



ORTEGA RCE244M

An electro-classical that boldly veers away from the traditional build ethos - David Mead is our avid explorer . . .

As you would have seen in last month's *Acoustic*, Ortega has a reputation for building top of the line classical instruments at affordable prices. But things don't stop there - far from it; there are some instruments in the range that stray away from the accepted concept of a nylon-string guitar - and that's exactly what we have here. You'll probably have already noticed the fingerboard for instance. Maple? On a classical guitar? And it has a truss rod? You can hear the die-hard traditionalists gasp for breath from here!

BUILD QUALITY

Let's face it; many acoustic or electric players are drawn to the mellow fruitfulness of the nylon-string sound but shy away from inviting a regular classical model into their collection for various reasons. First and foremost, of course, is the size of the neck; massive 48mm and beyond fingerboards are just a bridge too far when you only need the instrument for one or two tunes. So what to do? Enter Ortega and their slimmer, slightly cambered fingerboards and discrete electronics - but let's start the story from the beginning and look at the body woods in play here.

The top of the Ortega is Engelmann spruce which lurks beneath the semi-transparent grey-to-black finish. This, of course, is another slight deviation from the norm as you might expect to find cedar sitting atop a nylon-stringed guitar for its inherent warmth and subtle tonal qualities. But no, it's spruce for the RCE244M. The back and sides might raise a few

eyebrows too, as they are both made from flamed maple - in actual fact this came as a surprise to me until I inspected the guitar in good light because that dark finish practically obscures the fine flame to be found here.

The neck adheres more to the traditional classical build with its use of mahogany, but it's quite possibly the fingerboard that stands out as being different in every sense of the word. First of all, my research revealed the fingerboard wood to be Helles Ahorn, a name that was totally new to me; but my schoolboy German (and Google Translate)

came to the rescue and I found the wood to be light maple. So, to sum up: spruce top, laminated maple back and sides, mahogany neck and maple fingerboard. But the innovation doesn't end quite yet because the nut width is slightly reduced, too. The spec tells me that it's a smidge under 48mm but my trusty ruler says that it's more like 46mm. In any case it actually feels like the wider end of the steel-string acoustic market. Those few millimetres can make all the difference to comfort, familiarity and reach for a guitarist who is migrating towards a classical guitar and I think most would feel instantly at home here.

Another feature that will doubtless meet with the approval of many steel-string players is that the fingerboard has a slight camber to it instead of being pancake flat like most traditional classical guitars. When it comes down to it, it's really not a case of whether this kind of departure from the norm sounds like a good idea, it's how it feels in the hand. To me, it felt at once different, but familiar, if you see what I mean!

Everything else on the Ortega is well up to standard with some fine maple binding, classy-looking gold tuners and an extra strap peg on the heel. Obviously the manufacturers are aiming the instrument towards the works of Sting or Steve Howe rather than Bach or Weiss!

SOUND QUALITY

With all the variations on traditional building that have been brought into play here, you'd expect that the



sum of the parts just might offer up some unusual nylon-string tonalities. But, in fact, you'd be wrong; my initial exploratory noodlings on the Ortega revealed a lovely light and airy tone that satisfies my expectations in every quarter. In other words, it would take practically anything I threw at it melodically, whether it was a



WOODS USED

Well, this is a bit different, isn't it? We love the look of the Ortega. That maple fingerboard, the black top and the black and gold tuners. But what are those woods? Top is Engelmann spruce, the back and sides are of flamed maple, the neck is of mahogany and the fingerboard is light maple with 21 frets sat on it.





The Ortega classical is a step away from what a classical guitar is known as



The RCE244M has black and gold tuners, sitting perfectly with the maple

16th Century air or contemporary pop. It's low-ish action makes playing almost effortless and I felt instantaneously at home with the guitar.

The RCE244 is fitted with a Shadow Sonic Basic under saddle

Nanoflex pick-up with controls for volume and tone just inside the soundhole. The unit is powered by tiny coin batteries with the promise of 1000 hours of life.

So, having fired up my AER amplifier, I inputted the Ortega and I'm pleased to report that all the lovely airiness of tone I referred to earlier transfers itself to the electronic voice of the instrument.

Add a little reverb and you're all set to go with a nylon-string sound that would fit into

practically any playing situation.

CONCLUSION

I suppose the big question here is whether this instrument satisfies the demands of the player it's aimed at - and I think the answer is a hearty "yes". As I have said, many players might want to seek out the nylon-string sound on an occasional basis and don't want to faff around too much with that settling in period you get sometimes when swapping from one instrument to another.

The Ortega simply lays out the welcome mat from the word go and those subtle diversions away from traditional building all add up to a smooth ride.

David Mead

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Great sounding and well made instrument that will suit the occasional nylon-string player down to the ground.

Cons: The maple fingerboard tends to shout "I'm different" whereas perhaps rosewood would merely whisper it?

Overall: If this is the sort of thing you're looking for you can't really go wrong with the level of build quality and reasonable price point found here.

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.



ORTEGA RCE244M

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Ortega
Model: RCE244M
Retail Price: £575
Body Size: Cutaway classical
Made In: China
Top: Engelmann spruce
Back and Sides: Flamed maple
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Helle's Ahorn (light maple)
Frets: 21
Tuners: Three-a-side
Nut Width: 47.6mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: Shadow Sonic Basic
Left Handers: No
Gig Bag/Case Included: Gig bag and strap

CONTACT DETAILS

Web: www.ortegaguitars.com