

# AMPLIFYING ACOUSTICS

Fancy electrifying your acoustic guitar? We found out what's involved and the kind of quality you can expect from the end results.

Words: Simon Croft

**My early** battles with acoustic guitars on stage didn't end in victory. It was partly my fault. I was trying to use ordinary stage vocal mics – not the best start. We did experiment with pickups but all we seemed to end up with was a guitar that sounded like an electric... but was still prone to feedback. Thankfully, things have moved on.

## Fit the kit

We were sent two Shadow systems that allow you fit pickups to your existing acoustic guitar. Of these, the SH145 is closest to an electric pickup, as it detects the magnetic

top of your guitar, so if you slip with the pliers, you're less likely to mark the finish.

The reason you will need a file is that, although the sliver of material that goes under the saddle is thin, it has to come up the side of the saddle where it connects to the preamp. This requires the removal of a small amount of material from the end of the saddle. Because it was pouring with rain the night I tried this, I couldn't be bothered to go to the garage for my toolbox, so I made do with a girlie emery board. It files nails and, yes, it files bridge saddle just fine.

more of the character of the instrument itself. That's the whole reason I bought the guitar in the first place, so no complaints there.

I'm not going to try to pick a winner from these two systems. I liked the sound quality of both. Which one you choose depends on what you're trying to achieve. The idea that you could fit either Shadow system to your existing instrument appealed to me a lot. Whether you want to fit the pickup yourself is up to you. It is very easy, but if you're not sure, I suspect that your local music shop will be happy to help.

## “THE SHADOW SH NFX-AC IS THE ACOUSTIC CONNOISSEUR'S CHOICE”

energy of metal strings, rather than the vibration of the wood. Although this means that it can only be used with steel-strung guitars, it is the simpler of the systems to fit. All you need to do is slacken off the two screws, position the pickup in your sound-hole, swing the two lugs under the guitar's top and tighten.

For the simplest installation, you can plug the supplied cable into the mini-jack on the pickup and connect the other end of the cable to an amp. A more satisfactory arrangement is to use the other supplied cable, which terminates in a jack socket that you can screw into the guitar where the endpin normally goes. It's a little more work but it's worth it.

Slightly more fiddly is the SH NFX-AC, an under-saddle system that involves taking the saddle out of the bridge of your guitar. On the plus side, this system works on the vibrations of the instrument, so can be used on classical as well as steel-strung guitars.

The instructions say that you need a file. You may also need a pair of pliers, because some saddles are a tight fit into the bridge. While you're at it, you may care to attach a few layers of newspapers to the

The preamp attaches to the guitar using pre-fitted sticky pads – all you have to do is peel off the protective plastic and push the unit into place.

## The kit is fit

With not one but two pickup systems now in place on my guitar, I plugged them into an amp to compare the sound. They both work very well, as you might expect from a company that has built up a reputation for acoustic pickups over the last 35 years.

Technically, the SH145 is a humbucker and was designed that way to minimise electrical interference. But don't think it's going to sound like a Les Paul going into a stack. The SH145 produces a light, clean and very appealing tone – it sounds especially great when putting some extra air into what could otherwise be an overly electric arrangement. (By the way, it's also available in black.)

The Shadow SH NFX-AC is the acoustic connoisseur's choice, although it does take a little more time to fit. This system – on my guitar at least – seemed to deliver

Although I'm a total mic freak, I would like to keep both these Shadow systems on my acoustic guitar. Overall, the SH145 would be my choice for live work, but the SH NFX-AC is the authentic acoustic voice in 'non rock' situations. **PM**

## SHADOW ACOUSTIC GUITAR PICKUPS

### WHAT IS IT?

A choice of two acoustic guitar pickups, both of which can be fitted by the owner without specialist tools or musical instrument repair skills.

### WHY SHOULD I WANT ONE?

Maybe you have a cherished acoustic guitar that you want to amplify but you don't want to modify the instrument permanently. Or perhaps you don't really like to see the preamps and other evidence of electronics you find on most modern electro-acoustic guitars. Or it may be simply that you want a high quality amplified guitar but you can't afford to buy an electro-acoustic that's as nice as your current acoustic.

### SRP:

SH 145 £119

SH NFX-AC £109

01132 865381

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