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Schertler SM Acoustic-Electric Guitar Review

by Pat Smith

Schertler's SM is a stage-ready, mid-priced acoustic-electric

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Schertler is a company that was first known for its acoustic guitar pickups, then for its amps. Now, it's making acoustic-electric guitars to showcase its pickups, both steel and nylon string models in various wood combos. Our sample steel string is the mahogany SM model.

Designed by Swiss luthier Claudio Pagelli, the SM has a modern look, with an oval sound hole and body shape; it's sort of modern take on the Maccaferri guitar (like Django's). Take a look at [Pagelli's website](#) to see his other work; it is quite unusual and I would love to try some of them. I gather that this guitar is made in Korea (South) and the tuners and all the guts are made in Switzerland. Schertler is also making their own 18:1 gear-ratio tuners which have a clean modern look, and work very well with no play and a nice smooth response. The tuners will be available as aftermarket replacements and I would recommend them heartily.

The wood part

The SM is a modern-looking guitar, very round. It has all solid wood construction with an Alpine spruce top, and mahogany neck, back and sides. It should also be mentioned that the design places the bridge pretty much dead center in the lower bout, much like a twelfth fret neck joint would. That tends to give you the max that a box has to give, which is perhaps one reason for the pleasing sound of this guitar, despite its small size. The neck joins the body at the thirteenth fret, which may also contribute to the fuller sound. The fingerboard is ebony (and seems to have a finish on it), as are the bridge and peghead overlay. The rosewood binding is a classy touch, as is the raised wood soundhole surround. My only gripe is the slotted peghead design. I personally don't care for slot heads on steel strings as it makes string changes more difficult, and this one has the string ramps cut so that the strings drag across the wood, which seems like it could ugly things up down the road. Other than that, fit and finish are very good. The neck shape is a nice round C which is quite comfortable, and the frets shine like mirrors. Setup is good right out of the box. Because the body is so small, it's very comfortable to hold, and the cutaway gives good upper fret access.

Electronics



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Download Example 1

Fingerstyle - Pickup, Amp, Mic



Download Example 2

Flatpickin' - Pickup, Amp, Mic

Mic: sE3 to Aphex 207D mic-pre Amp: L.R. Baggs

Core 1, mic: Audix i5 to Aphex 207D mic-pre

Direct: Pickup to Aphex 230 mic-pre, Interface:

RME Fireface, DAW: Samplitude V8



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Electronics

The SM is equipped with the Schertler Dual Source System made up of the Bluestick under-saddle pickup as well as the D-Dyn electrodynamic contact mic. The controls, which have some unusual symbols (which I had to look up in the manual), include mix (between the two pickups), Volume, Treble, Middle, Bass, and a battery check button and light. The electronics are powered by a 9 Volt battery which is accessed via a door in the side by the strap button. Battery life is 200 hours. I gotta say, I love the little battery door rather than a Velcro mounted baggie for the battery. It's so much more convenient than loosening the strings and dealing with retuning issues—especially on a gig.



Yeah, so how's it sound?

This is a guitar that you need to sit with for a while and get to know. It has a small body, which doesn't give you a giant acoustic sound, but of course you don't really want that in a guitar that is mainly intended to be played electrically. So some folks may be tempted to set the SM back on the shelf thinking they want a bigger sounding guitar. But consider what you want to use this guitar for; do you want a strictly acoustic guitar, or are you looking for a stage guitar that will deliver? Plugged into a Schertler Unico amp with tones set flat and the pickup balance to center, the SM had a very balanced musical sound. It's quite rich harmonically and the sound is warm, full, and unusual in a way I can't quite describe—but very pleasant. The pickup is sensitive to string squeak so you may want to consider a polished string. The SM is fairly feedback resistant and was not prone to howling bass notes. The first thing I look for when checking out an acoustic transducer pickup is a dead high-E string and/or a blazing hot G string. This guitar had neither, and the string response was very even, just as you would want it to be. The neck is satin-smooth and very comfortable, and combined with what can only be described as the overall snugliness of this guitar, it makes for a great long-term couch companion, plugged in or otherwise.



The Final Mojo

Considering that the pickup system alone would cost you around \$600 before installation and that this solid wood guitar comes with a nice light weight case, I think this is a pretty darn good deal. It plays well, and plugged in is very acoustic and true to the sound of the box. There is enough acoustic sound to give you the feel of an acoustic while not enough to cause feedback and howl. Unplugged...enh. But plugged in (as intended) it is quite good with a sound unlike any other acoustic-electric I've played. Definitely worth checking out.

Buy if...

you need a great sounding acoustic-electric, stage guitar.

Skip if...

you want a solely acoustic guitar.

Rating...



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