

A photograph of two Auden guitars leaning against a vintage amplifier. The guitar on the left is a light-colored wood, possibly spruce or cedar, with a dark fretboard and a black bridge. The guitar on the right is a dark-colored wood, possibly mahogany or rosewood, with a dark fretboard and a black bridge. Both guitars have a single cutaway on the right side. The amplifier is a vintage-style, light-colored, rectangular unit with a woven grille. The background is a dark, solid color. The floor is made of dark wood, and a patterned rug is visible in the bottom left corner.

# Crossover Success

The poor relation of the steel-string flat-top, the nylon-string 'classical' guitar has a rich history and really should be a part of any serious player's collection. We explore its potential with two new 2021 'crossover' models

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## CÓRDOBA FUSION 5 & AUDEN YORK £450 & £1,099

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### What You Need To Know

1

#### Tell us a bit about Córdoba.

The Córdoba brand – created by the Córdoba Music Group who also owns Guild – is named after the Spanish city and is well established, catering from beginners to professionals. Though referencing the Spanish style of construction, the majority of its instruments, like our review model here, are made in China.

2

#### But I didn't think Auden made nylon-strings?

Not up to this point, but the York is a new model for 2021. Auden imports the 'shell' from a small factory in China and does all the important stuff at its workshop in Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire – a very modern method of high-quality, cost-effective production. Auden also owns and makes Gordon-Smith guitars at the same location.

3

#### What do you mean by crossover?

It's simply a term coined for a nylon-string guitar that's a blend of classical style typically with a steel-string's thinner width neck, onboard electrics and most commonly a cutaway.

There's really quite a chasm between the steel- and nylon-string acoustic guitar. And that's putting it mildly: you could easily argue that they operate in parallel universes. It's not just the strings or the constructional differences, it's the culture. Swapping between a small-bodied Martin and a luthier-made classical guitar, for example, isn't an easy transition, even for a well-seasoned player. Which is where the far-from-new 'crossover' concept originated: a nylon-string that feels and plays more like that Martin. This cross pollination is actually an area of acoustic guitar design that is really quite vibrant both in style and price, illustrated here with two new-for-2021 nylon-string electro-acoustic crossover designs that really couldn't be more different.

A typical classical guitar will have a nut width of 50mm (two inches), or thereabouts, a flat uncambered fingerboard and a 12-fret neck-to-body join. That Martin, for example, might have a nut width of 42.9mm (1 11/16 inches) or the slightly wider 44.45mm (1 3/4 inches), a light fingerboard camber of around 406mm (16 inches), and the neck will most commonly join the body at the 14th fret.

In principle then, the 'crossover' aims to sit somewhere between these contrasts, as with Yamaha's more classical-like NCX style, while its NTX range is more steel-

string like. It's a similar thing with our two review examples. While both have 12 frets to the body and a similar fingerboard camber, the Córdoba is coming more from the Spanish style with its wider nut width of 48.5mm and a string spacing of 38.5mm. The Auden is noticeably thinner at the nut at 45mm, but the difference is narrowed with its 36.5mm string spacing and the fact that both have the same string spacing at the bridge of 59mm.

The lighter tension of nylon strings means a thinner top, lighter bracing (usually a fan style but not exclusively) and, quite often with a crossover style, a reduced body depth. This latter point might well limit low-end when played unplugged, but it can prove very helpful when you're plugged in and dealing with feedback on stage. Our two examples are actually closer in size than they might appear. Nevertheless, there's the Córdoba's cutaway to consider and its slightly thinner depth, while the Auden – based on the company's small-bodied Julia steel-string – is marginally tighter across its lower bouts and very slightly longer at 489mm compared with the Córdoba's 480mm body length.

As with a steel-string, another consideration is whether or not you need a cutaway. The Auden, without a cutaway, is relatively unusual in its intended crossover style. The Córdoba, as its Fusion model





1. Córdoba's headstock logo is inspired by the famous red and white double arches of the Mezquita, a historically significant cathedral in Córdoba, Spain
2. It might be a crossover, but there's no strap button on the heel of our Fusion. You'll also be pleased to see those side dot markers – a classical guitar doesn't have any
3. Very much in the Spanish style, the Fusion's tie-bridge also allows the saddle to be slipped out for easy string height adjustment

name signifies, wears its cutaway almost as a badge of intent, much like many other models in the range. Certainly as a gigging crossover player, this writer wouldn't use anything else.

There's a similar discussion to be had in regard to 12 or 14 frets to the body. Using Yamaha's NX Series models as an example once more, the more classical-style NCX has 12, the more steel-string style NTX goes for 14. A true classical guitar will have no position markers on the face or side of the fingerboard, either. Crossovers usually

provide at least a couple of side dots and here both our models have side dots in the usual places from the 3rd to the 17th fret. At last, something in common!

Our Auden is all solid wood: a cedar top and African mahogany back, sides and neck finished in a light satin that would show off tooling or sanding marks if there were any. The quality is superb, inside and out. Its bound rosewood fingerboard is far from classical style, though, as is the bridge with its inset saddle – a classical guitar's saddle simply slides in and out of its groove, as you can see on the Córdoba's more in-style design. It's hard to see the specific neck join on the Auden because it's obscured by the preamp circuit board and battery.

The Córdoba appears to be built in more classical Spanish style with a visible foot-shaped 'slipper' heel, although we believe both necks are dovetailed into their neck blocks. The top is solid spruce, but the back and sides are laminated mahogany with a reasonably fancy outer facing of figured maple. To be fair, the Fusion 5 is competently made for its price. The only niggles are an overtight truss rod adjuster (both guitars break with traditional style and have dual-action truss rods) and the fact that the frets need a final polish.

The three-piece necks on both – with spliced-on headstock and heel stack – reflect the history of the instrument, not a cost-cutting exercise. Width aside, they're







pretty similar in depth with the same 1st fret dimension (20.5mm), and the Córdoba is just 1mm deeper at the 8th fret (24mm) than the Auden. Both have quite a rounded 'big C' sort of profile, the Auden's feeling slightly asymmetrical in higher positions with more shoulder on the bass side.

### Acoustic Style

Of our two guitars, the Córdoba feels and, to a certain extent, sounds very much the Spanish-inspired crossover, despite its lower price point. Slightly lighter in weight and with that mid-width neck, it'll still feel pretty 'big' compared with your electric, but it feels noticeably more compact than our concert classical reference.

The Auden feels more like a steel-string that's had its strings changed. Lower positions feel cramped in comparison, not least if you want to peel off your classical rep. Thumb-behind left-hand positions feel less comfortable than the often flatter-backed classical neck, too. Yet for jazzier and Latin styles, where you might easily wrap your thumb over the low E, it excels. Another example of finding your own fit.

It's not only the vastly different feel of the lower-tension but larger-diameter treble strings that's different from your typical steel-strings; they also sit considerably higher above the fingerboard. While a classical guitar might have a string height at the 12th fret of 3.5mm to 4mm on the



treble side and 4mm to 5mm on the bass, part of the crossover style is a lower setup, not dissimilar to flamenco style, and here both are pretty similar: 2.5mm/3mm on our Córdoba and 2.2mm/3mm on the Auden.

The 'warm and soft' sound of a nylon-string is a cliché. A classical or flamenco guitar can be viciously bright and attacking when hit hard – just listen to Paco de Lucía – and clarity and the balance between the treble and bass is what we're looking for. Our Córdoba heads off down that route with quite a powerful attack, a tempered bass and strong mids. It likes to be hit hard and responds accordingly, reflecting its solid spruce top and laminated sides. The Auden's voice is very different. A little shy, perhaps, with less shout and more controlled dynamics (even compressed); again, the sort of response you might expect

4. The York's more steel-string-like slotted headstock holds the very smart and smooth Schertler tuners and a well-cut bone nut

5. The thin satin finish is perfectly done on the York. Note the very un-classical binding on the fingerboard edge

The 'crossover' sits somewhere between a small-bodied steel-string and luthier-made classical guitar





6. Auden's much more contemporary-looking bridge design features an inset bone saddle, which is much more like a steel-string

7. Through the York's soundhole you can see the Supernatural's preamp PCB and battery, which is necessary to power the system

8. Mounted on the treble side of the soundhole, the Auden's preamp controls are quite fiddly to adjust, although the system sounds superb

from the wood choice. But it focuses the bass very nicely, which is full but doesn't run away with you, while the trebles have a beautiful refined clarity. On this evidence, the Córdoba is what you want for your street party; the Auden seems to suggest a quieter environment where you can appreciate the detail of its sound.

### Plugging In

A key part of the crossover is its ability to be heard in that Latin or jazz band, and just as in the steel-string world there are plenty of

ways to crack that nut. Our Córdoba uses a very simple Fishman Sonitone setup with a Sonicore under-saddle pickup, the preamp mounted on the bass side of the soundhole with volume and tone rotary controls. The battery sits in an easy-to-access moulded housing that also holds the output jack on the body's side.

The Brad Clark Supernatural system on our Auden is rather more complex. We have bridge and face sensors that are pre-mixed within the preamp that's mounted with the battery by the neck block.





9



9. The Fusion's controls are mounted on the bass side of the soundhole, so you can easily feel them to make adjustments. We simply have volume and tone control

10. The standard Fishman output jack also houses the battery. It's very easy to replace

11. The Sonata Burst finish is one of three colour options on our Fusion. Here, the back and sides have an outer laminate of flame maple

10



Positioned this time on the treble side of the soundhole, the control plate offers mini-sliders for bass, mid, treble and volume plus a push switch that can select four preset voicings. Neither guitar offers any output-muting tuner or any kind of feedback suppression, such as a simple phase switch.

The Córdoba's plugged-in sound is adequate, although the actual tone control seems to slightly pull back both the highs a little and the midrange. It certainly benefits from a little outboard EQ to clean up the lower midrange, which is otherwise a little thick sounding.

Plugging in the Auden, although we have reservations about the control interface, which is rather fiddly to use, we hear quite a refined studio-quality sound. The top pickup is evident in the handling noise, but the EQ is very effective. Those sound presets provide a little colour, but if we're honest we're never quite sure where we are. There's a lot of subtle shade here and, despite the variations, it still sounds very much like the guitar itself. Impressive.

### Verdict

In picking two random nylon-string electros such as these, we possibly couldn't have illustrated the diversity of the nylon-string crossover market more vividly. In fact, about the only thing they have in common is their nylon strings!

11





12

## Córdoba is what you want for your street party; the Auden suggests a quieter environment to appreciate the detail of its sound

As its price reflects, the Auden is a beautifully crafted piece with a considered, balanced sound, both acoustically and amplified. At under half the price, the Córdoba sounds a little more Spanish, shouty and excitable, and, although the Fishman system is adequate as is, a little additional EQ certainly enhances what is an evocative if rather uncultured plugged-in voice. It's tidily made with a couple of exceptions and certainly fits into the 'halfway between classical and steel-string' crossover style in terms of neck width.

It's the first time this writer has had some play time with the Auden's Supernatural preamp system and sonically it's very impressive, although to say it's fiddly to operate is a bit of an understatement. For many, too, the Auden's virtually steel-string-like neck will just feel too cramped, although for a steel player simply wanting some nylon flavour – a very good flavour at that – there's zero to get used to.

But, as we found, adding a nylon-string to your collection is not just about the different sound and feel; it's about discovering a whole new world of music, players and technique. Not to mention hugely addictive. **G**

12. Typically, a classical guitar is played seated or held by the right forearm, flamenco style. As befits the crossover style, the Auden comes ready to strap on



### CORDOBA FUSION 5

**PRICE:** £450  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Medium-bodied cutaway, nylon-string electro-acoustic with 12-fret neck join  
**TOP:** Solid spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Laminated mahogany with flamed maple outer facings  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 95mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 371mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany, 3-piece with dual action truss rod  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 650mm (25.6")  
**TUNERS:** Córdoba Silver 3-a-side 14:1 ratio with black ebony-like buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/48.5mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Pau ferro, side dots only, 406mm (16") radius  
**FRETS:** 19, medium/small (top fret partial)  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Pau ferro with bone saddle/59mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Fishman Sonitone Classical with under-saddle pickup, soundhole-placed volume and tone rotary controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.65/3.63  
**OPTIONS:** Colour only  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The existing Fusion series also features the 12 and 14 models from approx. £600  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model, but others are available  
**FINISHES:** Sonata Burst (as reviewed) Natural, Jet Black – gloss polyurethane

8/10

**PROS** Price; competent build; mid-width neck; lively boisterous voice, acoustically and plugged in

**CONS** Fret tops are a little rough, though that's easily sorted; the truss rod adjuster is very stiff; little onboard control plugged in



### AUDEN YORK

**PRICE:** £1,099 (inc case)  
**ORIGIN:** China/UK  
**TYPE:** Classical-bodied non-cutaway, nylon-string electro-acoustic with 12-fret neck join  
**TOP:** Solid cedar  
**BACK/SIDES:** African mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 106mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 362mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany, 3-piece with dual action truss rod  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**TUNERS:** Individual Schertler 18:1 ratio with ebony buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/45mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Maple bound rosewood, side dots only, 406mm (16") radius  
**FRETS:** 20, medium  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Rosewood with bone saddle/59mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Brad Clark Supernatural ST-FS preamp with bridge and top sensors. Preamp features 3-band EQ, volume and 4 sound presets  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.7/3.74  
**OPTIONS:** With rosewood back/sides (adds £200), available summer 2021  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Not on the nylon-string front, but the 14-fret steel-string Julia uses the same body outline and starts at £1,299  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISHES:** Satin natural (as reviewed)

8/10

**PROS** High-quality build, though not particularly Spanish in style; beautiful acoustic/plugged-in voicing

**CONS** Neck might be too narrow for some, especially in lower positions; the preamp's control plate is hard to access, especially in a live setting