





PRICE: £1,439

Tanglewood MasterDesign TSM 3

A luthier-designed jumbo with mammoth potential for great tone – *Acoustic's* rogue reporter David Mead scales Tanglewood's top of range.

“Tanglewood have produced a series of premium instruments where the accent is on sophisticated good looks”

Woods Used

The top is Sitka spruce. It has an unusual grain pattern with a distinct horizontal figure to it. Back and sides are mahogany with flamed maple bindings. The fingerboard is ebony.



The MasterDesign series represents the upper reaches of Tanglewood's acoustic guitar stable. Designed by luthier Michael Sandén, the range comprises six models with various body shapes and build characteristics. The emphasis across the board here is that of understated looks, premium body woods and a build that maximises tone and sustain. Add to this a very subtle B-Band pickup system and you have the makings of a potential giant killer.

Build Quality

Let's face it, if you were going to produce some top-of-the-line instruments to grace your already prestigious acoustic guitar line, you might be tempted to take a regular model and bling it to the max with outrageous abalone inlays and wildly figured woods. Thankfully, Tanglewood have gone in the opposite and arguably more tasteful direction and produced a series of premium instruments where the accent is on sophisticated good looks.

I contacted designer Michael

Sandén about the MasterDesign series and asked him for a little background detail on the range. 'When I designed the Tanglewood Master series I wanted to have three different guitar models with three different defined sounds,' he told me. 'The TSM3 being the biggest, I wanted it to have this nice mid-range sound with a little "woof" in the bass.' And the general design? 'When

Tanglewood first saw my guitars they fell for the look and to try to design something else would have been giving them something they did not want. But trying to get this design and sound into a mass-produced guitar proved to be more difficult than I thought. The process took over two years before we had our three models finished to show the public. I am very pleased with the guitars and



Tanglewood MasterDesign TSM 3

Visit www.acousticmagazine.com for all the latest guitar reviews

Technical Specification

Manufacturer: Tanglewood
Model: TSM 3
Retail Price: £1,439
Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: China
Top: Solid Spruce
Back and Sides: Solid Mahogany
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony with 0 Fret
Frets: 21 (+ 0 Fret)
Tuners: Gold Grover with Black Buttons
Nut Width: 44.5mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: B-Band A1
Strings Fitted: Elixir Nanoweb Lights - 12-53
Left Handers: Not at this time
Gig Bag/Case Included: Custom made Deluxe Tanglewood SKB Hardcase with TSA Locks

Contact Details

Tanglewood Guitar Company
 Tel: 01937 841122
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk
info@tanglewoodguitarcompany.com

the way they came out.'

The guitar's top is made from Sitka spruce and Tanglewood inform me that this particular crop comes from Tibet, a growth region which I don't believe I've come across before. Sitka spruce usually hails from North America or Alaska (Sitka is a town on the west coast of Alaska and this is where the wood gets its name from). I must say that the grain pattern is quite unusual in that there's a distinct horizontal figure to it as well as the more formal vertical structure. Back and sides are from quarter-sawn mahogany with flame maple bindings all around, and flipping the guitar over reveals both a second strap

What We Think

What did our test results reveal?

Pros: Great-looking luthier design at a mid-range price point.

Cons: That zero fret, however functional, will put a few off.

Overall: A good-sounding plug-in-and-go guitar with a whole raft of subtle designer flourishes.



Tasteful 12th fret inlay

pin on the guitar's heel and an attractive rosewood veneer on the back of the headstock, reflecting the one present on the front. It's little design flourishes like this that go a long way in distinguishing an instrument from the rank and file. It's nice. I like it.

The fingerboard is ebony with a green abalone "T" around the 12th fret, the only maker's mark visible. There's a zero fret snuggling up close to the nut and this is likely to be a divisive factor for many as zero frets are not to everyone's taste. But Michael insists that its presence here helps intonation and tone, things that will be revealed later in the playing test. The asymmetric bridge combines design and purpose too, as the larger end of it is intended to transmit bass resonance to the top.

Sound Quality

At the strike of the first chord it's possible to tell that the sustain of this instrument is very good indeed. It rings on for ages,



Gorgeous mahogany back and sides



Clean, distinctive headstock design

Michael insisting that you can always cut a note short but you can't make it longer. Fair play – it works. There is no trace of any unpleasant boominess in the bass region either; if the mission here was to add *Tanglewoof* to the lower register then I can certainly confirm that this is the case.

Everything tonally is well balanced, and drop-tuned to D there's a healthy snarl there, without things becoming at all muddy.

The action is a little higher than I'd like, but I'm looking at it with a fingerstylist's eye and not that of a bold strummer. The latter would probably welcome a more 'normal' action, especially when chordal accompaniment gets a little wild.

The B-Band A1 system carries on with the overall subtlety of the TSM3 in that its volume control is concealed just inside the soundhole and so no electronics are visible from the front. The amplified sound is broad and well spoken, with every frequency

well represented. The lack of a side-mounted preamp means that a player would have to rely on either an external preamp or sound system for any tonal tweaks necessary, but I didn't find anything I wasn't happy about with the amp's EQ totally flat.

Conclusion

This is a very nice instrument and I think Tanglewood have pitched it at exactly the right price. For just under fifteen hundred pounds, you are getting a stage-ready acoustic with great looks, expansive sound and a very capable pickup system. The SKB case (which is apparently guaranteed for 1,000,000 miles) will keep it safe from knocks and bruises too – so what more could you ask for?

I have to say that I personally find the jumbo body size a little too much on the cumbersome side for me, but with two other body shapes to choose between in the same range – the auditorium and grand auditorium – this wouldn't put me off in the case of these upper-echelon Tanglewoods.

David Mead

Acoustic Test Results

Our ratings explained

- 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.

Rating out of five

How well did this guitar fare?

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