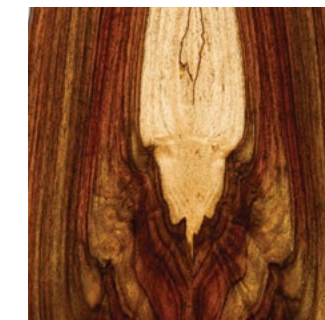




Top
Book-matched
Indonesian
rosewood back

Bottom
Buckeyed
burl rosette



AT A GLANCE

MCELROY STANDARD MODEL, GENERATION 2.1

BODY

Grand auditorium/small jumbo

Solid bear-claw Sitka spruce top
with lattice bracing

Solid Indonesian rosewood
back and sides

NECK

Honduran mahogany neck
with ebony fretboard

25.4-inch scale length

1.75-inch bone nut

EXTRAS

John Pearse 600L Phosphor
Bronze Wound Light Gauge
strings (.012–.053)

Ameritage Gold Series
hardshell case

Lifetime warranty

PRICE

\$8,100 as reviewed
(base price \$7,500)

Made in La Conner,
Washington
mcelroyguitars.com

A Well-Built Tone Machine

McElroy Standard delivers a rich and warm sound, with superb projection and sustain

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

In the late 1980s, Brent McElroy, a carpenter, became intrigued when he met a cohort who made his own guitars. In 1991, when McElroy opened a coffee shop offering live music on the weekends, he encountered another artist who made his own guitars. But it wasn't until McElroy moved to Seattle, in the mid-'90s, that he met a guitar maker at Seattle Center and was finally inspired to transfer his skills to lutherie. Now, 20 years and more than 100 guitars later, McElroy builds a range of steel-string instruments as well as nylon-strings.

McElroy's first guitar design was his Standard, with a 16-inch lower bout, a grand concert- or jumbo-sized instrument intended to work equally well for forceful strumming and delicate fingerpicking. A few hours with one of

his latest Standards—Generation 2.1, serial No. 110, whose build is documented on McElroy's website—confirms that McElroy has more than achieved this goal in creating a smart modern guitar that sounds as stunning as it looks.

THE FEEL & SOUND

Removing the Standard from its Ameritage hardshell case for the first time, I'm struck by its lightness—about 4.75 pounds—relative to its size and by the deep beauty of its woods. The Sitka spruce's top has a beautiful natural red tint and an intense bear-claw figuring throughout, complemented by a buckeye burl rosette with a wild marbled coloring. On the guitar's back, a pair of perfectly book-matched Indonesian rosewood plates, in a range of warm browns, meet in a dramatic lighter-

colored area whose effect is mirrored in the heel cape, made from buckeye burl. Meanwhile, the bridge is unmistakably Brazilian rosewood and the Gotoh 510 tuner's customary gold buttons have been swapped out for those made from cocobolo.

Though at a glance the Standard appears to have been conventionally built, it's got some interesting structural details. The neck is built with a bolt-on joint and the bracing is not the traditional X but in a lattice pattern inspired by classical guitars. (McElroy's Generation 1 instruments had X bracing, and he still uses this spec on request.) The unusually shaped bridge does away with the standard pins in favor of a design where the ball ends rest against the bottom end, like on an archtop guitar's trapeze tailpiece, making string changing easier while providing

tonal integrity. The Standard is beautifully built, to say the least. Inside the box the kerfing and bracing are perfectly clean, with no excess glue to be found, nor any debris from the building process.

The frets are perfectly crowned and polished, without any jaggedness at the edges. The body's nitrocellulose lacquer finish has been buffed to a faultless gloss.

BIG & BROAD SOUNDING

Though it has an ample body—4⁵/₈ inches deep at the end block—the Standard doesn't feel cumbersome to hold.

The one-piece Honduran mahogany neck has a decidedly modern C-shaped profile—neither club-like nor pencil-like—and it feels fast and effortless to play. The guitar is perfectly

intonated and all of the notes on all of the strings ring with perfect fidelity and no buzzing or dead spots.

The Standard has a rich and warm sound, with superb projection and sustain, and a wide dynamic range. The rosewood seems to add complexity to the sound, and overall, the guitar feels very lively—as any flattop in its class should.

From Carter-style accompaniment to frenzied rock strumming, the guitar responds well when played with a plectrum. With its generous amount of headroom, it takes a lot to get the instrument to overdrive. Flat-picked single-note textures have great breadth and definition, though there's just a hint of brittleness when I really dig in on the first string. When gently fingerpicked, the Standard amplifies the

slightest nuances. It feels piano-like in the way that the notes of arpeggiated passages cascade together. But the instrument also holds up well to a less gentle attack, having a rich snap when treated to a hearty blues approach. Whether strummed or fingerpicked, at a whisper or a holler, the guitar retains its brilliant sound when placed in a low tuning, like open C.

With the Standard Model, Generation 2.1, Brent McElroy has arrived at the perfect intersection of sonic and aesthetic beauty, craftsmanship, and playability. The instrument recommends itself for any player looking for one fine guitar that will cover a lot of territory.

Adam Perlmutter transcribes, arranges, and engraves music for numerous publications. See his website at adamperlmutter.com.