

De Gitarist, July 2010

Review of Teye Electric Gypsy S-series 'La India'

Guitar for a lifetime.

A flamenco guitarist from the Dutch town of Groningen, who lived in Spain for years, toured the USA with Joe Ely, and now makes electric guitars in Austin, Texas, that perhaps belong to the best guitars of all time... Surely a joke? Absolutely not. Meet Teye!

Text Oscar Timans; Photos Dennis Boxem

All Teye-guitars are hand-made in the USA. There is one model, the Electric Gypsy, that is made in three different series. The differences are in the labor-intensive adornments, the electronics, and the quality of the tonewoods. The T-series is the least expensive, after that comes the S-series, and the superior version is the built-by-Teye A-series. We tested the 'La India' from the S-series.

Design

Some readers will experience a *déjà vu* when they see the La India S. Teye's guitars remind of the legendary instruments of the late Tony Zemaitis, but the similarity ends at the use of engraved aluminum. The Teye is not a Zemaitis-clone: the differences are substantial, especially under the skin. You can disagree on taste, but you will certainly stand out with a Teye!

The La India consists of a body and neck of carefully selected mahogany, an ebony fingerboard, an engraved aluminum top (surrounded by a beautiful inlay of turquoise powder in resin) and top-quality hardware: Jason Lollar humbuckers, Grover tuning machines, 'military-grade' pots and switches, and Teye's unique electronics, on which more later. By the way, instead of turquoise powder in resin, there is also the possibility to use real turquoise, to the tune of some 15 thousand Euros...

The slots in the nut are exactly to measure, to a fraction of a millimeter. Down-side to this is that they may have to be enlarged if you want to use a heavier gauge string (standard, these guitars come with a D'Addario .010 set. Teye thinks his guitars sound best with those). The only concern we had was that the g-string gives a nasty ring when you play a harmonic above the 7th fret with a hard pick attack. This is because the string not only touches the saddle, but also resonates against the rear of the bridge. The guitar has a long scale length of 648mm, which contributes to a tight and full tone.

The La India S has been constructed with great care, but this does not automatically imply that everyone will find this a pleasing guitar. Ergonomically there are a number of things that will pose no problem to one, but will be an obstacle to others. For starters, there are three humbuckers instead of the usual two, some guitarists may have to get used to the fact that their pick will occasionally touch the middle pickup. Less happy was I with the sharp points of the thumbwheels. They are part of a circular decoration that reminds of a flower, complete with thorns. Pay attention! You can also hurt yourself on the pickup rings since these are metal, tall, and pointy. The four rotary knobs are equipped with a knurled plastic exterior, that provides good grip but has an excessive sharp upper edge that protrudes. You'll think twice before doing Pete Townsend windmills on this guitar!

Sound and Playability

Of a guitar with this price tag you may expect that the playability is tip-top, and it is. The neck is remarkably wide and the radius of the fretboard feels just right, compound with 10 inch at the nut tapering to 16 inch at the 24th fret. For some guitarists, it'll take some getting used to the neck width, but after a little while you never want anything different anymore. The neck fits beautifully in your hand and the extra width means that on the La India S you have all the space for complex chords and finger-picking.

The quality of the fretwork is excellent: neatly installed, levelled, and rounded off. The guitar stays in tune excellently, and the intonation is tip-top.

To make a long story short: the La India S is the best sounding electric guitar that I have ever had in my hands and besides that the most versatile. There! I've said it! The combination of top quality mahogany, the aluminum top, the Jason Lollar humbuckers and Teye's electronics produce a very resonant sound over an enormous broad frequency

range. Totally Hi-Fi, but without the slightest chill or sterility. The lows are remarkably deep, but crystal-clear and totally non-muddy. The highs extend very far, but is never thin or shrill. The mids are enormously complex, all kinds of sonic nuances present themselves that are hard to capture in words. Notes bloom magnificently the longer you allow them to resonate. It's like a good glass of wine: you keep tasting new nuances. And this, dear reader, is totally independent of how the guitar's switches and pots are positioned. You don't have to search for the 'sweet spot' because there is none – every sound that this guitar produces is equally inspiring.

Electronics

It all looks familiar: the four pots of a Les Paul and the five-way switch of a Strat. But the appearance is deceptive, because with Teye everything is different from what you're used to! Let's start with the five-way switch, that offers the following combinations:

- Position 1 - bridge
- Position 2 - bridge and middle
- Position 3 - bridge and neck
- Position 4 - middle and neck
- Position 5 - neck

Nice is that the two volume knobs 'walk along' with the pickup switch. So: in positions 2, 3, and 4 they control the volume of the selected pickups, of which you can adjust the balance to taste. To use only the middle pickup, you choose position 2 or 4 and kill the volume of the pickup you don't want to hear. With a bit of fidgeting it is also possible to find the 'in-between-positions' between 4 and 5, where additional sounds can be found.

No coil split for the humbuckers? No. At least not in the conventional way. This brings us to the 'mood' control. Teye is not divulging how precisely this works, but in every Teye guitar of the S- and A-series sits an epoxy-filled Coca-Cola cap from which all kinds of wires protrude. It is not a variable coil-split, and it is passive, so no batteries. However it may work, it is far out! Turn the moodknob down and you get every shade of sound between what you may associate with 'humbucker' and 'single-coil', but in a way that is much more musical than what you would achieve with a coil-split. No, the Teye does not sound exactly like a Strat or a Les Paul. Personally I think that the La India sounds better than no matter what other guitar and besides adds something totally new.

Conclusion

The looks aren't for everyone, but that is a matter of taste. The Teye La India S can be used for any style of music, with a natural preference for rock 'n' roll (think Wild Romance, Stones, Black Crowes) A guitar for all your life, that you never will want to leave your hands after you've played it for a few hours. The price is corresponding, but if you keep in mind what pianists and violin players spend for a good instrument, it's really not that bad.

Test results:

Construction: *****
Playability: ****
Sound: *****
Price/Quality: *****
Verdict: *****

We liked:

Quality, versatility, delightful neck, unsurpassed sound.

We didn't like:

Looks aren't for everyone, parts w. sharp points

The Teye La India S has a unique sound and therefore really has no rivals. Those who are looking for a similar style should search for the Metal Front series of the current (Japanese) Zemaitis. Prices in Europe are around 3300 Euro and you'll have to go to Germany for one. Another top level guitar that is versatile is for example the PRS 25th anniversary Custom 24.

Disclaimer: this is just a translation of the original article, without facts check or the correction of data.