

Teye El Torero

An American work of art with Dutch roots

'Fender makes tools, Rickenbacker and Gibson make instruments, and Teye makes art'

These past years we saw them appear more and more often in stores, on TV and in guitar magazines: the extraordinary, attention-grabbing and above all versatile guitars of Teye. When we heard there would be bass versions, we stood at the front of the line to acquire one of the first editions of this bass with a Dutch flavor. Guitar builder and guitarist Teye lived in Fryslan for years and his business partner hails from Alkmaar and also lives in the US.

For a test editor of a bass magazine it can be tricky when yet another variation on the Precision passes thru the office. Everything has already been said. This Teye-bass gave us grey hairs in a different manner. The looks are almost undescrivable and the dialing of sound is done on feeling, and not on easily defined positions. A nice challenge to do this work-of-art justice on two pages. Let's get started!

Faces

Contrary to the Duesenberg elsewhere in this issue, the Teye-bass comes in a solid, simple plastic case. Ready to be thrown around, in other words. In the business-like black plush the skinny Teye attracts extra attention. Gorgeous? Over the top? You be the judge!

You could call Teye's mahogany body Les Paul-like, but the skinny waist makes all the difference. The combination of a skinny waist with engraved plates is inspired on the famous models of Tony Zemaitis, but these are no copies, far from it. Tony who? The connoisseur knows that we are talking about the British guitar builder who made wonderful guitars and basses for Ronnie Wood and Ronnie Lane (Faces), Keith Richards (Stones) and later for bands like the Black Crowes. On Teye's site you read all about the how and why of his instruments and the life story of builder-guitarist Teye. Even a synopsis would be too long for this article.

Compass rose

On the body we find a mechanically engraved aluminum plate and the details are unbelievable. You keep looking at it and discovering new details. We see amongst other things the text 'Hand Made in Austin Texas', 'Teye Electric Gypsy El Torero R-series', gorgeous arrow heads around the jack plug and designations of the function of the knobs. Those knobs are a work of art by themselves, with rubber rings for a good grip. The strings start in a brass block with an engraved plate on top, the hand-made bridge contains all kinds of gracious elements and the two Nordstrand MM-pickups sit together in a separate pickup ring. The walnut neck has a bound ebony fretboard with 24 frets of which the highest, in spite of a well rounded heel, are not really reachable. Leave those notes to the guitar player. The fingerboard inlay is sober, although the 'compass rose' at the 12th fret returns on the front plate. Remarkable is it to see that the headstock has been glued separately to the neck. Something we see in Asian-made instruments but also with classical guitars. This benefits the sturdiness: the head will break much less easily. The bound head has light-weight Hipshot tuners, an engraved plate, and you have to look a few times before you realize that the truss cover is removable.

Everybody-friends

About the looks two things can be said with certainty: this Teye-bass is a work of art, and you either love it or think it's horrible. That's the way it should be! We already have plenty of everybody-friends. As a fan of the Faces and Zemaitis you

need no getting used to this exterior. Remarkable was that many fans of the looks were not charmed by the two enormous MM-humbuckers. These really deserve a Teye-coat, but you adapt quickly. Teye has eye for detail. Everything has a function: 'Teye – more than meets the eye', a free slogan for the company.

Play!

The El Torero is nice and light and straps on comfortably. The neck is wide, the bindings a bit sharp, but because of the 32 inch scale length, about 5 cm shorter than the average bass, it plays very light. Your thumb quickly finds a spot on one of the Nordstrands and you feel right at home on the bass. When playing acoustically, you remark how deliciously the body resonates and how tight the neck is. When you feel the string tension, you do not expect a medium scale.

Two MM-humbuckers side-by-side is by now a proven concept. Think of Music Man itself, various G&L's but also of the \$\$-basses of Warwick. However, the knob array of this bass is unique. Besides volume knobs for both pickups and a master-toneknob, you find a control with the designation 'Mood'. Teye's secret. This one knob determines how the pickups are switched and the maker acts secretive about what exactly happens. We guess by listening and by tapping the magnet poles in various positions, to hear which one is activated. You have to view the two humbuckers as four coils. With the knob all the way to the left you get a Music Man-like sound. The center two of the four coils are activated. Turn the knob a little further, the front coil is added, which results in a large dose of warmth. Turn the knob all the way to the other extreme, and now the outer coils are switched on. This position is comparable to a certain extent with a Jazz Bass. By working the volume knobs you can choose between only the front or the rear coil. What happens between the extremes is more vague. It is clear that all four coils are activated and judging by the sound the pickups are also switched series/parallel, for a more woolly or a tighter sound.

Charm

Basically this bass has a wonderfully tight and growling sound that cuts deliciously thru the mix. From that basis there's an awful lot possible in thickness, warmth, and punch of the sound. Because of the mood-knob the bass is much less cut-and-dried to operate than for example a Warwick or a G&L, but that is the charm of this bass. To achieve a sound you rely much more on feeling and that takes a while. As luck would have it we were allowed to use the bass for a good while and we used it amongst other things for an acoustic TV show and a rock concert. After a few hours of playing you know where the sounds can be found and soon you dial effortlessly from explosive and punchy for one song, if needed rolling back some sharpness with the well-voiced tone knob, to warm and thick for another song. Whether you are playing in series, parallel and with two or three coils? It is really not that important, as long as your sound is good.

Conclusion

A Teye isn't cheap. Far from it. There are some disadvantages too. The neck is a little wide and sharp, the upper frets are difficult to reach and sound-searching is less clearly defined as with other basses. For clear switching and perfection we refer you to Ibanez or G&L. But does this outweigh the rest? The Teye El Torero is a fantastic sounding bass that can handle many situations and is a hand-made work of art. Fender makes tools, Gretsch, Rickenbacker and Gibson make instruments and Teye makes art. It is a pity that the looks of this bass have as many opponents as it has fans, because sound-wise it does not get better than this. The instrument has been built wonderfully, with the eye for detail as big as the will to make a fantastical sounding instrument.

Now it's up to you. Do you have the money and the courage? Grow your sideburns, tie on the silk shawl, don the velvet jacket and jump on stage for some 70's rock!