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**Audition**

We test the best of the rest  
of the month's new gear

Photography Joseph Branston







## TANGLEWOOD SUNDANCE PERFORMANCE PRO SERIES X15SDTE & X70TE **BOTH £899**

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**Described as** its biggest launch in 15 years, Tanglewood's new Sundance Performance Pro Series starts with the acoustic-only dreadnought X15 (£699), followed by the 'superfolk' electro-cutaway X45AVE and X45E (both models at £799), and the all mahogany X47E at £899. The range is topped by a pair of very classic-looking electro models in vintage sunburst gloss, reviewed here, the orchestra/000 X15SDTE and the slope-shoulder dread X70TE. The entire range uses all-solid wood construction, while our two review models employ spruce tops that are torrefied. This is a method of 'ageing' new wood to simulate decades-old timber, usually reserved for high-end guitars, but – as we saw at this year's NAMM show – a feature that's creeping into the affordable market. In other words, £899 gets you a big slice of guitar.

Both acoustics are non-cutaway, 14-fret designs with the same 'long' 650mm (25.6-inch) scale, 43.3mm nut widths and 53mm bridge spacing. Those torrefied tops, which typically have a darker hue than untreated spruce, have a moody two-tone 'burst. The back and sides are left natural gloss; the neck backs are natural satin. Tanglewood tells us that the guitars use "parallel and fan tapered bracing patterns", although looking and feeling inside, things appear fairly standard X-brace and we suspect the darker spruce top bracing has also been torrefied compared with the cleaner, whiter back braces.

Necks appear to be one piece with an added heel piece and there's a classy machined diamond-shaped volute behind the nut that adds strength to the narrowest part of the neck, although adjustment of the truss rod is via the soundhole, not behind the bone nut. There are minimal micro-dot fingerboard inlays that tie in with the un-posh vibe, not least the simple white-band soundhole decoration. The body, fingerboard and head are bound with a bright white plastic – an older off-white would have suited the vintage vibe better – while fretting is pretty tidy, although a final polish would have avoided the new scratchy feel as you bend strings. Both fingerboard and bridge are spec'd as sonkelin (sic), usually 'sonokeling', a rosewood from Indonesia that is botanically identical to Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*).

Unlike the trend for vintage-style or open-back tuners, the ones here are fairly chunky Grovers, and equally chunky rosewood bridges feature a compensated bone saddle and clean white plastic bridge pins. With a couple of minor exceptions, it's a hugely tidy job and, while the finish doesn't appear to be the thinnest we've ever seen, you can certainly see some rippling of the spruce top through that nicely 'burst' gloss.

Powering comes from a side-mounted Tanglewood-*logo'd* Fishman Presys Plus preamp that features an accurate and fast tuner and three-band EQ with

additional brilliance control, plus both a notch filter and phase switch to attack feedback.

### Sounds

There's nothing particularly 'vintage' about the slim, well-shaped necks or slinky playability of this pair – both have a really mainstream feel that doesn't shout strummer or fingerpicker, just 'do anything and get on with it!' The sounds are similar, and while it's impossible to hear what the torrefied top alone is actually bringing to the table, both guitars have an engaging voice. The 000, for example, is surprisingly rich, nicely musical with trimmed but not deficient lows, a strong but not boxy midrange and clean, clear highs that don't sound overly box fresh. The dread, of course, is substantially bigger in size, especially in depth, and its sound reflects that, but again we have this rich, sonorous musical character.

Plugged in, the impression of well-sorted guitars continues with excellent output balance across the strings. Listening with EQs (onboard and outboard) all set flat, the dread' is a little thick sounding, the 000 lighter and tighter in the bass, but neither need any excessive tweaking. We use the onboard preamp's EQ sparingly to trim those dreadnought lows and a slight midrange reduction to open the sound a little. With some outboard compression, lower-mid EQ, a *soupcçon* of TC's BodyRez and a dash of reverb, we're good to go.

### Verdict

A thermally treated, torrefied piece of spruce will not turn a mid-priced guitar into a vintage Martin. But here it's one part of this Sundance recipe that, in combination with a well-sorted build and smart presentation, creates two extremely viable musical-sounding pieces that have a little more give and resonance, more maturity, than we'd expect – not only at this price point but also from very new instruments. Is that enough to stand out in the aggressive mid-priced market? Time will tell, but it's certainly enough to make both of these instruments more engaging than the often everyday fare of so many 'import' guitars. We strongly recommend you give 'em a strum. **[DB]**



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SERIES X15SDTE

**9/10**



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