

The Origins of Yamaha Guitars

Stories Behind Our First Instruments Part 2

The Beginning of Yamaha Acoustic Guitars The First FG Series



In the mid-1960s, Japan was in the midst of an electric guitar boom, while folk music was thriving in the United States. Yamaha set out to develop an acoustic guitar that could compete with the leading American brands of the time, while offering something distinctly Yamaha.

Our focus was uncompromising quality. We tested prototypes in environments with extreme temperature and humidity conditions, carefully inspecting them for warping and structural stability, while pursuing the highest possible standards. For the tone, Yamaha envisioned the signature FG tone as a powerful low end paired with sweet highs that blends naturally with vocals. More than **100 prototypes** were built to achieve this sound.

In 1966, we introduced the first models in the FG series: the **FG-180**, a dreadnought-style guitar, and the **FG-150**, a compact concert body guitar. Both featured a headstock design inspired by the letter “Y” for Yamaha, a motif that remains a hallmark of Yamaha acoustics to this day. Models manufactured for the Japanese market between 1966 and 1968 carried a pale green label inside the soundhole, now known as the “Light Green Label.” In 1968, this changed to the iconic red label, the origin of today’s popular FG Red Label series.

The FG-150 made history on the world stage when Country Joe McDonald played it at the 1969 Woodstock Festival, becoming the first Yamaha acoustic guitar played at a major international event. With its distinctive body shape, scale length, and other unique specifications, the original FG achieved exceptional musicality. More than 60 years later, its legacy endures through the modern FG series, still beloved by artists and guitarists around the world.



The Beginning of Yamaha Electric Guitars The First SG Series



The SG-2 (image) features two single-coil pickups, while the SG-3 is equipped with three single-coil pickups.

From the very start, Yamaha approached electric guitar design with a simple but powerful principle: **thinking from the guitarist’s perspective.** With this mindset, we poured passion and time into creating versatile electric guitars capable of delivering any tone a guitar player could desire. Every component, including wood, strings, hardware and finishes, was developed from the ground up, with meticulous attention to detail throughout design and production.

These efforts came together in 1966 with the launch of our first two electric guitars for the Japanese market, the **SG-2** and **SG-3**. Named “SG” for **Solid Guitar**, this model featured an asymmetrical design available in three color options and showcased Yamaha’s unique blend of individuality and innovation.

We developed **original designs** for the tremolo unit, neck-joint system, pickups, and even the tuning machines, always prioritizing the needs of guitarists in mind. The role of ergonomics was also central to our approach. We analyzed playing posture and hand movement, refining neck and body shapes through repeated testing and precise adjustments.

The SG series continued to evolve over the decades, preserving its refined craftsmanship and signature sustain while earning the trust of countless artists. For more than 60 years, the philosophy of putting the guitarist first has guided every guitar Yamaha has ever built.

