

PRS Mira Guitar

The third in a triptych of American solid-body pioneers that includes Les Paul and Leo Fender, Paul Reed Smith coupled the best developments of those two innovators with unparalleled craftsmanship, resulting in what many regard as the preeminent “dream guitars” of the past quarter-century. From building custom instruments in Maryland to becoming a major contender in a hopelessly crowded market, Smith has retained the boutique quality of his guitars astonishingly well, and his company’s production process incorporates more hand-crafting than any “factory” assembly line might imply. But these top-quality instruments are usually attached to price tags many working musicians find forbidding.

PRS’ new Mira guitar aims to change this: It’s an authentic Smith creation, innovated and manufactured in the Maryland factory, and price-wise it retails for considerably less than a typical PRS McCarty or Custom. The Mira lists for \$2,200 with dot inlays and \$2,560 with abalone bird inlays (a PRS trademark you might just have to have); not exactly budget prices. But then again, if you need something for way under a grand, look into the Korean-made PRS SE line—particularly the semi-hollow SE Custom, which got good marks in this magazine in 2007. The Mira is through-and-through authentic Paul Reed Smith, and worth your going a bit over budget.

The Mira is a rare (for PRS) flat-body that evokes Gibson flat-bodies like the double-cutaway Les Paul Junior—a bit of a departure from the co.’s name-making carved-top beauties. The guitar features a mahogany body and 24-fret set mahogany neck with a thick heel, a rosewood fingerboard and PRS’ 25-inch scale length, the median between the 24 3/4-inch Gibson length and the 25 1/2-inch Fender. The tuning machines are 14:1 Phase II low-mass locking, which, coupled with the stoptail

bridge, delivered the intonation and tuning stability you might expect from a more daunting mechanism like a Floyd Rose.

This new model comes available in several finishes, suiting everyone from the blues and country (and jazz) traditionalist to the commercial alt-rock types that make up a big chunk of PRS’ endorsers. The model I reviewed, the beautiful glossy Powder Blue, lies somewhere in between, but other jazz-inclined players will want this ax in Vintage Mahogany or the Gibson SG-esque Vintage Cherry. (Wild Mint is pictured.) The pickguards on all the Miras match their truss-rod covers, which seems overly cute at first but

reflects some serious attention to detail.

The Mira comes stock with newly designed humbuckers from PRS dubbed—you guessed it—Miras, and they’re winners, two black exposed-coil ’buckers with a classic Gibson BurstBucker output and harmonic fullness. A single volume and tone control streamline tone-dialing but lose some of the nuance achieved through a standard Les Paul configuration, and the vintage-style three-way toggle—like that of an early Strat—takes up too much space and doesn’t allow for Gibson-style toggle trickery (an LP-style three-way might just make this thing perfect). Played through Fender tubes in the neck position, the low end boomed with impressive depth, particularly for such a lightweight all-mahogany piece with no carved top. For a jazz and blues player working this ax with a clean tone, the tone dial—angled off like a die and easy to twist—becomes the key to the universe: At 10 you’re Stevie Ray Vaughan; at 2 or 3 you’re in the Pat Metheny Trio, firing off chromatic bop licks with a cloudy timbre nearly devoid of treble. Roll the tone back to normal and hit the coil-tap, and you’re the proud owner of an old Fender Tele. Hybrid-picked licks are bright and snappy, fingerstyle funk is all bite. With overdrive, both amp- and stompbox-derived, the distortion is svelte and creamy—it sounds like you’re playing a Tube Screamer even if no green machine is available.

The Mira plays nearly as good as it sounds. The low out-of-the-box action and glossy-backed thin neck make it difficult to keep your hands at rest once you strap this thing on. With such a lean body, the guitar is most comfortable with a strap, even in seated position, and that strap is secured via PRS’ standard extra-wide (and thus extra-secure) buttons.

The Mira is both a cool throwback and a marketing advancement for PRS, but if you can have only one of Paul Smith’s instruments, something with a carved maple top and flame finish might be a better representation of PRS luxury. However, if it’s tone and functionality you seek, the Mira kills it on all fronts. **EVAN HAGA**

