

TANGLEWOOD PREMIER SE SERIES

Exotic woods, market prices. Alun Lower lives the high life...

Partnering exotic (albeit laminate) woods with a high quality solid top on a guitar nudging the right side of £500 isn't exactly a new concept. Many of the big names such as Ibanez and Fender have been doing it for years to great effect, offering a splash of luxury to what would otherwise be a fairly ordinary mid-range instrument. Tanglewood's Premier SE range offers a glorious AA grade solid Englemann spruce top paired with a range of exotic laminates including zebrano, figured ash, Dao walnut and, in this instance, Australian lacewood. Each offers a distinct and decidedly classy vibe, staying clear of the slightly tacky flamed and quilted sunbursts that adorn so many of their rivals. But with the likes of Sigma and Faith offering solid construction at very accessible price points, is there still room for the showy, part-laminate solution in the mix?

BUILD QUALITY

The TPE SFCE LS (let's call it the SFCE from here on, shall we?) makes a good start before I even get a glimpse of the guitar itself by coming supplied in a really rather lovely hardcase. Finished in cream, with brown accents and a luxurious green padded interior, it certainly makes you feel as if you're about to encounter something

special, even if it does cost an extra £99 for the privilege. For that money I think I'd rather invest in a heavily reinforced gigbag, but to each their own and the TWCC case is certainly a fine option.

As for the guitar itself, the most immediately striking thing has got to be the pale hue of the spruce top, which shines brightly through the satin finish and almost looks artificial at a first glance. I remember thinking a similar thing when I laid eyes upon my first Faith guitar - and if those instruments are anything to go by then I think we can safely assume that the SFCE's own slab

of Englemann spruce is of comparable quality - a very good start. The lacewood makes for a pleasing distraction if a little plain compared to the other options available in the range. It's a very modern and minimalistic-looking wood with a tidy grain that wouldn't look out of place in a modern Ikea catalogue.

The crisp white binding keeps

things neat and leads us nicely to the mahogany neck, which has been finished to a good enough standard, feeling nicely smooth and even under the hand. The fingerboard and bridge are both constructed from rosewood, and the set of features rounded off nicely by the inclusion of a B-Band Crescent 1 preamp paired with an undersaddle pickup. Frets aren't 100% perfect but still finished to a decent standard, and the guitar as a whole sits nicely on the lap, with the "Super Folk" body shape feeling comfy, curvy and fairly substantial - the best of both worlds.

All in all, it's a solid package that feels very reliable, if not particularly luxurious. The exotic laminates are a nice touch but with comparable instruments offering solid construction it does feel like the visual element has come at something of a cost. However, where the Premier SE series stands out from its rivals is the fact that the entire range has been designed by Michael Sanden, offering the luthier's acclaimed bracing patterns at a much more affordable price point.

SOUND QUALITY

A guitar like this positively screams versatility and sure enough the SFCE lends itself very nicely to just about any playing style you can throw at it. The

part-laminate construction offers excellent projection, and while many guitars in this



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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Tanglewood
Model: Premier SE TPE SFCE LS
Retail Price: £499
Body Size: Super Folk
Made In: Far East
Top: Solid AA Englemann Spruce
Back and Sides: Lacewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: Open die-cast
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Strings Fitted: Elixir Nanoweb 12-53
Left Handers: No
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hardcase

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Great value gigger, with lots of lovely characteristics and the input from master luthier Michael Sanden
Cons: A little more of the same - it's good, but it's not exactly going to reinvent the wheel
Overall: A fantastic guitar for the gigger, songwriter and a good addition to an already solid roster

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★
Sound Quality	★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★

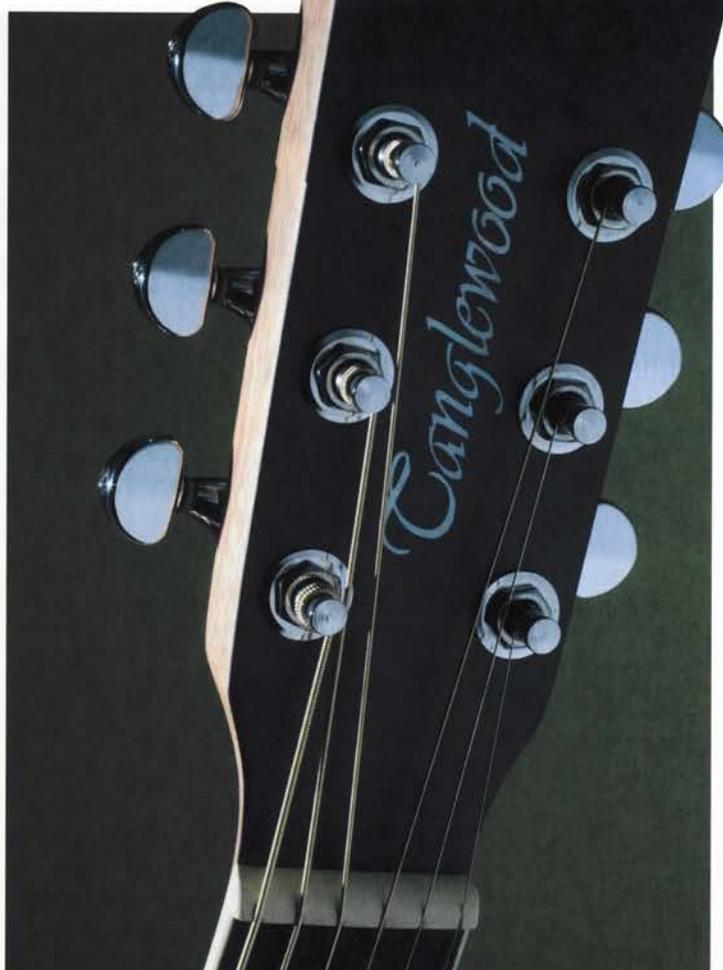
5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Tanglewood Guitars
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk



It's a great guitar package that does feel very reliable, if not a tad luxurious



The Premier SE range uses a bracing design by luthier Michael Sanden

price range can lose a bit of detail and definition the SFCE sounds particularly crisp and articulate – possibly due to the involvement of Sanden's bracing patterns.

Simple strumming offers the usual range of frequencies, feeling nicely punchy in the low and with plenty of top end treble to keep things from getting out of hand. The mids were a touch less defined than I have heard on other examples, but that's something that mahogany guitars excel at and perhaps it was this comparison that made me notice.

Regardless, cash-strapped singer-songwriters should be happy with the range of tones on offer here, and it should be one that balances sweetly with other instruments also.

Dropping the pick and switching to a fingerstyle approach offers much of the same qualities, with the high strings in particular proving a highlight with a sparkling and energetic tone that feels

determined to place itself just a little higher than any other nearby instruments. Low end definition suffers just a tad in this area, but it's by no means a bad tone and I think only the most particular of ears would pick out much of a difference.

Plugged in, the SFCE again offers a dependable performance, B-Band's new Crescent preamp offering a natural, open sound that manages string-to-string balance nicely and not falling too deeply into "quacky" piezo

tones. It may not set your world alight, but there is plenty to enjoy here for the aspirational gigger.

CONCLUSION

The SFCE may not exactly reinvent the wheel in any meaningful way, but as a contemporary update to the standard mid-range electro template it offers pretty much everything the mid-level guitarist could want. A multitude of different shapes and configurations

are available to suit different tastes, the exotic woods are pleasing to the eye and the list of features ticks all the required boxes. In my opinion, there's not a whole lot to elevate the guitar above some of the finer examples in this price range – particularly those that feature all-solid construction – but I still wouldn't hesitate in recommending Tanglewood to just about anyone. The Premier SE series simply adds to what was already a very impressive foundation by giving you just that little bit more value than before. From the looks, build and finishing to the quality of the electronics package, everything just keeps getting better and goes to show why Tanglewood has enjoyed such a great reputation in recent years. You genuinely can't go too far wrong here and really, for an instrument of this kind, that really is a massive compliment.

Alun Lower



Plugged in, the SFCE offers a dependable performance with the B-Band