

# Tanglewood Sundance Performance Pro Acoustics

Tanglewood has a great reputation for bringing high quality features to affordable acoustic guitars. Having dominated the mid market in the UK for some years it is now stretching up the scale, and around the world, with the help of the renowned Swedish luthier and designer Michael Sanden. The latest collaboration is the brand new Sundance Performance Pro series which even features a model with a 'torrefied' top. A what? **Jamie Humphries** finds out.

**T**he Tanglewood guitar company has been producing acoustic and electric guitars since the late '80s. A British based company, its guitars are manufactured in several Asian factories and it has built a reputation for offering features and quality way above the asking prices. Indeed, some say Tanglewood virtually created the affordable quality acoustic market in the UK and parts of Europe. As that market has become more crammed with manufacturers in recent years, Tanglewood has cast its gaze upward and is now offering some really very serious instruments aimed at professional and very serious semi-pros. The latest examples of these have been launched just a few weeks ago and are called the Performance Pro series. We have had two to test.

Tanglewood's new Sundance Performance Pro line features a range of high quality guitars designed by Swedish master luthier Michael Sanden. The guitars are constructed from premier woods and feature a variety of solid tonewoods - and one of them employs an ageing process called Torrefying. As Quiet Room readers will already have seen from our recent review of a pair of Takamines (*GI Issue 47 - Ed*), torrefied wood has been kiln dried. Torrefied top guitars are said to have a rich character to their sound, normally associated with instruments that have been played for more than 30 years. As a technique, it was first used by boutique brands but is now starting to be used by some of the larger makers, but never before in the Tanglewood's price range.

We received two guitars for review the week they were released; these included the Super Folk style X47 E and the Dreadnought X15 SDTE, which are two very different instruments, although both from the higher end of the range.

## Tanglewood Performance Pro X47 E

### Pros:

High quality woods

Great playability

Exquisite tone and sound

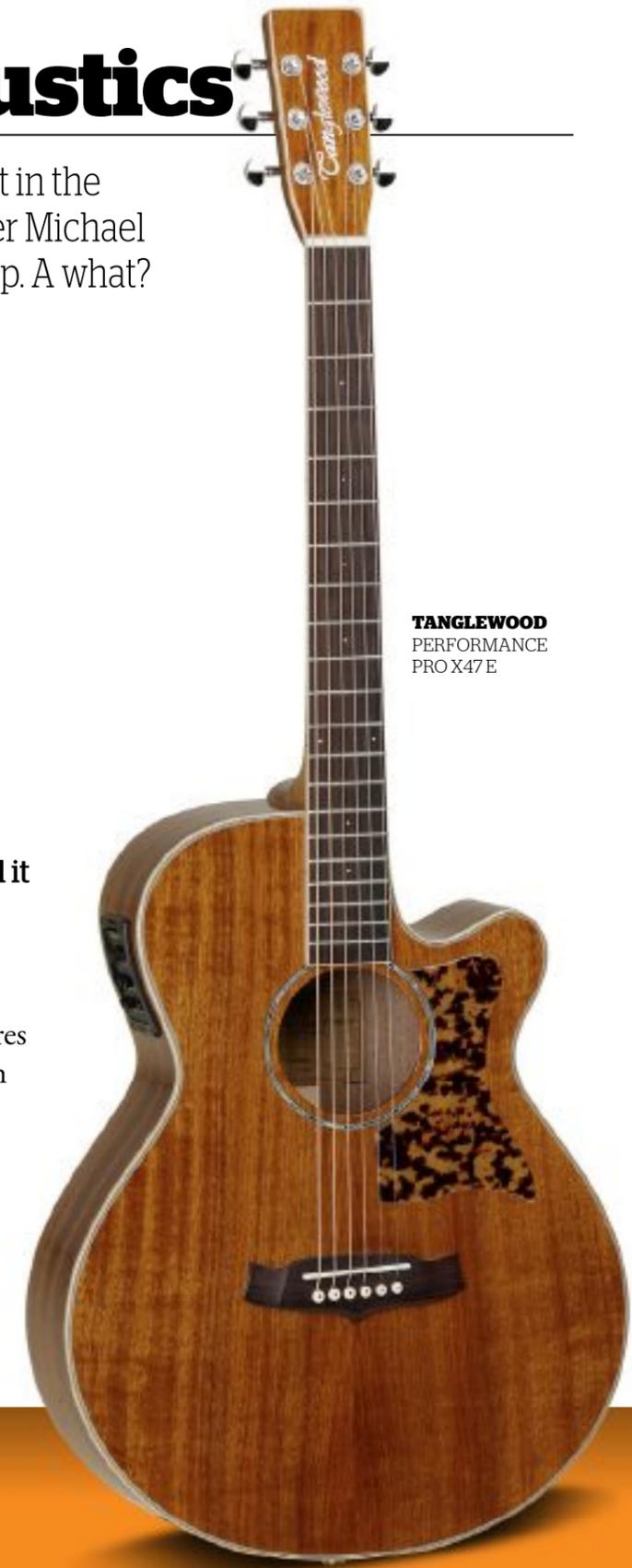
Very affordable.

### Cons:

Unknowable resale value if you wanted to sell it in years to come.



The X47 E is a Super Folk style guitar, which features a cutaway body, with onboard electronics. Although a more modern smaller style, the body is still quite deep, aiding a rich, lush tone, a quality which is sometimes lost on cutaway guitars. The body features an AAA solid mahogany top, and inside has a combination of X bracing and fan bracing, which according to its designer, Michael Sanden, aids tone and sustain. This



TANGLEWOOD  
PERFORMANCE  
PRO X47 E

## STAR RATING

SEE TEXT

[...>]

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guitar also features solid mahogany back and sides, which is great for projection and definition. The body features a maple binding.

The modern feeling C shape neck is constructed from mahogany with a sonokelin fingerboard - sonokelin is an Indonesian rosewood. The neck has a scale length of 650mm and includes a bone nut and ABS Pearl dot inlays. The headstock boasts six chrome Grover tuners, with the guitar finished in a high gloss natural polyurethane finish.

The X47E also features an on board pickup system, the Fishman Presys +. The Presys+ system features a master volume, three band EQ, a notch filter to help eliminate feedback, a brilliance control, similar to presence and a phase button, which affects the low end frequencies when engaged. The system also features an onboard tuner, which mutes the output signal for silent tuning; ideal for tuning between songs.

Performance wise our sample guitar was set up beautifully, and was very

comfortable to play. I'm not a specialist acoustic player; for the majority of my shows and tours I'm hired for electric guitar but occasionally I have the odd bit of acoustic work. With this in mind I'm very fussy about how an acoustic should feel. To be honest I like an acoustic to play as smoothly and easily as an electric guitar. I have been bought in on shows before where an acoustic is provided and the transition between electric and acoustic can be very taxing. This guitar however was beautiful to play, and would be the type of guitar in style and feel that I would tour with for those acoustic moments. The set-up was perfect, and the guitar felt as though it should cost double its suggested price.

The X47E felt very easy to play, and I was able to perform lush accompanying strumming chords, finger style arpeggios and also single note lead lines. This instrument will adapt to a variety of styles and applications. The cutaway also makes upper fret access very easy.

The sound of the X47E acoustically was surprisingly full and rich for a smaller



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bodied modern style acoustic. The guitar projected well, and had beautiful top end presence and lots of rich low end. Plugging the X47E in, and the guitar takes on another role, being a great acoustic for live electric performance. The pre-amp produces a very natural, and surprisingly transparent tone. Obviously you can adjust the EQ and introduce more of the sound of the pre-amp system in; but I prefer to keep everything neutral, and try to retain as much of the guitars woody character.

To sum things up this is a very nice acoustic guitar, and at a very attractive price. As I have said, I'm no acoustic expert, so I'm coming at this review from purely an angle of what feels and sound right to me, but that is the same position many GI readers are going to be in - primarily electric players who want a great acoustic to add to their repertoire. This guitar would work well with the acoustic singer songwriter, the electric player who plays some acoustic, or the more accomplished finger style player; you could even do a great Al Di Meola on this very player orientated guitar!

[...>]

TANGLEWOOD  
PERFORMANCE  
PRO X15 SDTE



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### Tanglewood Performance Pro X15 SDTE

#### Pros:

- A professional high-end acoustic instrument
- Top quality materials
- Torrefaction at a very affordable price point

#### Cons:

None at all



The other Tanglewood we were sent for review was the X15 SDTE, which features a larger dreadnought style body. This guitar also features all solid woods and is described as a vintage style sloped shoulder dreadnought. The key attraction to this fine looking guitar is that it features a AAA solid spruce top that has been torrefied. As we have seen, torrefaction is an accelerated ageing

process in which a piece of wood is dried in a kiln, the result being, in theory, that a new instrument will have a similar sound to an nicely aged one. Apparently it's a more complicated process than you might think. The wood is kiln dried before being cooked in a 'torrefaction kiln', removing all the moisture. The wood is then treated in a conditioning chamber, adding a small percentage of controlled moisture back into the wood. This procedure effectively ages it, and makes it more stable when exposed to varying atmospheric moisture levels through its life, as well as making the wood highly resonant.

Previously, if you wanted a guitar made from this kind of wood you'd have been in much higher price territory, so Tanglewood is to be congratulated for bringing this technique to more of a mass market.

Solid mahogany has been used for the back and sides, which makes for a very traditional combination - probably exactly what a dreadnought buyer is going to be looking for. The mahogany neck features a C profile, and once again is very comfortable in the hand. As with the previous guitar, sonokelin has

been used for the fingerboard and the bridge. The neck features a 650mm scale length, a bone nut and small dot inlays. The bound body looks fantastic in its beautiful dark vintage gloss burst.

Also in common with our previous Tanglewood, this model boasts the Fishman Presys+ preamp and pick up system, making this a very versatile instrument for performance.

Once again, our sample was exceptionally well set-up and a real pleasure to play. Did it feel like a 30 year old guitar? Well, it has an unplayed neck/fingerboard and frets but the acid test is how it sounded and I'm happy to say that the sound was beautifully rich. It had a broader tone than the smaller more modern bodied X47, which you would expect from the size difference and acoustically it is very loud with great projection and a very rich and resonant tone. Does it sound like a 30 year old guitar? It's impossible to say without a time machine and two samples but it definitely does sound different and, to my ears, better.

Plugged in, once again the Fishman system delivers admirably, giving an accurate amplified

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**TANGLEWOOD**  
PERFORMANCE  
PRO X15 SDTE



**TANGLEWOOD**  
PERFORMANCE  
PRO X47 E

“This is a **guitar that demands** to be auditioned...”

acoustic sound. But for me this guitar should be appreciated for its natural acoustic tone.

I was very impressed with this guitar. It’s a beautiful looking vintage style dreadnought, made from quality materials, featuring bespoke wood treatment. This guitar was set up beautifully, and even with my limited acoustic chops I was able to make a pretty convincing sound! Although the asking price might seem a bit high for an instrument that doesn’t come from one of the big brands, you have to factor

in the very high quality woods used, especially that torrefied top, which must add a lot to the cost price and certainly seems to add something special to the guitar’s tone. Most importantly, it does so at a fair bit less than a similarly made guitar from the big brands will cost you.

This is a guitar that demands to be auditioned and if you are in the market for a professional class dreadnought that’s exactly what I’d advise you to do. Make sure you check this one out! **END >**

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