

TWO TO TANGLE

TANGLEWOOD SUPPLIES **DANIEL HODGSON** WITH A HANDSOME PAIR OF EXOTIC STRUMMERS





"BOTH GUITARS CERTAINLY LOOK VERY IMPRESSIVE"

Few so-called 'budget' guitar manufacturers have enjoyed the kind of enduring success that the Tanglewood Guitar Company can claim. The brand's longevity suggests that these entry-level to mid-priced acoustics are delivering what the average punter wants. The problem is, we always want more – more up-market features for less cash, leaving more change in our pockets.

Delivering an expensive-looking and -sounding instrument for an affordable price is extremely difficult, but that's just what these 'Exotic Series' guitars from Tanglewood's Chinese-made Evolution range are attempting – uptown appointments and decidedly downtown prices. Let's find out how they perform.

BODIES & NECKS

The 'Exotic' element of both of these guitars comes in the form of the specific woods used in their



construction. The modestly-sized TSF CE XFM (this collection of letters decodes as: Tanglewood's 'Super Folk' body shape, with cutaway and electronics, exotic flame maple) makes use of laminated figured maple for its back and sides, in conjunction with a more conventional solid Sitka spruce top. The larger TSJ XB (Tanglewood 'Super Jumbo', exotic bubinga) has a body built entirely from laminated bubinga, an attractive dark brown hardwood sometimes referred to as 'African rosewood'.

Both guitars certainly look impressive, the flame-maple Super Folk in particular. Its solid spruce top is attractive and shows a reasonably tight and straight grain pattern, though it's overshadowed by the back and sides, which showcase some handsome figuring. This is all neatly bound using thin strips of mahogany and a five-ply black and white border around the top, which, combined with the even gloss finish, helps lend this guitar a very upmarket aesthetic. The bubinga-bodied Super Jumbo takes a different tack, with a tactile satin finish and maple edge binding, but it's no less neat and tidy and creates a similarly positive impression.

The necks on both models are fairly slim but not overly so, and both are finished in satin for a fast and modern feel. While the Super Folk uses maple

for the neck and the Super Jumbo opts for mahogany, both employ separate headstock and neck heel sections grafted onto the neck proper. The rosewood fingerboards each feature 20 medium-sized frets and more neat wood binding, though the frets on the Super Jumbo would benefit from a bit of extra polish – they feel a little gritty on this particular example.

The headstocks are appropriately veneered to match the bodies and equipped with enclosed Grover-style tuners, which feel smooth and reliable. Another welcome feature included on both models are the bone nuts and compensated bridges.

ELECTRONICS – TSF XFM

While only the Super Folk on test here is equipped with a built-in electric capabilities, there are various configurations of both models with and without the Fishman Ion-T preamp and undersaddle transducer seen here. This is a relatively new Fishman system, the most striking feature of which is its simplicity. The neat shoulder-mounted preamp is nice and compact, with a single volume knob and phase invert, contour (a preset mid-range scoop) and tuner on/off buttons. A low battery warning light and small tuner display complete the inventory. The output jack socket is built into the end pin, with an



• The Fishman Ion-T preamp takes the 'less is more' approach

GBINFO	
TANGLEWOOD EVOLUTION EXOTIC TSF CE XFM	
PRICE:	£399.95
BUILT IN:	China
SCALE LENGTH:	648mm (25.5 inches)
NUT WIDTH:	43mm (1.69 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT:	36mm (1.4 inches)
TOP:	Solid sitka spruce
BACK & SIDES:	Flame maple laminate
NECK:	Maple
FINGERBOARD:	Rosewood
FRETS:	20 medium
BRIDGE:	Rosewood
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE:	54mm (2.1 inches)
ELECTRONICS:	Fishman Ion-T preamp & undersaddle transducer
MACHINEHEADS:	Grover-style enclosed, chrome
WEIGHT:	2.3kg (5lb)
FINISHES:	Natural gloss (shown)
CASE:	No
LEFT-HANDERS:	Coming soon



• The TSF XFM features neat mahogany binding for an upmarket look



easy-access 9V battery compartment positioned nearby.

SOUNDS

If these two guitars look very different on the outside, the tones they produce are even more removed from one another. The laminate-bubinga Super Jumbo certainly has the more powerful voice of the two, though the bottom end isn't overly pronounced. The highs are clear but controlled, balancing well with the warm and woody mid-range frequencies that dominate this guitar's tone. Overall, the sound is pleasant, though lacking the low-end power and projection of a good dreadnought. However, considering the price, this is a very capable strummer, with sufficient clarity and sustain to suit flatpicked melodies too, though fingerpickers might look for a smaller-bodied model with better string-to-string separation and definition.

The Super Folk is a very different animal indeed and, in purely acoustic



"FOR THE PRICE, THE TSJ XB IS A CAPABLE STRUMMER"

terms, it is rather less successful.

Maple-bodied acoustics can often sound crisper and somewhat 'harder' than their mahogany and rosewood counterparts, and so it is here. While there's plenty of definition and brightness, there's a noticeable lack of bass to fill out the sound and a general feeling of 'tightness' in the Super Folk's relative lack of volume and sustain. Again, considering the low price, it's unrealistic to expect a world-beating acoustic tone, but the Super Jumbo is certainly superior in unplugged terms.

However, the Super Folk's trump card is its Fishman ION-T preamp, which delivers a workable plugged-in sound with the minimum of fuss. The guitar's brightness and definition are well represented, though there is a touched of the typical piezo 'quack' that is exhibited by all but the best undersaddle pickups. However, this simple, uncluttered system is one of the better performers in this wallet-friendly price range.

CONCLUSION

In terms of neatness and attention to detail, these exotically appointed Tanglewood acoustics reach an impressively high standard. These are two of the smartest guitars we have come across at such a low price point. The standard of setup and playability is also very good, an important consideration when beginners and less experienced players are a big part of the target audience – there is little to deter the aspiring acoustic picker here.

The bubinga-bodied Super Jumbo has the edge in terms of acoustic tone, offering a well-rounded performance that will suit strumming in particular. Meanwhile, the cutaway Super Folk's unplugged sound is rather more muted, though this is offset by its very capable on-board electronics. There's much to recommend these Tanglewood Evolution Series Exotic models, particularly if you're seeking something a little bit unusual on a tight budget. **GB**

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TANGLEWOOD EVOLUTION EXOTIC TSJ XB

PRICE: £249.95

BUILT IN: China

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 43.5mm (1.72 inches)

STRING SPACING AT NUT: 36mm (1.4 inches)

TOP: Bubinga laminate

BACK & SIDES: Bubinga laminate

NECK: Mahogany

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 20 medium

BRIDGE: Rosewood

STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 54mm (2.1 inches)

MACHINEHEADS: Grover-style enclosed, chrome

WEIGHT: 2.4kg (5.3lb)

FINISHES: Natural satin (shown)

CASE: No

LEFT-HANDERS: Coming soon

CONTACT: Tanglewood Guitar Company
WEB: www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

GBVERDICT

TANGLEWOOD EVOLUTION EXOTIC ACOUSTICS

GOLD STARS

- ★ Neat and tidy build and finish
- ★ Good playability
- ★ Competitive prices

BLACK MARKS

- Unplugged, the Super Folk lacks bass and volume

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone after an affordable yet eye-catching acoustic

GBRATING

