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Mérida Master 75D



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Posted by **Adam Perlmutter**

The Extremadura, an autonomous region in western Spain, is known as the guitar's birthplace. It's also the inspiration for a relatively new guitar brand, Mérida, which takes its name from the region's capital city. The company's handcrafted imported guitars—which first made a splash in Europe and Japan, and are finally available in the United States—include classical and steel-string offerings. Found in the new Master Series of steel-string guitars are dreadnoughts and grand auditoriums with various tonewood packages, all available with a cutaway and Fishman electronics. I checked out the Master 75D, a dread, in its non-cutaway incarnation.

Classic Spruce & Rosewood Configuration

The Master 75D is built from the time-honored tonewood combo of a Sitka spruce soundboard, with scalloped Sitka X-bracing, and Indian rosewood back and sides—all solid. Mahogany is used for the neck and ebony for the fretboard. Care appears to have been taken in the selection of the woods; the Sitka is finely grained, and the rosewood has an attractive deep brown coloration.

Aesthetically speaking, the Master 75D, with its spare, modern look, is a refreshing departure from the traditional dreadnought. The rosette, said to have been inspired by the architecture of the Mérida Amphitheatre, is formed by elliptical rings of rosewood and mahogany—the sculptural rosewood bridge has a binding of mahogany, as do the body and headstock. Mahogany also makes appearances in the truss-rod cover, heel cap, back strip, end strip, and in the script M on the headstock—the only part rendered by CNC machinery.

The Master 75D, like all Mérida guitars, is made in China, a fact that the company seems to downplay. (They indicate, in tiny letters on the soundhole label, that it's made in P.R.C.) But the guitar is hardly the typical assembly-line Asian import. In fact, except for the finish, it's made entirely by a single luthier.

Whoever built the review model did very clean work, with the exception of a little debris inside of the box. The poly finish is uniform and very thin—you can almost feel the pores. In a thoughtful flourish, the wood inside the guitar has been rubbed with oil, for both protection and beauty.

After overseas completion, the Master 75D is set up at Mérida's Norwalk, Connecticut, headquarters. As a result, the fretwork is impeccable, smoothly polished and leveled, and with comfortably rounded ends.

Well-Rounded Performer

The Master 75D has a 1.69-inch bone nut and a relatively shallow neck that fans of traditional steel-strings might find skimpy. But thanks to its profile and its satin finish, as well as the low action, it's quite comfortable. Depending on one's playing style, though, the action might be a little too low—a heavy hand can cause some buzzing at the lower frets.

Even and well-rounded are the words that come to mind when describing the guitar's overall voice. The bottom end is full, but not overpowering as on some dreadnoughts; the midrange is strong and airy, and the treble register is sparkling. It offers a nice snap and projection, likely owing to its rosewood back and sides, and it can be driven pretty hard before the tone is adversely affected (buzzy frets notwithstanding).

The instrument is also well-rounded when it comes to its potential applications. Though the instrument wouldn't necessarily appeal to the bluegrass traditionalist, it does have ample volume for rhythmic applications in that idiom, and a good presence and string-to-string balance on those G runs. It sounds equally nice for basic rock strumming, fingerstyle improvisations in DADGAD, jazz comping with walking bass lines, and chord-melody solos involving complicated harmonies.

Mérida's Master 75D is a welcome addition to the world of dreadnoughts, a nicely made guitar with a lovely voice and styling. The most traditional player might not gravitate toward the instrument, but it would make an excellent choice for the musician who works in a range of styles, or for the singer-songwriter who wants a nice guitar for composing purposes. At \$1,425 street, it's far from a bargain for an imported instrument—but it's not a bad deal, either, especially for a well-crafted handmade guitar built from all-solid tonewoods whose supply levels are not what they once were.

BODY

Dreadnought size
Solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped Sitka braces
Solid Indian rosewood back and sides
Rosewood bridge
Gloss polyurethane finish

NECK

Mahogany neck with ebony fretboard
25.4-inch scale length
1.69-inch bone nut
14:1 enclosed tuners
Satin finish

EXTRAS

D'Addario EXP 11 strings
Hard-shell case

PRICE

\$1,425 street

Made in China


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