

Translation of Music Maker article.

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**‘The beautiful metallic ring gives the instrument an American sound’**

## **TEYE GUITARS ELECTRIC GYPSY**

**The ideal guitar that has it all. That is what many guitarists are looking for. Among them the Dutch guy in the States: Teye. He collected his frustrations and ideas about guitar design in a “list of bitchenings” and developed his vision in a line of high-end guitars with the name Electric Gypsy. We were allowed to warm ourselves to the flamed La Llama.**

**Text: Sander Geus**

Many a guitarist is looking for an all-in-one instrument. And preferably without the instrument being too complicated by means of countless switching options and standing in the way of making music intuitively. It would be ideal if only one guitar had to be carried to a gig or recording session. Who doesn't think about that when it's time to pack up? But above all it would be fantastic to be able to switch guitar sounds during a solo. Thus thought also Teye, who after a career of more than two decades as professional guitarist on both the electric and the flamenco guitar decided to apply himself completely to the construction of his ideal electric guitar. Teye's goal: to make a guitar with the dynamics of his flamenco guitar and with as many as possible “real” sound variations, or as Teye says: “an expression monster”. Apart from that, Teye wants the guitar, even before a single note is played, to attract attention, and therefore makes his guitars into real works of art. Teye goes far in this. He uses engraved aluminum and detailed mosaic inlay work to beautify the Gypsy to perfection. One glance at his website speaks volumes.

Teye makes guitars in three price categories: the made by himself hand-built A-series, the composed of the same quality components but more manufactured S-series, and the T-series that has been designed for an easier production process to keep the costs down. The La Llama (Spanish for ‘the flame’ or ‘the fire’) is the model from the S-series with the most traditional look.

### **First Impression**

Connoisseurs may think: it looks like a Zemaitis! Not strange at all, the thin body with it's narrow waist is almost identical to the models of Tony Zemaitis, who passed away in 2002. Metal- and mosaic-decorations are also to be found with Zemaitis. Is this a subject of shame? Oh no, because Zemaitis-guitars have been praised since the '70's by guitarists like Ronnie Wood and Eric Clapton. And in the vintage-circuit the guitars are veritable collectors items that command astronomical amounts. Teye is open about his love for Zemaitis. He's played those guitars for years, owns several, and was very close to Tony Zemaitis. When Teye decided to make his ideal guitar it made sense to use the model of Zemaitis as basis. With emphasis on ‘as basis’, because there are a number of clear distinctions between the two. All Electric Gypsies have the longer scale length of a Fender (25.5”); three humbuckers, and unique electronics.

### **Construction**

The single-cut body and set neck are all mahogany. The fingerboard is of smooth ebony and fitted with 24 frets. The mahogany has a thin, hand-rubbed finish, that may marr sooner than a modern type finish but that gives the guitar a natural feel and allows the body to ‘breathe’ as far as resonance goes. Remarkable is the maple top sunk into the body, that with its deeply flamed cherry sunburst almost sets off the fire alarm. The cream-colored binding on the top is the finishing touch that gives the guitar a look of *chic*. The guitar is equipped with detailed engraved aluminum. This looks (also up close) tasteful and gives the guitar an exotic accent. If you were searching for a guitar to go with your engraved revolver and cowboy

boots: this is the one! The aluminum hardware is manufactured by Teye himself. This makes the instrument absolutely unique.

### **Playability**

The single-cut body is smaller and thinner than a Les Paul. That makes playing nice and is a relief for back and shoulders because the guitar is lightweight (about 3.8 kilos) and balances well, when sitting down as well as when standing. The neck profile, between a C and a D immediately feels familiar. The highest positions are extremely easily reached because of the cutaway and rounded-off heel. The larger scale length took some getting used to because you don't expect that from a Les Paul type instrument, although it didn't take long. String action is low from first to last position, but fret-buzz or dead spots are nowhere to be found.

To sum it up: a pro job.

### **Electronics**

Remarkable are the three hand-made humbuckers of boutique-brand Lollar. Teye describes Jason Lollar as a veritable tone-freak, and his pick-ups had just that little extra clarity that Teye was looking for. The pick-ups are switchable by means of a Stratocaster-like five-position switch. The positions are except the middle one, like a Strat: bridge / bridge parallel to middle / bridge parallel to neck / middle parallel to neck / neck. So the middle position is equal to a Les Paul or a Telecaster.

Underneath the four knobs we find two volume controls. These have been wired thus, that they control the volumes of the chosen pick-ups, regardless the position of the switch. So you can, by killing a volume control in one of the in-between-positions, also use the middle pickup only. The tone-knob removes the highs in a subtle and balanced manner from the sound and is functional on it's entire sweep. Lastly there is a so-called 'mood' knob, which, according to Teye, you'd wish could be found on your wife or girlfriend. With this knob you can tap the humbuckers gradually to single-coil and thus create a more Fender-like sound. Teye designed the electronics in such a way that with everything on ten there is no filtering in the sound. The pure signal of your pickups then goes straight from your cable to your amp.

### **Sound**

Okay, you finally found a guitar that matches your cowboy boots and the electronics are promising, but does it sound good or is this all fake and blowing smoke? From experience we know that the prettiest guitars are not always the best sounding ones. Well, the La Llama fanned our flames from the very first moment. The guitar, plugged into the clean channel of a Peavey Classic Delta Blues with 15" speaker in the living room, gave from the very first note a rich, full and transparent sound with lots of sustain. Balanced, dynamic, and very sensitive to playing style. Open chords sound rich and the highs are beautifully sparkling and round. The longer scale provides a tight tone and in combination with the ebony fretboard, lots of 'spank' and 'twang'. The guitar has a nice metallic ring which gives the instrument a clear American character. Riffs like "Sweet Home Alabama" sound very natural on this instrument. Country-gig? No problem, choose the bridge position and turn the mood-knob down for a sharp single-coil sound. Jazz tune? Switching to the neck pickup, full jazz sounds are present. Funky rhythm? The in-between-positions offer convincing Stratocaster-sounds. All popular guitar sounds can be emulated with the instrument. With over-drive the guitar easily goes to classic rock, with bite and overtones easily reproduced. Think the sounds of Billy Gibbons or Slash.

We took the guitar to a rehearsal and to a gig; we still were impressed. The instrument finds its own spot in the mix and when needed moves well to the front. You notice that the guitar has lots of power and dynamics under the hood. Where on other guitars you have to work really hard to get your sound, on the La Llama everything goes smooth. A small change in pick attack has a big effect. And yes, the guitar draws attention. At last, we thought, somebody's making some good photographs of us at a gig, and it turns out, when we look at the pics, they're all close-ups of the La Llama...

## Conclusion

The million-dollar-question: is this the ideal guitar that makes our Stratocaster, Telecasters and Les Pauls obsolete? Well, during a gig or session you won't miss them, the La Llama is very all-round and of the highest quality. The electronics are unique. The guitar can absolutely hold its own against the bigger boutique brands. And that is a good thing, because the hefty price is likewise. Expensive, but if you're a fan of classic guitar tones, you won't get burned by this guitar.

In other words: give her a try!

### TEYE GUITARS ELECTRIC GYPSY LA LLAMA

Price:	€ 4750
Origin:	Austin, Texas
Body:	Mahogany with flame maple sunk top
Neck:	Mahogany, set
Fingerboard:	Ebony
Scale:	25.5"
Frets:	24, medium
Hardware:	Hand-made aluminum bridge and tail. Grover machines
Electronics:	Three Lollar humbuckers, five-position switch, two volumes, tone, and mood
Import:	Erick Determann, <a href="mailto:erick@teye.com">erick@teye.com</a> <a href="http://www.teye.com">www.teye.com</a>