



Schatten HFN Artist & HFN Artist Plus 2

PRICE: £159

PRICE: £185

Schatten make pickups for virtually every instrument. Huw Price tries for a couple for the acoustic.



Schatten HFN Artist & HFN Artist Plus 2

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Technical specification

Manufacturer: Schatten
Retail Price: HFN Artist £159
HFN Artist Plus 2 £185

Contact details

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Schatten promise that HFN pickups are 'designed to give you a full, rich sound and will reproduce exactly what your guitar sounds like'. They certainly look the part - the brass shell protecting and shielding the piezo element is mounted on a carved rosewood spacer with three 'feet' that contact the bridge plate.

The total weight of the unit is just 0.2 ounces (7 grams) and Schatten claim this won't affect the acoustic tone of the instrument, and it can fit virtually all X-braced steel-string acoustic guitars - with or without pin bridges. The only structural alteration that may be required is a half-inch hole for the endpin jack/jack preamp.

Various HFN models are available, including the Player,

which is passive, and the active Artist, Artist Plus 1 and Artist Plus 2 models. The active versions all have the slimline Schatten endpin-mounted preamp, with either one or two thumbwheel volume controls for the Plus 1 and Plus 2 respectively. Schatten's preamp allows you to connect another pickup device, and the second volume control allows you to mix the pickup signals to taste.

Schatten suggest that adding any sort of microphone in conjunction with the HFN is 'really quite unnecessary' because the pickup behaves like a microphone. It flexes and moves with the soundboard of the instrument, thanks to the arched rosewood pickup base, and samples vibrations from three areas across a span of time. Since only one element is used, there

are no mechanical phasing issues due to multiple sensing elements. The preamp can take power from an on-board 9-volt battery, an outboard battery box, or from phantom power (up to 48 volts DC) supplied by a preamp or mixing desk. On the circuit board itself there are two trim pots which set maximum gain for each channel. Since a microphone isn't recommended, Schatten suggest that magnetic soundhole pickups are the best match for the HFN Artist.

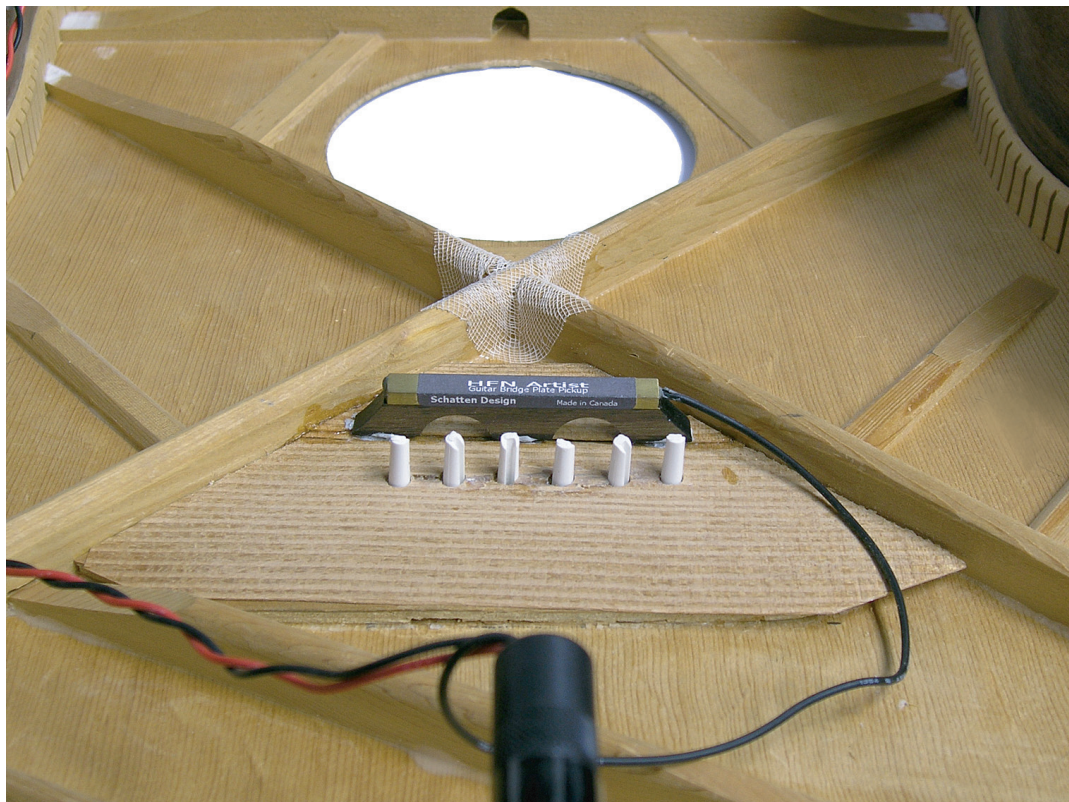
The installation instructions do need to be read carefully, but the process itself is very easy. If you already have a similar preamp installed, it will probably be a case of simply swapping them over. If not, then drilling the appropriate-sized hole should be a quick job for any competent tech, and you can complete the installation yourself.

The pickup itself is installed on the bridge plate, directly beneath the saddle, and Schatten provide two fixing methods. The first option is to use foam tape. Simply remove the backing from one side and press it onto the three 'feet' of the pickup. Next, remove the backing from the other side of the tape and reach inside with the pickup to push it onto the bridge plate. Schatten recommend doing this with the two outer bridge pins pushed through the holes to guide you.

Rather than use foam sticky tape you can use Schatten's putty. A piece of putty about the size of a pea is placed on the bottom of each foot and the pickup is positioned in exactly the same way. One problem you may encounter is a bridge plate that's excessively curved due to string tension. This can cause the middle strings to sound louder than the outer ones and Schatten suggest refitting the pickup with tape or putty on the outer feet only.

With the Artist Plus 2 system the thumbwheel controls are fixed to the edge of the soundhole with sticky tape, and each one comes with a fold-up 9-volt battery bag that sticks to a flat surface inside the guitar. The package includes stick-on clips that are designed to keep the cables tidy inside the soundbox. It's important to do this because loose cables can vibrate against the body and

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cause unwanted buzzing and vibration noises. But before fixing everything down, I'd suggest a trial run with the preamp outside the guitar so you can optimise the level control for your system.

Both these pickups sound identical, but of course, the Plus 2 version gives you fingertip volume control for the HFN Artist pickup itself, plus a second pickup device. The sonic character is a million miles away from the archetypal undersaddle piezo tone. The frequency response is somewhat on the bright side of balanced, but the trebles are sweet and piezo quack is virtually non-existent. Even more striking is the sense of air around the sound. We're all probably used to the dry, anaemic sound produced by so many acoustic pickups, but the HFN Artist has far more of the type of open quality that many of us might associate with microphones. Although the pickup itself is located right under the saddle, it appears to capture the whole sound of the guitar rather than focus on one specific area. Consequently, the tone is full and rounded rather than thin and brittle.

As mentioned previously, the HFN Artist is slightly bright,

What We Think

What did our test results reveal?

Pros: Both relatively quick and easy to install (although do read the instructions). Good results

Cons: Some players might decide a little bit of equalisation is required to soften the treble region

Overall: Good solid piece of kit, would recommend both.

but the nature of that top end is very easy to live with and it might even be beneficial if your guitar sounds naturally dark, or if you're stuck with a dull-sounding PA system. What's remarkable is the way that the HFN Artist captured all the natural brightness and harmonic complexity of our spruce/rosewood Larrivee L-03R test guitar. This instrument is also possessed of some deep and sonorous bass, and the HFN Artist captured this depth of tone without any boominess. Once I had tweaked up the volume control on the preamp circuit board, the output levels were rudely healthy. Amplifying this system should present no problems, but there could be a danger of overloading external

preamps if the on-board preamp is set higher than they can cope with. That's reason enough to pay a little more for an optional volume control.

Despite the fact that these pickups sit proud of the bridge plate, feedback rejection is at least the equal of most of the undersaddle systems we have tried, and better than many. All things considered, these HFN Artist pickup systems sound pretty remarkable and they're both quick and easy to install. Some players might decide a little bit of equalisation is required to soften the treble region, but we can certainly recommend both these systems.

Huw Price

Acoustic Test Results

Our rates explained

5 Stars: Superb, Almost faultless.

4 Stars: Excellent, Hard to beat.

3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.

2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

Rating out of five

How well did this guitar fare?

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Build Quality | ★★★★★ |
| Sound Quality | ★★★★★ |
| Value for Money | ★★★★★ |



A word about our test instrument

When we began planning this series of pickup testing articles we realised that we had to select a single guitar that could take us all the way through the process. We also needed a guitar that was a good all rounder, so a classic Dreadnought was out of the question because they're often too big in the bass and too scooped in the mids. Obviously parlour guitars, O and OO sizes were out of the question because they're too bass light and specialised to provide any representative picture. Even traditional OOO models were considered but are a touch too bass light.

We also needed a guitar that would present some technical challenges for any system. After all it's much easier to amplify an unresponsive plywood guitar than a resonant all solid thoroughbred that's far more likely to feedback. The test guitar would also need to be robustly made because it would be subject to a fair bit of stress as the various pickup systems were installed and removed.

We already had some experience of L'Arrivee's L models and we knew the L-03R from the Recording Series ticked every box as a superb all-rounder. It's a fine fingerpicker with an even frequency balance and a nicely extended bass end. It's a powerful yet dynamic rhythm instrument too.

With its solid spruce top and solid rosewood back and sides we also knew that the L-03R could generate the degree of harmonic complexity that only the best pickup systems would be able to accurately reproduce. It even has a rosewood reinforcement patch glued onto the upper bout to provide sufficient structural strength to mount a control panel. So many thanks to L'Arrivee's UK distributor Sound Technology for providing us with this wonderful test guitar.

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