



This guitar comes fully-loaded with a pair of US-made Tony Iommi humbuckers – and they sound awesome

It's classic SG all the way with a tune-o-matic bridge and a stop tail-piece



£595

# EPIPHONE TONY IOMMI G-400

HAS EPIPHONE JUST RELEASED ITS GREATEST ROCK GUITAR YET? *TG* THINKS SO... WORDS: ED MITCHELL

**> You call this a rock guitar? There's no locking trem!**

Wash your mouth out with soap, foolish young whippersnapper! Your tart's handbag, lollipop stick-necked, sad little widdle plank is no match for this mighty beast. This guitar sounds like a truck load of whup-ass and will keep on delivering its evil-hearted goods for years to come. Can you really say all that about your guitar? In fact, this Epiphone Tony Iommi G-400 is like every *Rocky* film ever made compared to your guitar's *Karate Kid III*. Locking trem, indeed...

**Er, OK. So who's this Tony Iommi geezer supposed to be then?**

He's only the bleedin' Godfather of metal riffery. Look, years before he began shuffling around his Los Angeles mansion, dodging dog shit and shouting at the kids for his reality TV show, renowned bat muncher and self-styled Prince of Darkness Ozzy Osbourne was in a rather important band. We're talking about the mighty Black Sabbath, of course. We say important because these guys pioneered that particular brand of grumpy metal – all doom-laden riffs and 'you're all gonna die' lyrics – that keeps guys like Slayer's Kerry King in protein bars and Bic razors to this day.

The engine of Black Sabbath was guitarist Tony Iommi, a genius with a heavy riff and pretty nifty lead playing ability to boot. Tony always liked to keep his riffs simple; just a few notes played with blinding intensity. You must've heard the blistering opening salvo from *Paranoid*? And surely all you metal

guitarists out there are familiar with the awesome sludge-fest that is *Sweet Leaf*? If not, go to the back of the class and write 'Nu-metal has rotted my brain' 1000 times on the blackboard. The rest of you, walk this way...

**OK, I'm now up to speed with Sabbath, what's the deal with Tony's new axe?**

Sabbath's line-up may have changed over the last 30-odd years but two things have always remained the same: the man himself, Tony Iommi, and his ever faithful SG. Although he occasionally played SG-style guitars from the likes of Patrick Eggle, Jaydee and John Birch, Gibson's classic twin cutaway weapon of rock has always been his favourite. It's now as much an Iommi trademark as the man's fearsome facial hair and false fingertips.

**Sorry, his false fingertips?**

Tony lost the tips of his middle and ring fingers on his right hand in an industrial accident in the 1960s. But before you accuse us of being sick-ass gore-hounds, there is a very good reason why we're dredging up this gruesome nugget of trivia. Put simply, that unfortunate injury greatly influenced Tony's choice of guitar, his set-up and his unique 'dungeons of hell' tone.

**Go on, I'm listening...**

Tony needed a guitar with a slim neck and an easy string tension – it had to be comfortable for his digits. Anyone who has played a Gibson or Epiphone SG will know that the strings are pretty easy to bend;

**We love the headstock on this guitar. It finishes the Iommi off beautifully and looks almost as good as the Gibson version**



even a set of 10s presents little trouble. Tony lowered the string tension on his guitars even more by fitting an unusual mix of light gauge strings (9, 9, 12, 22, 28 and 38) and tuning down to C#. Tuning low gives his guitar the booming voice that has become synonymous with Sabbath songs. Only thing had to be coupled with a meaty pickup to boost the signal to his Laney amp. A few years ago Gibson came to the rescue with the Tony Iommi humbucker – its first ever signature pickup.

**His new Epiphone has that pickup fitted, right?**

Yep, for your £595 you're getting a kick-ass SG loaded with two of Tony's US-made Gibson humbuckers. Now that's what we call value for money, and no doubt great news for Black Sabbath fans on a budget.

**What's the guitar like?**

Probably the best Epiphone electric we've ever tried. The quality of finish is top class and the guitar has all the classic elements that we've come to expect from the SG. Underneath that glorious ebony finish – it should be called Sabbath Black, of course – is a mahogany body; a nice thick slab with those iconic devilish contours and sexy curves. The neck is glued to the body, as it should be, and is also fashioned from mahogany. The fingerboard is rosewood with funky crucifix inlays and 24 frets. Yes, that's right folks, this is a full two octave SG! Every other SG has 22 frets, natch.



Just how much more black could this guitar be? Er, none more black, frankly...

Elsewhere we have the classic Gibson control set-up (2 x volume, 2 x tone and a three-way pickup selector), a tune-o-matic bridge and fixed tailpiece and a striking headstock that really suits this guitar and gives the Gibson version a run for its money. We have also gone ape for those chunky Grover machineheads; built to last with rock solid tuning.

The headstock has a discreet Tony Iommi signature on the truss rod cover. We like that because it means non-Sabbath fans can play this guitar if they want to. Whether you're a goth, a punk, a rocker or a widdler, you're going to love this guitar. Trust us!

**There's a scribble on the scratchplate.**

TG's old pal Tony actually signed this guitar for us. Normal production models come with a plain black scratchplate only. Sorry...

**What does it sound like, then?**

Like Tony Iommi, funnily enough. His tone has changed a bit over the years but we still rate those early recordings that showcase his edgy fuzz tone. Using our trusty Retroman Lola fuzz box, we nailed that classic sound on the bridge pickup without even breaking a sweat. Add to that some modern gain and this guitar will out-rock anything with six strings. The pickups are truly awesome in themselves and should be considered by anyone struggling with weak humbuckers – the Iommi humbuckers are available to buy as a retrofit for your guitar.

The bridge pickup isn't so keen on clean settings but you can use the sweeter middle

and neck positions for the quieter songs. The bottom line is that this guitar just wants to rock and we ain't gonna argue with it.

**I get the feeling you guys like this guitar.**

Damn! What gave it away? It's true we have fallen for this wonderful guitar. TG has always had a soft spot for the SG anyway, but the Tony Iommi version ticks all of our boxes. And the best part is that now there's a left-handed version available – which only seems appropriate since Tony is left-handed – everyone can get a piece of the action.

Of course, we'd all love to get our hands on the £4,000 custom shop Gibson Iommi model, but this Epiphone will keep us well happy until then. You really have to try this superb guitar for yourself. It's a little devil...

**FOR:** Looks awesome; sounds great; plenty of rock vibe  
**AGAINST:** Not everyone will dig its gorgeous gothic looks

**TG RATING:** ★★★★★

**WHO'S IT FOR?**  
 Six-string Satan worshippers; the Sabbath faithful

**INFORMATION**  
**ORIGIN:** Korea  
**TYPE:** Solid body electric  
**BODY:** Mahogany  
**NECK:** Mahogany, set-in  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, with crucifix inlays  
**FRETS:** 24 medium  
**PICKUPS:** 2 x Gibson USA Tony Iommi humbuckers  
**HARDWARE:** Black chrome tune-o-matic bridge, stop tailpiece and Grover machineheads  
**CONTROLS:** 2 x volume, 2 x tone, three-way pickup selector switch  
**FINISH OPTIONS:** Ebony only  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** £599  
**CASE:** No  
**CONTACT:** Rosetti 01376 550033  
**WEB:** www.epiphone.com

**ALTERNATIVELY**  
 Gibson Custom Shop Tony Iommi SG – £4,200  
 Epiphone G-310 – £275  
 Epiphone SG Custom – £429

**THE ORIGINS OF A ROCK ICON**

Although it's still only a baby compared to its legendary big brother, the Gibson Les Paul, the SG is actually 44 years old this year. In fact, when it was launched in 1961 this future rock 'n' roll icon was intended to be a replacement for the Les Paul range. That's why early examples of the SG have a Les Paul nameplate squeezed between the neck pickup and the fingerboard.

So why did Gibson change the guitar's model name, we hear you ask? Depending on what story you believe, Mr Les Paul (Lester William Polfus to his mum) either didn't take to the SG's radical design or simply preferred the sound of his original Les Paul model. Fair enough, but the wily old fox may have had another reason to have his name removed from the new guitar. In the early 1960s Les and his then wife and singing partner, Mary Ford, had decided to separate. Legend has it that Les, realising how Mary would be entitled to a share of any money

he made, refused to sign a new contract with Gibson. Undeterred, Gibson switched to the SG (solid guitar) model name and the rest, as they say, is history.

Even if old Lester didn't dig his new axe, plenty of other guitarists have fallen for its obvious charms. If you play an SG you're in very good company. In the 1960s, Beate George Harrison used a cherry-finish model on the band's *Rubber Soul* album, Robbie Krieger of The Doors wouldn't be seen dead without his SG Standard and Eric Clapton brandished an eye-catching psychedelic SG in the early days of Cream. Of course, the SG is also behind Angus Young's awesome tone on every classic AC/DC record. Can you imagine Angus playing any other style of guitar? It's unthinkable.

