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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

VERSATILE CLASSICAL

The Mérida Extrema Trajan T25-CES plays like a dream

by Adam Perlmutter

With its excellent playability, warm and balanced voice, and handsome organic design, Mérida Extrema's Trajan T25-CES is an instantly likeable guitar. While the instrument would be a smart choice for a burgeoning classical guitarist, its cutaway and built-in Fishman electronics package encourages exploration in other arenas, as well.

Over the last decade, Mérida Extrema guitars have been popular in Europe and Japan, and they've recently been offered on the US market, too. The instruments, which are made in China, are praised for their high level of craftsmanship at low price points. If our review model is any indication, the company's reputation is well-deserved, to say the least.

ALL SOLID

Like most classical guitars, the T25-CES's neck meets its body at the 12th fret, and it has the standard wide nut. But the instrument's Venetian (smoothly rounded) cutaway is a departure from tradition. (For those who think that the convenience of a cutaway comes at the expense of sound, the guitar is also available in a non-cutaway version.)

Our review model is made from a nice complement of tonewoods—all solid at that. Finely grained cedar with a reddish tint was used for the fan-braced soundboard. The back and sides are made from straight-grained mahogany that has received a rich, deep-brown stain, contrasting nicely with the lighter natural color of the neck, also made from mahogany.

The T25-CES is a smart-looking guitar, with the sort of detailing ordinarily encountered on more expensive instruments. Wooden flourishes of assorted species throughout—in the mosaic rosette, neck, and body binding, back strip, heel cap, end strip, and sculptural headstock overlay—lend elegance and visual coherence. Especially nice detailing is seen in the multicolored bridge, which Mérida Extrema labels as its TwoWoodtone, inspired by an ancient bridge in Mérida, Spain.

Our T25-CES boasts very fine craftsmanship. The black Tusq nut and saddle are perfectly notched, and the 19 frets are smoothly polished, without any jaggedness at their edges.

There aren't anv imperfections in the polyurehigh-gloss thane finish, and the guitar's innards are similarly clean. with no apparent shortcuts taken in the gluing of the bracing, and just a hint of untidiness here and there on the kerfing.

AT A GLANCE MÉRIDA EXTREMA TRAJAN T25-CES

BODY

Classical cutaway (non-cutaway version available); solid cedar top with Spanish fan bracing; solid mahogany back and sides; high-gloss finish

NECK

Mahogany neck with rosewood fretboard; 650mm scale length; 52mm Tusq XL nut; Der Jung tuning machines; high-gloss finish

EXTRAS

Savarez Cristal Corum 500CJ high-tension strings; Fishman Isys+ preamp; hardshell case

PRICE

\$1,285 list/\$899 street. Made in China. meridaguitars.com

HIGHLY PLAYABLE AND TONALLY BALANCED

T25-CES plays like a dream. Its traditional neck, 52 millimeters (2.04 inches) wide at the nut, has the perfect low action, making it feel effortless to play barre chords and also encouraging fast, precise playing. Detracting slightly from the guitar's high performance are the Der Jung tuning machines, which don't have the most responsive movement.

It doesn't necessarily have the deep resonance and impressive projection of a fine, concert classical guitar, but the T25-CES sounds very good, well balanced from its robust lows to its crystal highs. The guitar is very responsive to both pick- and fret-hand nuances, and it has a fairly wide dynamic range.

In terms of repertoire, the T25-CES responds just as well to some J.S. Bach lute suites as it does to an avant-garde piece like Luciano Berio's *Sequenza XI*. It also sounds quite nice for bossa nova—an arrangement of the Antônio Carlos Jobim standard "Vivo Sonhando (Dreamer)"—and for some free improvisations.

The T25-CES comes complete with Fishman's Isys+ preamp and under-saddle pickup. Mounted on the upper left bout, the preamp is housed in the typical black plastic enclosure that disrupts the woody look of the guitar. But it's very handy, having a built-in electronic tuner in addition to volume, bass, treble, and phase controls.

Plugged into a Fender Acoustasonic amplifier via a quarter-inch jack on the lower right bout (as opposed to an endpin jack, a less cosmetically obtrusive solution), the guitar sounds full and natural, without the need for any tonal tweaking. Obviously this feature wouldn't be suitable for traditional concert applications, but it transforms the instrument from a traditional classical guitar to a smart modern acousticelectric.

Adam Perlmutter is also a contributing editor to *Acoustic Guitar*.