



VINTAGE PAUL BRETT STATESBORO 12-STRING

Stepping out of your comfort zone can lead to fantastic things in life, which Huw Hopkins realised when he doubled the strings to re-tread a youthful rite of passage

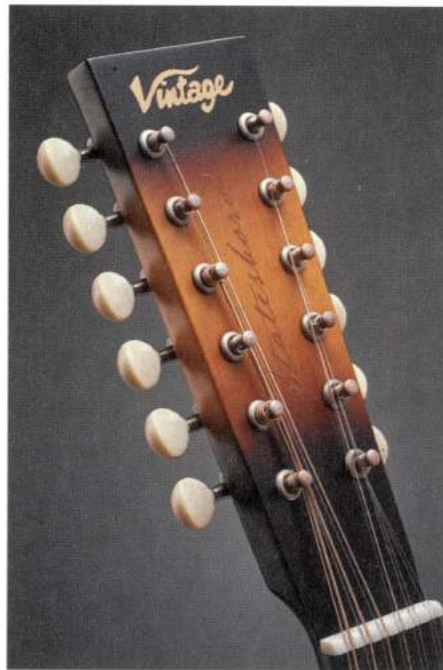
WORDS: HUW HOPKINS

You know what's hard to play? 'Hotel California' by The Eagles. It's supposed to be a rite of passage when learning to play guitar in your most absorbent and experimental years growing up. But for some reason, I never bothered. Truth be told, I was only struck by how much of The Eagles back catalogue I knew by the time I reached my mid-twenties - I was blown away by how much the band had seeped into my life. Recently, however, I found a reason to re-visit a youthful rite of passage and learn 'Hotel California'. That reason? The Vintage Paul Brett Statesboro 12-string.

I have seldom played guitars with 12-strings, aside from the occasional inquisitorial foray at a music shop or two. But the moment you open the bronze locks on Vintage's tan-coloured case, it doesn't matter what the instrument is - you take note. People who aren't petrol-heads can appreciate a Ferrari when it drives down the street. Similarly, even if you haven't played many 12-string guitars before, you can tell it looks good when it looks like this.

The distributor of Vintage guitars, John Hornby Skewes & Co, calls the colour Satin Antique. And once the vibrant mood of this warm-orange wood melting into midnight black has burst out, you find further delight in the detail of this guitar's aesthetics. The soundhole is circled by a Julius Caesar-like wreath crown in a rich walnut colour. Thankfully, you are not distracted by the matte-black Fishman PRO-REP-102 Rare Earth Humbucker pickup screwed into either side of the hole. The pickup is optional on the Statesboro, but it is worth investing if you want to give a guitar like this greater versatility.

The bridge system is immaculate. All 12 strings are locked into a floating, chromed



metal joist that has Statesboro etched faintly across the front. The strings are then stretched over a piece of rosewood, along 18 frets on a mahogany fingerboard with four fret dots at five, seven, nine and 12. They are then lined through a bone top nut and around the appropriate number of chrome tuners with cream machine heads (six on each side of the head). The back of the mahogany neck matches the colour of the solid spruce top, as does the maple veneer headstock and the maple back. The joins are picked out with white binding that echo the cream of the machine heads on the head.

Tuning is not terribly difficult, but it certainly is a bit different with the top two strings basically matching the existing notes, then the bottom four being octaves higher than their

counterparts and of the same character as the top two steel strings.

Playing feels odd at first. When you're strumming, things are simple enough. But it is easy to strike the wrong strings when picking or playing fingerstyle. On the neck, it is equally confusing, making sure your fingers are hitting the correct string when playing what you would normally consider single notes. Again, there are no issues while playing chords. Accomplished players should soon settle in once they stop thinking about where their fingers are. If you play the same way you always have, using the additional six strings will quickly become second nature. If you're looking for a bass note, it takes a little while to get used to playing the lower strings on an up-stroke, as you arrive at the higher octave strings before the lower notes on a down-stroke.

After that, getting a good sound out of the Statesboro is simple, especially if you are looking for a bright sound. Amplifying the guitar makes it sound even better. There are no knobs or switches to mess around with; just plug in at the bottom where a strap would be attached and away you go. The second set of strings really shine and you can easily slip into playing some class songs before you know it.

After managing, but not really mastering, The Eagles' iconic hit, my attention turned to other famous 12-string masterpieces. I finally realised what was missing from my versions of Led Zeppelin's 'Stairway to Heaven' in the previous 15 years of playing it on a six-string. The additional notes are all there, and even if you fluff a note, it still sounds better than one of those useless guitars with half the strings. Red Hot Chili Peppers' 'Breaking The Girl' sounded great, as did 'Substitute' by The Who. But to really get the most out of the Statesboro you

have to dig a little further into the annals of musical history.

Paul Brett – a name that longtime readers of *Acoustic* will recognise as a columnist – is one of the icons of 12-string guitar these days. However, he has a long list of people who have benefitted from his contributions including The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown, and Lonnie Donegan. The motivation behind the guitar's style harkens back to the days of Blind Willie McTell, a legendary blues guitarist who lived from 1898-1959, inspiring the likes of Bob Dylan, Ralph McTell, and Jack White. As part of the marketing behind the Statesboro, Paul said: "Obviously we have updated various elements to morph into today's market, but in essence, it looks like and certainly sounds like a big blues machine of that era."

Disbanding with the idea of recreating modern rock classics that featured 12-strings, I instead followed Paul's thinking and opened the Vintage up for some blues – and this is where it really came into its own. While I don't possess the intimate songbook knowledge of the early



blues pioneers such as Blind Willie and King Solomon Hill, I enjoy playing blues more than most genres. For me, it was Eric Clapton's 'Hey Hey' and John Lee Hooker's 'Boom Boom' that realised the guitar's potential.

One of Blind Willie's most recognisable songs is the 'Statesboro Blues' – yes, where the name

of this guitar derives. Without having a great appreciation of 12-strings, one might assume that some of the sounds generated by this early ragtime recording features a honky tonk piano – but all those notes and sounds are achievable on this Vintage. It is a credit to Paul Brett and the legacy of Blind Willie McTell. ■

VINTAGE PAUL BRETT STATESBORO 12-STRING

NEED TO KNOW

- Manufacturer:** Vintage Instruments
- Model:** Paul Brett Statesboro 12-string
- RRP:** £749
- Body size:** Parlour
- Made in:** UK
- Top:** Solid spruce
- Back and sides:** Maple and mahogany
- Neck:** Mahogany
- Bridge:** Rosewood
- Tuners:** Chrome with cream buttons
- Length:** 106cm
- Width:** 37.5cm
- Case included:** Yes, beautiful tan-coloured hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

- Pros:** It looks great, is well built and makes you want to play
- Cons:** Takes some time to get used to if you're not usually a 12-string player
- Overall:** A fantastic product that captures the heart of traditional blues playing

ACOUSTIC RATING

- Build Quality:** ★★★★★
- Sound Quality:** ★★★★★
- Overall:** ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

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