

In-Between Art & Guitar?

Teye Master Cordoba

" There are few objects that can compete for attention with a Teye Master guitar." This is how it is stated on Teye's web presence, and exactly thus is how I describe it after my first encounter with the Cordoba model from the Master-series. As an author and tester I luckily often get to experience the high points of guitar making, but upon seeing such a total work of art the question begs itself: "Is that still a guitar, is it art, or is it both?"

By Bernhard Galler, photographs Andreas Huthansl. Translated from German by Teye.

It all fits together: Teye's instruments are exactly as uncommon as his biography. Nothing there of a linear guitarbuilder bio, no, a loudly colorful path of life that will have any freelancing personality councillor break out a sweat or similar unpleasantness. The start was still rather normal: Teye grew up well-protected and happy in an extended family. From the cradle he felt an affection for Spanish music, whenever the radio emitted such sounds Teye dropped his toys and became all ears. At age 4 he began with the piano, at age 6 his elder sister accompanied him to the record store to buy his first 45: 'Twist and Shout' by the Beatles, for 2.25 dutch guilders.

When he was 10, finally the moment arrived: The long-desired guitar arrived!

But he did not see himself at the goalpost: an electric guitar it must be, un-negotiably! Which he obtained at age 15, followed by a Les Paul copy, and then a 'real' SG. Into which he chiseled a 3rd pickup, since for him only an axxe with three humbuckers was the 'real thing'. The wiring which he devised as teenie can still be found in his guitars albeit completed with the MOJO-control (trademarked). I will return to that speciality in more detail later.

After years of the live oxen-tour through clubs in mostly the Netherlands and Germany he radically changed directions and studied classical guitar at the Groningen conservatory of music. During a trip to Spain he learned the flamenco music and love of his life. After intermittent stays and musical activities in the USA, the Netherlands and Spain he settled in Texas and affords the luxury of a second home in Sevilla.

Three Times the Big Love

After the flamencomusic and his wife Belen Teye found in Andalucia a third love: the regional architecture. The Moorish style elements that occur there, can be found on his guitars.

It is so that apparently the red-white inlays made of bone and synthetic coral in the top of the instrument have been inspired by the walkways of Cordoba's mosque, its most famous sight. Likewise the proprietary pointed-onion-turret-style control knobs indicate this arab-moorish influence.

In any case, everything on this guitar, from the custom-wound humbuckers made by Jason Lollar, via the tuner buttons to the custom-pots for the MOJO control, feels as if it was all hand-made or spec'd by the Chef himself. That also explains the not even double-digit yearly output, and also the price which exists strongly outside of tangible and defensible parameters.

At closer look another influence surfaces, not architectural art, but the outerworldly guitar building legend Tony Zemaitis. Teye knew and respected him, even calling a (sic) Zemaitis his own, after he had given up a mid-fifties Gold Top for that. Likewise the old master of extrovert guitar making had a love for affectionately engraved aluminum plates. It's easy to see where Teye's existential impressions hail from. Just like the guitars of the great Tony Z. the Cordoba exhibits a certain degree of imperfection, which makes her rather endearing. Where other hi-end guitars arrive with a breathtaking meticulousness, the Cordoba comes as an antithesis. Not to be misunderstood, the Cordoba is fabulously worked, the neck has been set up sensationally, the fret ends are rounded off to finesse, it's only that for example the mosaic work of the front isn't 100 per cent wise. The manual labor is visible, the stones are not seamlessly lain together, but show that human touch and irregularities were in play. Same holds for the monumental engraving on the body's rear. Take one, two steps back, such banalities submerge in the grandness of this extraordinary instrument.

A MOJO gear.

Basis of this guitar treasure chest is a two-pieces chambered body of Korina-wood, the same principle counts for the neck: it is also two-part and Korina. I dislike to ascribe concrete tonal qualities to certain woods, at best, tendencies. Thus by the choice of woods and humbuckers it was already clear what basically awaited me: like a typical singlecut LP guitar, just not as compact and closed like with the Mahogany body of the classic.

The Cordoba not only can serve up the genre-typical boardsounds in a Les Paul manner, but shows itself by reason of the special pots and especially the MOJO knob enormously versatile. It is in fact really surrounded by something like Mojo.

Teye could not be coaxed into revealing what it is exactly that's inside this secret, this pot is the proverbial Black Box, enclosed in a not-too-open package. Only this much: with it it's possible to blend continually from humbucker into the direction of single-coil sounds, in that divided across the control path, little by little bass- and midsections are filtered out. The single-coil sounds however authentic and good, will not wipe a true vintage Strat off the map. Together with three humbuckers and a five-way switch they deliver manifold ways of sonic characteristics. To this end, Teye offers on his web site extras a sound sheet with several suggestions as basics for further experimenting. And it's all there: going from Les to Leo: ballsy lead sounds from a Paula, mid-pickup blues, thinned out one-coil sounds for country-escapades, funky in-between tones, and good-old Jimi at the neck pickup of course goes too.

As base building block Teye recommends a tube amp (what then else?) a good helping of gain, and no effects! The remainder is done by the fingers and the pots, of that I was able to extensively convince myself. As extraordinary with the tone pot I mention the smooth sounding progress, the especially tasteful fine-tuning by which the sound does not just become dull. Same counts for the volume pots, which sonic course leaves the highs in the audio in far-reaching manner. They please with yet another specialty: in case two pickups are selected, one volume pot can be turned off completely, while via the second turned-up pot the remaining switching remains working. This is not the case with normal four-pot circuits: where the turning off of one volume knob is sufficient to mute the entire guitar, even when the other volume pot is full open.

Not to forget as contributing to the sound is the Tune-O-Matic bridge/Stop Tailpiece. The tailpiece is made of brass and bolted directly into the body. So it does not need -as is usual- the string tension to

hold it on the body – a very practical solution! The bridge and saddles are made of aluminum, this brings "sparkle" into the sound structure.

Guitar, Art, and an Investment Piece

Investment in one of Teye's Master series guarantees the highest exclusivity: only eight unique pieces of sheer overwhelming opulence at the cutting edge of guitar making and art are available each year. The price? High. Very high. Simply exorbitant. From the right point of view, this is put in context again: The Cordoba is more than just a guitar, it is equally an art and investment object for the discerning collector as it is an absolute top class instrument for a demanding player, fantastically playable with varied, amazing sounds. In every respect, the master series of Teye currently is absolutely unrivaled.

By the way: Shipping of Master Guitars is free for readers of Grand Guitars Magazine, as Sales Manager Evert Wilbrink assures me!