

# THE STANDEL 920S

By Willie G. Moseley

**T**he Standel 400 (VG, November '09) was the only bass in a 1967 catalog that showcased a short-lived but high-quality series of instruments made for the California company by Harptone, of New Jersey. The Standel models were crafted under the auspices of legendary luthier/innovator Sam Koontz.

Standel's Jersey-made lineup consisted of three series; from fanciest to plainest they were the Deluxe Artist Line, the Deluxe Line, and the Standard Line. The 400 bass was a member of the Standard Line and was the final instrument shown in the catalog.

What was the first instrument in that catalog? The one shown here – the Deluxe Artist 920S guitar. What's more, its owner, Al Clausen, says it was a display model at the 1967 NAMM show in Chicago.

Clausen is a veteran player and instructor, and recently told VG, "I have had archtops all my life. I've always had an L-5, which is my guitar of choice; but I also have two Heritage Golden Eagles I really love."

In the late '60s, Clausen was working at Lamar Music, in Racine, Wisconsin. The store carried Gibson, Vox, and Harptone-Standel, among other brands.

"Wes Montgomery was my idol, and when I saw him in Milwaukee, I just had to have the 15" JBL Standel combo amp, just like Wes," Clausen recounted.

Prior to the '67 NAMM show, Standel issued promotional material announcing their new series of instruments would be introduced at that event. The image of the 920S beckoned to Clausen... But, prior to his trip to the Windy City, he wanted to acquire a D'Aquisto archtop.

The 920S (the S denoting sunburst finish – its only listed option) was an archtop acoustic with a Florentine cutaway, carved spruce top, carved flame-maple back, and what the literature called "age-selected flame-maple sides." It also touted the model's "five-ply laminated neck of mahogany and maple for strength and beauty." The shape of the headstock was an allusion (probably intentional) to D'Angelico guitars. The dimensions of the body were 17" wide, 21" tall, and 3 1/4" deep. The ebony fretboard had pearl split-block type inlays à la a Gibson Super 400. All Standel-by-Harptone guitars had a scale of 24 5/8" and a zero fret.

Dressy touches abound on the 920S. The catalog noted nine-ply body binding, five-ply binding on the neck and headstock, three-ply binding around the f-holes, and a "five-ply hand-bound guard plate." Gold hardware includes Grover tuners, a hand-engraved tailpiece, and there's an adjustable ebony bridge inlaid with pearl.

The guitar's pickup is a gold "floating" DeArmond unit with adjustable

polepieces. Company literature said the Volume and Tone knobs were mounted on the pickguard (as seen here) but the catalog photo of the 920S showed control knobs mounted on the body.

Sure enough, Clausen was smitten with the 920S due to its craftsmanship and ornate touches. "The fact it was finished in a varnish instead of lacquer intrigued me," he said. "I did not care how it sounded, electronically; it sounds fantastic acoustically! (Jazz guitarist) Attila Zoller was there, and played it, too; he really liked it. I simply had to have it."

While the photo of the 920S is the first instrument in the Standel catalog, it wasn't the first instrument listed in the text – that honor went to the 18" archtop

1967 Standel 920S archtop, serial 1015B-2E

1000S (sunburst) and 1000N (natural). And while their photos don't appear in the catalog, Clausen believes he saw an example at the NAMM show, recalling there were three full-depth

Standel archtops on display. "Mine, with the floating DeArmond, one with built-in humbuckers, and a blond larger-body guitar like a Super 400."

Though his store was unable to work a retail deal with Standel, Clausen was so entranced with the 920S he paid list price for it – in cash – to the Standel rep, though he had to leave the guitar on display until the show closed.

"It had a few minor nicks but I was glad to get it," he recalled. Clausen was told that the 2E portion of the serial number on the interior label meant the guitar "…was the second experimental prototype, handmade by Koontz."

"It was my instrument of choice for many years," Clausen summarized. "I toggled between my Standel, L-5, and other instruments through the years, but this Standel is like no other. It is one of the most embellished archtops ever built – perfect in proportion and sound. Whenever I play it, people come up and look at the headstock, trying to figure out what it is. And I always have a story to tell!" VG

