

Teye Guitars La Mora S Plus Review

By James Ego

Teye is a walking dichotomy. Born in the Netherlands, he learned flamenco from Gypsy masters in Andalusía, Spain. He played flamenco with country artist Joe Ely between stints playing electric in rock bands. And somewhere along the way, he picked up a Zemaitis or two. He currently makes music and guitars in Austin, Texas.

When Teye began building his “A” Series guitars, they combined the disparate elements of his unique life experience almost literally. The engraved metal tops and hand-worked bridges and tailpieces indicated an unabashed Tony Zemaitis influence. The exposed mahogany on the back of the body and neck pointed to his Old World flamenco roots. Instead of flawless, smooth gloss, his guitars featured thin, hand-rubbed finishes, echoing traditional flamenco and violin-making techniques. But all of this craft and experience came at a cost. “Hand-made,” whether it is an engraved top, hand-rubbed finish or intricate Southwestern-inspired inlay, has never been inexpensive.

Teye’s concession to recessionistas is the introduction of the “S-Plus” series. Instead of the engraved tops of the A series, the S-Plus features laser-etched designs, while the custom-made aluminum bridges and tailpieces are replaced by TonePros hardware. What remains untouched includes Grover Imperial tuners; three custom, hand wound Lollar humbuckers; Teye’s patent-applied-for wiring scheme; and the same hand-rubbed finish applied over carefully selected mahogany. And, instead of Teye completing each guitar from start to finish, the S-Plus series relies on a small, in-house crew.

The La Mora features a black anodized top surrounded by an ebony mosaic with turquoise and mother-of-pearl inlays. There are some filler gaps between a few of the trapezoid-shaped ebony pieces adorning the top, but it speaks more to the custom nature of the instrument rather than shoddy workmanship. Our La Mora has a black finish over the mahogany neck and body, giving the guitar an elegant, sexy appearance. Typically nonplussed by mixing gold, chrome and silver, I have to admit the La Mora pulls it off, looking fetching as hell by

juxtaposing the gold pickups, bridge and tailpiece with the exposed aluminum of the top, chromed inlays on the pickup surrounds and the silver of the control knobs.

As a nod to the hand-made nature of Teye's guitars, there are some sanding marks on the fingerboard binding on the guitar's top, and the binding's color is uneven due to the finish applying technique. Of course, these are the same "issues" facing Teye's \$9500-\$19,000 A-series guitars, pointing to the whole "dichotomy" thing I was getting at earlier. Despite all of Teye's guitar's gorgeous appointments, the man simply refuses to make concessions when it comes to tone. He prefers the sound of thin finishes applied over lightly pore-filled mahogany, so each guitar made leaves his shop finished accordingly. Teye doesn't seem to be worried about achieving visual perfection – despite the ornate appointments – but instead seems focused on making his guitars "right," something I find really refreshing.

Weight-wise, the La Mora follows a not too heavy, not too light credo; this wood has been chosen for its tonal qualities, not any current weight bias. A rounded edge on the treble side of the neck-body joint allows unfettered access to all 24 frets, keeping the thumb out of site. The unbleached bone nut is cut cleanly and the fretwork on the ebony fingerboard is spot on. The La Mora came out of the case ready to play, set with medium action per the manual's specs, while the Graph-tech saddles were positioned so chord shapes played in tune across the neck.

This guitar really pops unplugged. Sounding almost compressed, it offers up a little bit of swell after the initial attack. Plugged in, this effect is more pronounced, consistent with the handful of other Teyes I have played. Coupled with the just-right Lollars, this is one exceedingly expressive machine. The five-way switching system manages the broad range of tones: position one – down – is bridge pickup, two offers bridge plus middle, three is bridge and neck, four delivers middle plus neck and five is neck solo.

While the La Mora doesn't lack any traditional humbucker muscle, the delightfully interactive controls – Volume for bridge and neck pickups, master Tone and "Mood" knob – allow it to bop back and forth between single-coil like sparkle

and dual-coil chunk, all with plenty of definition. The Mood control operates differently than typical tone controls – think “thick” knob. In positions two and four with the Tone maxed and Mood at zero, the La Mora dishes out some tight, three-dimensional out-of-phase tones. Sounding great clean, adding in some dirt resulted in even deeper 3-D sounds. Cleaning things up a bit and switching to the bridge pickup delivered some kick-ass twang textures that became delightfully spitty and snarly as the Volume increased.

The straight up humbucking tones – achieved with the Mood knob at ten, Tone past five and Volume to taste – are pretty much sublime. In this context, it’s apparent Jason and Teye play well together. The bridge pickup is tight and ballsy while the middle unit solo – accessed in positions two and four by rolling down the unwanted pickup’s volume – sounds great on its own and even better blended with the bridge or the neck, particularly after some Tone and Mood twiddling. The neck pickup is a thing of beauty, delivering the requisite fat textures while retaining definition. Even with the Mood and Tone controls at zero, the neck pickup retained clarity, producing a delightfully nasally woman tone or, with less push, a convincing jazz tone. You can also select all three pickups by finding the sweet spot between positions two and three, a la old school, three-way Strat switches.

Despite this flexibility, the La Mora’s focus isn’t so much about mimicry, but creating the right sound for the moment. Paraphrasing the manual: if you want a thinner or thicker tone, play with the Mood knob. You want brighter? Turn up the Tone. If softer is in order, roll back the Volume. The controls are incredibly easy to use, becoming intuitive almost immediately.

Deities, like Jimi and Stevie, would continually ride pickup, tone and volume settings – the La Mora begs for the same treatment. Set your amp to its sweet spot and then play the entire guitar, controls and all – there aren’t any bad sounds. The notes always bloom. Every input – no matter how subtle – offers up a great sounding response. This thing is as happy and effective feeding an overdrive as it is pushing an amp. The guitar’s mahogany/humbucker construction means its voice will remain familiar, but it does so through Teye’s filter more than any other guitar I can think of outside of high-end, hollowbody

jazz boxes. The La Mora is one of those rare gems that consistently takes your playing beyond its limitations.