

The Ibanez Studio Series, A Love Letter...

One of the best parts about my job is getting the opportunity to discover guitars I might have never known had existed. In a market dominated by a handful of models by even fewer builders, it's easy to overlook some real gems. Indeed, the whole aim of my ***** series is to shed some light on these misunderstood and underappreciated instruments that many, like me, would never know about. Most of these lines have one or two things that make them special, like quirks that maybe wouldn't be thought of as selling points but more like mojo. These pieces are historically or perhaps aesthetically valuable, but there's a reason they were discontinued.

Then there's the Ibanez Studio Series.

It was nothing special, just an afterthought throw-in from a guitar show. The dates lead me toward lawsuit-level quality, and that ridiculous name brought to mind economy Les Pauls. Even at first glance, it doesn't look special, just an odd double-cutaway with a pair of humbuckers and Gibson-style controls. But then I looked closer; humbuckers and Gibson style controls, but its long scale... and what's that? 24 frets? And a set neck? I then realized that this was more than a lawsuit guitar or throwaway oddball, this was a player's ax that was seriously ahead of its time.



The mythical beauty that stole my heart...

But where did this mystical artifact come from? And why had I never heard of it? Why are its fellows found in dreary pawn shops and guitar show junk tables? I had to learn more about this unicorn and how I could preach its virtues to the masses.

Of Lawsuits and Knock-offs

The 1970s were a rough time for the big American guitar builders, with prices rising and quality dropping. Players who had excitedly saved for a genuine Gibson Les Paul began to feel like the price wasn't worth the product. Whether it was or wasn't is for a different article, but one thing was for sure, players were increasingly turning to foreign knock offs for their favorable price/quality ratios. The legendary Norlin v. Hoshino lawsuit occurred when Gibson started noticing the loss of profits, and Ibanez guitars of that era have been hallowed artifacts ever since. But this article is not interested in the quality of Gibsons or Lawsuit guitars, but rather the lessons Ibanez seemed to have learned during the '70s. Inkling of copy-cats can be seen in the '60s, from pick-up design to headstock shapes of some vintage Japanese guitars, so it's obvious Japanese luthiers were watching since the beginning. And the '70s didn't just see Gibson copied; Takamine had been copying Martins, and Ibanez had also been copying Fenders with the Silver Series. This meant that Ibanez had been learning the ways of both giants, and when the lawsuit was over, the timing was right for Ibanez to start producing its own designs.



Naughty, naughty Ibanez

A Melding Miles Ahead

And so they did, with the introduction of the Musician series, and it's more affordable counterpart, the Studio series. The Musician series is fairly well known for its highly ornamental looks, and for the basses of the series being used by greats like John Entwistle and Sting. But the Studios seem to be forgotten. The two series are very similar, both having a 25" scale length, a pair of humbuckers, and 24 frets. Both series also came in different levels, with rising model numbers corresponding to higher levels of quality. This involved different woods and combinations of woods, and added controls. These controls included the Ibanez EQ-2 Tone Control System which offered a treble and middle cut or boost, and the ST-300s had the Tri-Tone system which offered standard humbucking, single coil, and phase settings.. But even the lowest level Studio, the ST-50, is a fine instrument and a no nonsense rocker. Go up one

level and you're at the ST-55 (the blessed unicorn I first experienced), this was exactly like the ST-50 but with dedicated volume and tone knobs for both pickups, Gibson style. Once you get to the ST-100, you're looking at a mahogany body with a maple core and walnut stripes, and Ibanez's "Velve-Touch" frets. The next step, the ST-200, had a ash body with a maple top and walnut accents, with the addition of the EQ-2 system. Finally, the ST-300 had an ash body with a maple core and walnut stripes, the EQ-2 system, and the Tri-Tone switches. Combine these features with the already fabulous build quality and playability of the series, and you had a versatile selection of guitars fit for any player.



QUICK-CHANGE TAILPIECE
The Quik-Change tailpiece is another Ibanez exclusive development. It combines the best features of a stud-type tailpiece with the convenience of a slotted design. The Quik-Change tailpiece holds the strings solid and at the proper playing tension.



TRISOUND
The ST 300 also features two V-2 Trisound pickups for added versatility. The three position Trisound switch selects either humbucking, single coil or reverse phased twin coil pickup configurations. No other pickup is so versatile.

Simplicity of design and quality of performance - that's the Ibanez Studio Series. While basic in approach, the functional excellence of these guitars puts them in a class by themselves.

GIBRALTAR BRIDGE
The Studio Series features another innovation from Ibanez - the Gibraltar locking bridge. After setting the action height, you can lock the bridge down perfectly solid to the body for the best possible sustain and response. The ST200 and ST300 also feature a heavy metal sustain block imbedded in the body for better sustain.

NEW V-2 PICKUPS
The heart of the performance of the Studio Series is the new special design Ibanez V-2 pickup. This high output pickup has reinforced upper midrange response and a slight rolling off of lows for a bright cutting tone. The open cream coils and mounting rings provide a classic appearance accent to the instrument.

VELVETOUCH FRETS
A new experience in playing ease is the Ibanez VelveTouch fret. VelveTouch frets are extra large for easy string bending and clear, ringing notes, but their special contour assures perfect intonation and a silky smooth feel.

FOUR OCTAVE FINGERBOARD
The 24 fret fingerboard gives you a full four octaves of range and the deep cutaway body allows free access to all the frets. 25 1/2" scale length.



UNIQUE CONSTRUCTION
The construction of the Studio Series plays no small part in their performance. The center of the body is hard rock maple for excellent response and sustain, while the sides of the body are either maple or ash. Two walnut strips running the length of the body add a bold accent to the overall appearance of the instrument.



	Body	Neck	Color	Position Markers	Pickups	Parts	Controls	Special Features
ST 100	Maple top with two walnut strips, Mahogany body	Hard laminated maple, set in	Brown Sunburst (IB)	Perloid dot	Ibanez V-2 pickup	Nickel plated Gibraltar bridge with sustain block	One volume and one tone	2-band EQ system
ST 200	Ash body, Ash laminate	Hard laminated maple, set in	Natural (NT)	Abalone dot	Ibanez V-2 pickup	Nickel plated Gibraltar bridge with sustain block	One volume, midrange and treble control	2-band EQ system, 2 Trisound

So. Freaking. Cool.

So with all this innovation and brilliance, it must have been a smash! What an amazing time the late '70s and early '80s must have been, when you can pick up an amazing guitar like a ST-50 for cheap and get 24 frets of shredding hard rock glory! Everyone must have had one! It had to be a guitar revolution! Right?!Right???

A Bit Early and a Bit Late

Well, it turns out that time was not on the Studio's side, and it's short run would end in 1982. But even before 1982, the Studio was not the guitar this writer fell in love with. The ST line from 1982 lost 2 frets, lost the elegant stained wood look, and picked up a pickguard. I've never played one of these before, but just looking at them I can see some of the magic is gone. And

while I don't have access to marketing data from the late '70s I can only speculate that 22 fret arena rockers were more in vogue at the time. So it seems the Studio couldn't hang with the old guard, which makes it all the more depressing when you see Ibanez's trend after '82 toward super Strats, culminating in the legendary JEM and RG models that set a new standard for performance instruments that still remains today. And what do you have with an RG? 24 frets, a pair of hot humbuckers, and Fender style scale length. Heck, apart from the shape and floating trem, you could have had an RG style shredder way back in 1978, nearly a decade before the RG arrived. Que será, será... But not to fear! They must have made a ton of Studios, because even today you can find ST-50s and 55s for CHEAP in pawn shops, and with a little love from a tech, you've got a beautifully playing, raunchy sounding, vintage player. Some of the higher model numbers still demand a high premium, but believe me, they will not disappoint. You can even find some double neck variants with the classic 6/12 setup...Oh, so beautiful... So is this series totally unappreciated? I think not, but is it still underappreciated and I can't find any professional or notable players who use or have used them. So I highly doubt we will ever see a reissue from Ibanez, but maybe that's for the best. Maybe it's best to have these wonderful, humble creatures remain a happy mystery, to be appreciated by those lucky enough to see through the pawn shop dust to the beaming majesty within....



Ibanez ST-100 with OHSC

Fun