

Santos Martinez 2000 RB

However much of a Metalhead you are, a fine classical guitar is a must-have - ask Tony Iommi! But where do you start looking if you want a quality, affordable classical guitar but all your previous experience lies with whammy bars and pointy headstocks? **Giorgio Serci** suggests the Santos Martinez Raymond Burley could well be the answer.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this guitar when I was told it was being sent to us for review. Professional quality classical guitars tend to be very expensive instruments and this Santos Martinez, though it isn't cheap, is nowhere near the price of top professional classical instruments, yet it has been heaped with praise since its launch. In fact, this model, the Santos Martinez 2000 RB, recently won the UK's prestigious Music Industries Association award for 'best classical guitar', which suggested we had good things in store!

The RB stands for Raymond Burley, the renowned classical guitarist, who has been actively involved in the creation of this signature model. This SM2000RB is in fact based on a guitar hand-built for Raymond by the respected luthier Martin Fleeson in 1985. Santos Martinez are produced and distributed by John Hornby Skewes (JHS), and manufactured in China. This particular model was cloned from the Martin Fleeson

guitar that Raymond enjoyed playing for over twenty years before it was time for it to retire.

Straight from its elegant case (included in the price), which is both sturdy and light, a perfect combination for a guitar destined to travel, this full size (4/4) classical guitar has a beautiful natural look, with contrasting wood colours. The top-quality tone woods used include spruce top, Indonesian rosewood back, sides, bridge and headstock, ebony fingerboard, red cedar neck with Spanish heel joint.

Its stunning headstock, featuring an elegant carved pattern including the Santos Martinez initials, is an eye catcher and makes this model instantly recognisable. The red cedar neck meets the upper bout in a fluid and ergonomic manner, with a so-called Spanish heel joint, which is one of the best designs for maximum sustain.

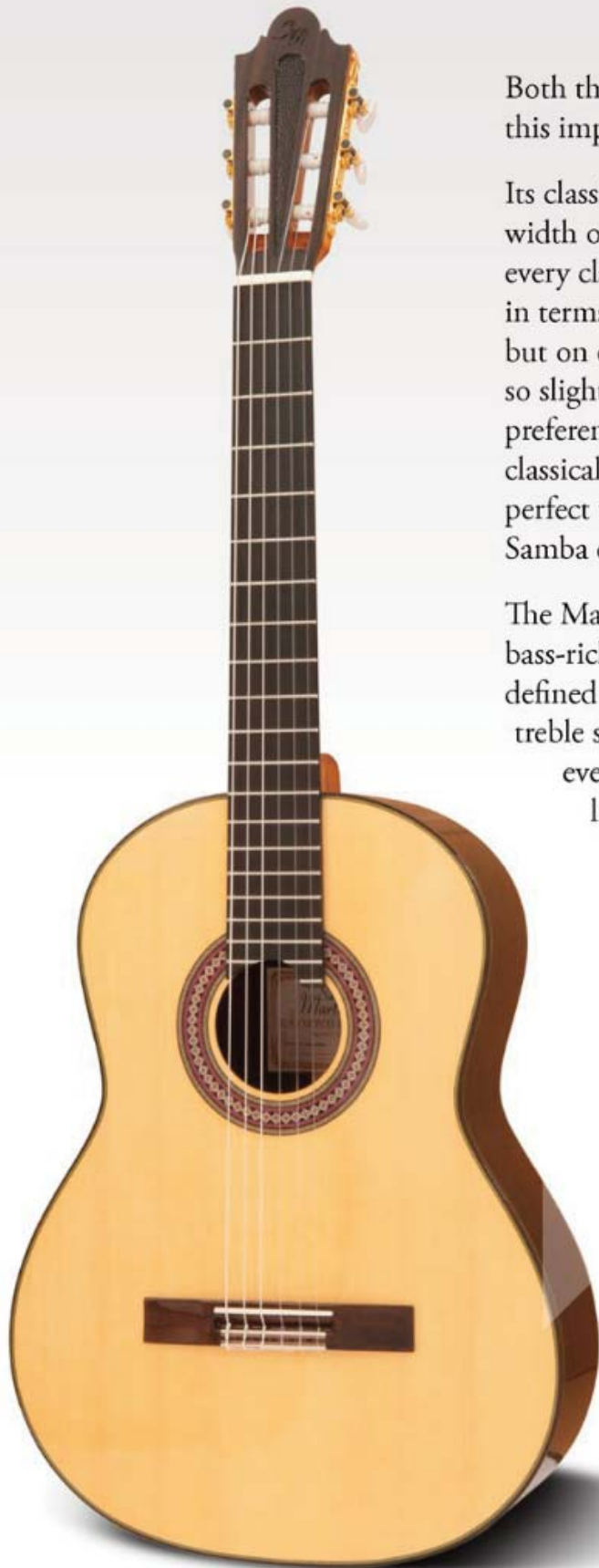


STAR RATING FOR BOTH ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC



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Both the 52mm bone nut and saddle also ensure this important sound characteristic.

Its classical neck is really comfortable, with a nut width of 52mm and a scale length of 648mm, so every classical guitarist will find this guitar great in terms of playability. The action is quite good, but on our sample could have been lowered ever so slightly, depending on personal and stylistic preferences. While particularly indicated for the classical repertoire, this instrument would be perfect to play Brazilian music such as Bossa Nova, Samba etc and fingerstyle in general.

The Martinez's tonal palette is quite wide, from a bass-rich but clear bass register, with a warm and defined mid-range and a sweet tone quality to the treble strings. In fact this instrument will satisfy even the most demanding players. Have a listen on our video!

It took me no time to tune it and to feel at ease with the action as it came, with a good set-up straight from the factory. Tuning was made easier also thanks to its accurate classical style (gold plated) machine heads. The finish on the frets, meanwhile is very good with no sharp edges and this model has 20 frets on the treble side, which means that the top note is C, instead of B as most classical guitars.

As most classical guitars, the SM2000RB doesn't come with a built-in preamp. This is not necessarily a disadvantage!

On the contrary, built-in pickups can compromise the acoustic tone



and sustain of the instrument. The best means to record a classical guitar such as this one is by using one or, even better, two condenser microphones for a pure, acoustic reproduction. Santos Martinez has recently put on the market a model with a built-in Fishman pick-up, but as I mentioned above, I would personally have two separate instruments, one with pick-up (for any live, louder performances) and one without, for a pure classical tone.

I think this would be a perfect choice guitar for a beginner to advanced player. Its price is surprisingly low, and the fact that this was manufactured in China is in my opinion the only reason why, as the quality of craftsmanship and tone woods and hardware are excellent. I strongly recommend this guitar as well as catching one of Raymond's masterful performances, where you can hear this instrument in action!

