

# MARCHIONE CLASSICAL

Guitar making  
at the highest level  
BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



**W**hen I crack open a shipping carton and pull out a lightweight Bam hardshell case to reveal a freshly completed Marchione classical guitar, I'm struck right away by how refined and luxurious the instrument is. Its perfectly applied French polish feels exquisitely smooth and amplifies the color and texture of the woods in an exciting way. A few scalar runs and arpeggios reveal that the instrument's voice is equally dazzling. It's rich and warm, confident and projective—exactly how a serious concert guitar should sound.

Stephen Marchione, the expert luthier behind the instrument, has been building for three decades. In his Houston, Texas, workshop he makes not just classical guitars, but steel-strings, archtops, and electrics, and, having studied with violin maker Guy Rabut, the occasional violin.

Marchione's mastery of all of these instruments—with their different means of sound production—is impressive.

## FINELY CRAFTED

Marchione makes a classical guitar that's firmly rooted in the Spanish tradition—built in the *solera*, face down and with integral neck support—and it has the customary 650-millimeter scale length fretboard. The luthier used a time-honored tonewood combination—a Swiss spruce soundboard, with Madagascar rosewood back and sides, and a Spanish cedar neck—and clearly procured a top-shelf set in terms of sonic and visual beauty.

The woods are complemented by Marchione's restrained decorative flourishes. The elegant rosette, of his own design, is inspired by artwork decorating the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. (The same artwork informs the shape of the headstock.) A bloodwood motif on the rosette is artfully echoed in the purfling, a layer of the headstock veneer, and even in the coloring of the top three strings of the D'Addario composite set that Marchione prefers on his classical guitars.

Superlative is an accurate word to describe the build-quality of the guitar,

which Marchione assembled with hide glue throughout. It's evident that the luthier sweated every detail. He was exacting with the fretwork and the shaping and slotting of the nut and saddle; he was just as fastidious with the inlay work as he was with the bracing assembly and other interior aspects.

## A BRILLIANT AND BROAD VOICE

While cutting his teeth as a luthier in New York City in the late 1980s and early '90s, Marchione got to know hundreds of fine classical and flamenco guitars. Those he found most satisfying to play had streamlined necks, so he keeps this in mind when carving the profile on a new blank.

The review model has a sleek neck and plays like a dream. The neck's shape seems to reduce stress on the fretting-hand thumb, making it comfortable to work barre chords for extended stretches. A perfect low action also contributed to the playability, and the guitar actually felt performance enhancing: I could play more fluidly, and at greater velocity, than usual.

What jumped out to me about the guitar's sound is its remarkable consistency. There are no dull spots on the neck; the notes were uniformly clear and loud from string to string, and from the first fret to the 19th. The natural harmonics at frets 5, 7, 12, and even 4 and 9, sparkled brilliantly, and the intonation was perfectly true.

Given its sonic evenness, its resonance, and dynamic range, the guitar could cover a wide range of stylistic territory. It's just as satisfying to run through a J.S. Bach prelude as it is a portion of Luciano Berio's *Sequenza XI*. The former piece benefits from the Marchione's clarity, while the latter makes good use of its impressive headroom.

Idioms outside of the classical tradition also work nicely on the guitar. It's a great tool for gentle bossa-nova accompaniment and relaxed country-and-western soloing, in the manner of Willie Nelson. (Judging by the wear that Nelson has placed on his famous Martin nylon-string, it's horrifying to think about a Marchione being subjected to similar treatment.)

There are plenty of great instrument options, both new and vintage, for the serious concert guitarist. Commissioning a new Marchione is expensive, but if our review model is any indication, the luthier is building beautiful guitars from beautiful woods—at the highest level. **CG**



## MARCHIONE CLASSICAL (AS REVIEWED)

**BODY** Swiss spruce soundboard; Madagascar rosewood back and sides; French polish finish

**NECK** Spanish cedar neck; ebony fretboard; 650 mm scale length; 53 mm nut; Sloan tuners

**EXTRAS** D'Addario EJ45C Pro-Arté Composite, Normal Tension; Bam Hightech Classical hardshell case

**PRICE** \$15,000 (as tested)

Made in the USA. [marchione.com](http://marchione.com)