

McElroy Standard Model and 000

In the last 15 years McElroy instruments have continued to unleash wow factor on many levels, but just how much does one and a half decades of luthiery influence these models?

Light-heartedly, Brent McElroy's guitar company is reputed to be run by his beloved cat, Picasso (avoid obvious pun about 'clawing' patterns in the highly figured guitar tops), and also for their unique variations on traditional design themes. Brent has been making guitars since 1995 and is a great advocate of premium-quality spruce tops and hand-tooled wooden soundhole rosettes, both of which feature in this pair.

Standard – Guitar Number 90

It is a bold step when a guitar maker uses the word 'standard' to identify what could be considered to be their normal level of quality,

craftsmanship, and of course, the all-important price tag. In fact, so desirable are these instruments that they were readily included in *Acoustic* magazine's feature article of 50 influential guitars, which is soon to be released.

Build Quality

When this McElroy Standard includes elements such as an ebony fingerboard, premium tuners, wood binding, ebony or Brazilian rosewood headstock overlays, Indian rosewood or Honduras mahogany neck, back and sides, you readily start to appreciate that this is a mountainously high standard.

But at this point let us not overlook the quality of the hard case itself. It is a GWW case by



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Ameritage and is home to six tough chrome catches which are unlikely to pop open by accident, a Cordura material covering, substantial internal padding and securing sections, and it looks very smart. In addition, a truss rod key is supplied, as is a warranty registration card for the case itself. The care doesn't end there, as you are also kitted out with a compact digital hygro-thermometer which, as the name suggests, allows you to measure variations in temperature, humidity, and the current extreme values of both. You can select between read-outs in values of centigrade or Fahrenheit. There is also a sweet little pick pouch with three plectra inside, and this sits inside a compartment next to Ameritage's humidity-control system – a moisture-absorbing block inside its own pot. All this is designed to aid you in maintaining relative humidity between 55% and

40%, with the ideal being 45%.

Onto the instrument: the top is solid Sitka spruce and the rosette is made from a highly detailed burl of buckeye. Unlike many high-end guitars toting bear claw figuring, this Standard model has a large and even amount of it, which adds to the balance of the look rather than literally appearing as if a wild animal has taken a figurative swipe at the grain, which may sometimes look more like a blemish. Here it is stately and refined and shows this naturally occurring figuring in the best way.

The lacquer has a beautiful honeyed vintage look, and this is complemented by a contemporary fingerboard binding design sans front fret markers. (They are beautifully inlaid on the side.) The styling is clean, uncluttered, and clinical but retains warmth of character. The bridge design, too, is its own thing but is not







avant-garde and is a substantial piece of ebony. In many ways the headstock could not be any more simple or attractive and is home to the wonderfully geared Gotoh 510 smooth machine heads. Just look at those beautiful tuning buttons. Not just a pretty sight, there is just enough low E and A clearance between posts and rake angle over the nut, so function is catered for. The ebony fingerboard is flawless, as is the fretting, and the sapwood heel cap sits like a serving of cream on a crème brûlée dessert, with a reflective enough glaze you could see your face in. Could the back and sides be any more appetising? No.

Sound Quality

The neck profile is a slim or shallow C and makes for great chord execution. It has a natural feel under the hands and feels ergonomic – rich with McElroy consideration and honing.

The traditional Gurian/Cumpiano bracing pattern is used and it delivers great results, perhaps as you would demand from its corresponding price tag. The rosewood back and sides (apart from sounding a little new) have a dynamic sensitivity which is clear and warm, and as you play at the bridge the treble response has a breadth to its shimmer which is not hard, but glassy, without topping out. Added to this, the variety of richness you can gain from playing fingerstyle opens an extra chapter of tonal interest from the body resonance. Overall, the tone is very smooth and yet assertive, and it seems like the characteristics of the mahogany neck have a large part to play in the evenness of the dynamic range of the back and sides – not so much



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a compression but more of a tempering to the extremes of bass and treble response. This guitar is responsive to nuances and playing subtleties, but also strikes out with a mellowness within its sustain which, if it were a singer, would be rich in head and body voicing.

OOO – Guitar Number 92

Build Quality

The quality of build is supreme, as with the Standard model, and this time we have a great concentration of bear clawing which almost appears as if it were

bookmatched, as it is so even, and again looks balanced and well poised. The claro walnut that the back and sides are made from are out of this world and a real show-stealer. The depth and detail in the grain are exquisite, not to mention the lustrous quilting running throughout it, which is eye-popping. The neck itself is also of top quality, made from one single piece of Honduran mahogany, which is refreshing to see, as many high-end guitars will still incorporate a stacked heel – arguably for strength but also using spare material. McElroy has confidence in the wood's integrity



MICHAEL WATTS WITH MCELROY GUITARS AT MONTREAL 2010



I had the great pleasure of demonstrating Brent McElroy's work at the 2010 Salon de Guitar in Montreal this July. This wonderful show is full of great talent, both builders and players and is a must for anybody who has a passion for modern luthier-built instruments.

I played two of Brent's guitars, one being the gorgeous latticed-braced OOO featured in this month's review and the other was the famous "Neoteric" model which combines both traditional and modern building techniques and had sparked off his new bracing approach. Both guitars responded beautifully and sounded fantastic over the microphones.

and strength in its own right, and so he should.

Other qualities of this Generation 2 series include Macassar ebony buttons, importantly a lattice-braced top (the prototype was designed in 2009), and extra-deep body dimension of 4.75" at the end block and 24.9" scale length. The overall length and body length are both 1" shorter than the Standard model, at 40" and 19", as opposed to 41" and 20" on the Standard. The bridge design also has its own unique take on strength and tonal integrity as there are no bridge pins. Instead we have a through-bridge stringing design similar to that of George Lowdens, with a large mass of the ebony centre section routed out to allow a steep rake angle.





“This guitar truly sings with sustain which keeps pulsing forwards like a gently returning tide.”

Sound Quality

Beautiful. This guitar truly sings with sustain which keeps pulsing forwards like a gently returning tide. It is easy to hear why the new bracing pattern has been adopted, as this instrument has more volume, projection and obviousness about its definition. For single-note playing it is a dream to arpeggiate through your favourite chords as its musical nature leaps out. You don't find yourself hunting around for any sweet spots – all are very pleasing and slightly more poignant than the Standard model. Such is the nature of the 000 it should have you cooing with an onomatopoeic 'oooh'.

Conclusion

A self-confessed intuitive builder, more so than scientific, Brent has more than 30 years of woodworking experience behind him, so you can trust his instincts. His endeavours to strike a happy blend between not just tonal and visual appeal but also longevity and structural soundness make for guitars with holistic appeal. Add to this his refined adjustments to traditional design formats and you have a resultant formula for eclectic instruments, if your wallet is elastic enough.

Russell Welton



MCELROY Standard

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Technical specification

Manufacturer: McElroy Guitars

Model: Standard Model – Original Series

Base Price: \$6500. With upgrades on this guitar: \$7950. (these are prices in the US, there will be import and shipping costs added).

Made In: Seattle, Washington, USA

Top: Bearclaw Sitka Spruce

Back and Sides: Honduran Rosewood

Neck: Honduran Mahogany

Fingerboard: Ebony

Bridge: Ebony

Frets: 20

Tuners: Gotoh 510 gold tuning machines w/ Cocobolo buttons

Nut Width: 44.45 mm

Scale Length: 632.46 mm

Onboard Electronics: B-Band A1 – 29L

Strings Fitted: John Pearse Acoustic set #600L. Phosphor Bronze Wound. Light gauge (.012 - .053)

Left Handers: left handed option offered on custom orders

Gig Bag/Case Included: Ameritage Gold Series with embroidered 'McElroy Guitars' logo

Contact details

McElroy Guitars

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What we think

Pros: Exquisite visuals, brand exclusivity, fantastic tones.

Cons: You may prefer fingerboard top markers.

Overall: Essentially desirable.

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

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



MCELROY 000

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Technical specification

Manufacturer: McElroy Guitars

Model: 000 model – Generation 2 series. Serial no. 92

Base price: \$7500. With upgrades on this guitar: \$8500. (these are prices in the US, there will be import and shipping costs added).

Made In: Seattle, Washington, USA

Top: Bearclaw Sitka Spruce

Back and Sides: Figured Claro Walnut back and sides

Neck: Honduran Mahogany

Fingerboard: Ebony

Frets: 20

Tuners: Gotoh 510 gold tuning machines w/ Macassar Ebony buttons

Nut Width: 44.45 mm

Scale Length: 632.46 mm

Onboard Electronics: N/A

Strings Fitted: John Pearse Acoustic set #600L. Phosphor Bronze Wound. Light gauge (.012 - .053)

Left Handers: left handed option offered on custom orders

Gig Bag/Case Included: Ameritage Gold Series with embroidered 'McElroy Guitars' logo

Contact details

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Tel: 206 728 9055

What we think

Pros: Compact, great playability and projection.

Cons: You need to dig deep to own one.

Overall: Fantastic fingerpicker, tone, definition and visuals.

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

BUILD QUALITY



SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY

