

Vito Custom Guitars

by

Damian Colavito

Submitted to the Department of Graphic Design

School of Art and Design

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

May 2019

Sponsor: Anthony Antonellis

Second Reader: Kelsey Elder



For too long of a time Semi-hollow bodies have been an unconventional choice for heavy guitar players, Vito is a guitar brand that rebrands Semi-hollow bodies as viable options for heavy guitar while still paying homage to they're origin in jazz and blues. The aesthetics of Metal and Jazz will be discussed as a way to have further insight into what inspired the brand, as well as the current guitar brands that produce Metal and Jazz guitars. From there the way that Vito approaches its brand. Branding aside is also important to understand why Semi-Hollow guitars weren't used very often in heavy music because of technical issues.

Jazz and Metal have very particular aesthetics, all derived from the time periods they were created/popularized in. Jazz being one of the oldest popular music genres to be birthed in the United States. Jazz was popularized in the 1920's during the Harlem Renaissance, while this movement isn't in direct relation to Jazz, it did have a large effect on the aesthetic of the genre. Due to the large influx of expressionistic painter during that time and the overall improvised nature of Jazz, the two were a likely pair. Jazz tended to mold to the times with its aesthetics though, but always managed to stay contemporary. Metal's aesthetic was very tied to the

locations of its subgenres births. Metal came along during a time that guitarists were looking for a heavier sound, and became popularized with bands like Black Sabbath, Blue Oyster Cult, etc. in the 1970s. It established the underlying themes of Metal, which dealt with death, the occult, and power fantasies. Later subgenres added new layers, such as Norwegian Black Metal which introduced themes of Satanism and anti-Catholicism, Thrash which brought in the counter-culturalism of punk. Both Jazz and Metal have very defined visuals but both have changed with the times.

Jazz and Metal would be nothing without the electric guitar, first invented during the 1930s, it defined the genres. One of the first electric guitars made was the hollow body arch top. This was made because acoustic jazz guitar players wanted to play single note solos in an ensemble without being drowned out by the other instruments. One of the biggest contemporary guitar brands that manufactures specifically hollow and semi hollow body jazz and blues guitars is D'Angelico, a New York brand that's been around for a long time named after the famous luthier D'Angelico. Another large guitar brand known for jazz guitars is Gibson, but Gibson is also a very popular choice for metal guitarists because of the Les Paul and SG guitars. The typography for both brands is treated in similar ways, rugged brush scripts. Branding for Gibson in general isn't anything that is too identifiable, if not a bit more utilitarian and less exaggerated. While D'Angelico is vintage with a contemporary look. Dean is a bit of an outlier, producing primarily rock and metal guitars, and they're logo tends to reflect that, being in a rugged serif with wings at each side, seeming to reinforce the rock themes. Same goes for the branding surrounding them. One of the most prominent supporters of Dean is Dave Mustaine of Megadeth fame, so it is obvious where the guitars are used most. Another prominent brand that has been around for a long while is Ibanez which is a brand that sells guitars of all pricing brackets.

Starting off as a cheap Japanese brand, after working with Steve Vai and working on his Signature Super Stratocaster, the brand was thrust into the limelight. After the many years they have been on the market Ibanez branched into many different style of guitars, including Semi-Hollow guitars. Why does Ibanez stand out in comparison to brands like Gibson, Dean or D'Angelico? Because it's the only brand that looks like they sell a large range of instruments. Their logo alone has what looks to be a crossover between standard script logos of other guitar brands and mixes it with an aggressive flair, which fills its brief perfectly. It's also where Vito gets the bulk of its inspiration from.

Vito is a guitar brand that hinges on being a crossover of genres. Where the Semi Hollow guitar found they're home as a Blues and Jazz guitars, Vito as a brand aims to change how you look at them. First and foremost Vito is a Rock and Metal guitar brand, but it does not mean the Vito guitar can't play other genres, due to the advent of contemporary passive pickups, the instrument's versatility is extremely prevalent. Vito's brand is a visual cross over between Heavy Metal and Jazz/Blues aesthetics creating a vintage Metal aesthetic. Utilizing illustration, typography, texturing and motion to bolster the brand. It is very important for the brand to pay homage to where the semi-hollow guitar came from, because it encapsulates what the guitar is capable of, rather than a strict Rock and Metal guitar. The vessels in which the brand will be are the guitar, look book, looping animation, merchandise like guitar picks, stickers and t-shirts. The guitar containing The Vito logo which is a Blackletter influenced logo mixed with a softness akin to a standard script guitar logo. The look book contains glamor shots of the guitar accompanied by typography that explains some the many features the guitar has, as well as current and future merchandise for the brand. The looping animation is a motion piece that helps

put the assets of the brand in motion, to see the brand in a different context, utilizing only illustration and graphics. The merchandise also utilizes specifically illustration and graphics.

Guitar brand aside, there was a reason why Semi Hollow guitars weren't the first choice for Rock and Metal Guitarists. The Semi-Hollow body is inherently a technical issue for playing heavy genres due to the body of the guitar constantly creating feedback loops. Feedback loops are when a noise is constantly amplifying itself. Due to the fact that the body of the guitar projects more noise it's very prone to feedback problems. But the wonders of modern technology made constant feedback problems extremely manageable, from potted pickups to advanced PA systems at venues. The Vito guitar is also equipped with high end Seymour Duncan potted pickups and are built to mitigate its feedback problems. There will also theoretically be other features that help with feedback problems, such as filling the pickup cavities of the guitar with foam so the vibration of the body will be mitigated.

Vito was not where this senior project started though, I previously worked on the visual end of a friend's conceptual record that included everything pertaining to the release of said record as well as graphic novel. Sadly the project fell through. Sometimes the difficulty of collaboration is becoming too dependent on one person's needs over your own. When there is a lack of communication and things don't get done projects fall apart. That didn't stop me, a project must be made regardless. Rather than following through with the previous project, one that was arguably not really me, I decided to go with something more me, which was Heavy Metal. While the task was rather daunting and the premise of starting from scratch was rather terrifying it eventually started to find its legs. From having to figure out what the project even was to the construction of the guitar and the brand it proved to be intensive project filled with discovery and expansion of skill sets. I can now arguably say I know how to build a guitar,

which is an exciting skill to know. Even though the previous project fell through there was some things I was able to hold onto, which was how to vigorously combine genres that seemingly have very little crossover, Previously it was steampunk and folk art, now it's Metal and Jazz. All of this circles back to the project given in my sophomore year: Exercises in Style, which initially gave me my absolute infatuation with the aesthetics of Heavy Metal. But also gave me the ability to deal with Metal in contexts outside of itself.

Vito is a guitar brand that's goal is to put a new image in the heads of guitarists for Semi-hollow guitars as a slick and cool new type of rock and metal guitar that has a vintage twist. While there was a reason why these style of guitar were not used very often in heavier genres, due to feedback issues, modern audio and guitar technology has put that in the past. Vito pulls from Metal, Rock, Jazz and Blues aesthetics to create a unique brand unlike any other in the guitar manufacturing company. In the end what is even the point of giving a Metal or Rock guitarist a new option to play? Its for the people who are sick of the convention that has been perpetuated for guitarists in those genres, and want stand out with a unique look and a unique tone.