

YAMAHA NTX700BL, NCX900R & NTX1200R £575, £785 & £1,149
ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAVIN ROBERTS



Yamaha NTX700BL, NCX900R & NTX1200R

£575, £785 & £1,149

Yamaha's new nylon string electros debuted at this year's Musikmesse. Let's assess the impact... *by Dave Burrluck*

What we want to know

1 Not more nylon-string acoustics, surely?

Last issue's nylon-string round-up was planned ages ago, then Yamaha launched the NXs, so we had to get you the exclusive review!

2 The market's a bit confusing though.

Indeed. The classical market is like a parallel universe with its own elite brands. But we're happy to look at the more mainstream marques that you'll be able to try in general music stores.

3 So what can you play on a nylon-string? Tears From Heaven?

If you must, yes, but there's a lot more to the nylon-string than that. Check Antonio Forcione's demo on this month's CD or Rodrigo y Gabriela – both use NX guitars by the way. Then there's a wealth of Latin, jazz and classical music just for starters. How much time have you got?

Yamaha should know a thing or two about nylon-string 'classical' instruments. They were first produced by the company in 1952 and were among the first guitars to be exported from Japan by Yamaha, some 24 years later. Yamaha still makes a large number of nylon-strings in its Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese Custom Shop factories, but this year has chosen to focus on what it believes is a growth area: the electric nylon-string guitar.

So, out go the existing APX5N and 9N electro nylons (the very traditional CGX cutaways remain) and in comes the NX range – Yamaha's major acoustic guitar launch for 2009.

The nine-strong range comprises two distinctly different designs, the 'contemporary' NTX and the 'classical' NCX, at four spec and price-points: 700, 900, 1200 and 2000. All are made in Yamaha's purpose-built Chinese factory except for the 2000 (see box on page 114). Let's start with the NTX.

NTX 700 and 1200

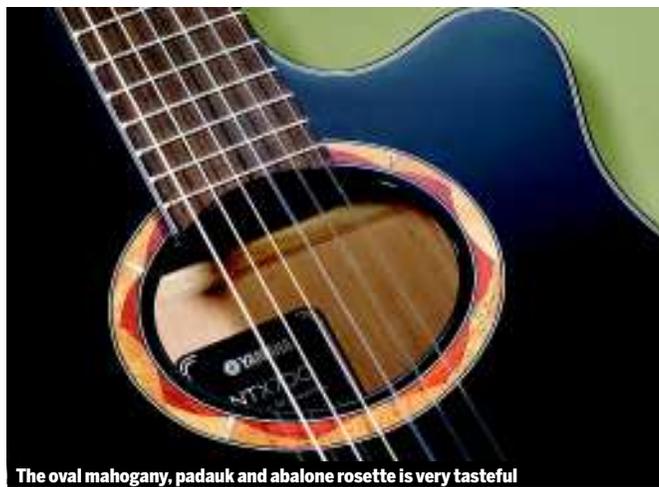
The NTX models use the 23-year-old APX body style, with its long upper shoulder and deep, rounded cutaway that

gives easy access to pretty much the whole of the fingerboard. In APX-style, the neck joins the body at the 14th fret, with a flat-fronted straight heel that, on the treble side, flows into the cutaway. Reflecting its 'contemporary' standing, we get more steel-string features, such as a cambered fingerboard and narrower neck. The broad body, with its pulled-in waist, is thinner in depth than the NCX

The rivals

The **Admira Virtuoso E** (£440) is more of a straight classical with a Shadow pickup: it's available as an EC cutaway at £537. Admira's **Eclipse Thin** (£394) is a cutaway and comes in black if you can't afford the NTX. **Alhambra's** cutaway **Crossover** is neat: a 48mm nut width with 57mm bridge spacing, cambered fingerboard and choice of Fishman preamps and woods. For example, the CS-2 CW A E2 (£852) comes with solid spruce/ovangkol and Fishman Prefix Plus. If it's a performance, plugged-in electro nylon you want then try a Godin Nylon Multiac. The **Godin Multiac Grand Concert Duet Ambience** (£1,533) has a thinline body with classical-style neck and Fishman mic imaging.

We've not heard a plugged-in electro nylon that, for the price, sounds better across such a broad stylistic range



The oval mahogany, padauk and abalone rosette is very tasteful



models and has a minimum rim depth of 80mm by the heel. We also get an oval soundhole with a very tasteful inlaid wood rosette design – the same across all the NX models – of mahogany and padauk with four abalone ‘stringers’.

The very un-classical and rather rock ‘n’ roll all-black livery doesn’t show off the woods – nato neck, back and sides and a solid spruce top – but peering into the soundhole we see tidy, all-spruce bracing and kerfed linings, and the inverted ‘L’-shaped neck block, which reinforces the top under the fingerboard. The six-fan bracing pattern is reasonably traditional (as used on Yamaha’s CGX nylon-string guitars) and is similar across all the Chinese-made NX models.

Stylistically identical, the NTX1200 has a completely different, all-solid wood specification: African mahogany neck, a striped dark brown/black ebony ‘board (edge-bound like all the NXs in black ABS plastic), Sitka spruce top, and rosewood back and sides with rosewood binding as opposed to the black plastic of the NTX700. Internally things appear slightly smoother too. The finish – ultra thin polyurethane – is superb on both, though the 1200’s body has a slightly smoother gloss and the neck back is less matte.

The uniform neck shape is a deep, but not overly heavy ‘C’ with sloping shoulders that, as ever, make it feel thinner than it actually is. All the NXs use an adjustable truss rod – a very non-classical feature but one you suspect has been included here as ‘insurance’ against the rougher use these guitars might

get. The heel and the headstock are spliced on – nothing unusual there – and the jointing is very clean on all models.

Along with the 48mm nut width, which gives a string spacing of 37mm, spacing at the saddle is an APX standard (but tight for fingerpicking) 52.5mm.

NCX900R

The NCX uses Yamaha’s existing cutaway classical shape (as found on the current CGX171), so the neck joins body at the 12th fret; the body has a slightly fuller waist, trimmer lower bout, round soundhole and fuller depth – 100mm at the base, 90mm by the heel.

The neck is broader in width with a flatter-backed, round-shouldered ‘classical’ feel and flat fingerboard. Neither style has face dots – the NTX adds side dots at the third, fifth, seventh, ninth, 12th (double), 15th and 17th frets; the NCX just at the 5th and 7th frets. The heel is far more classically styled – thinning and curving to a point capped with black plastic which provides a secure base for the strap button – all NXs are strap-ready.

With the wider neck – 58mm at the nut – comes a wider string spacing of 41mm at the nut and 58mm at the bridge – quite a difference to the NTX.

All NX guitars share the same rosewood ‘smiling’ bridge, with the strings tied on in the traditional fashion. There’s no protective binding around the edges of the string block, the actual back edge is rather sharp too and will probably show signs of wear in a short time. All but the NCX2000 use a urea plastic saddle (and nut) that’s compensated for the G string.

Overall set-up is consistent from guitar to guitar, with a string height at the 12th of approx 3mm on the low E and 2mm on the high E – lower than most standard classical.

System 61

The NX guitars all use the same ART (Acoustic Resonance Transducer) System 61 pickup/preamp with two contact pickups attached to the

underside of the soundboard, under the bridge’s bass and treble sides. The pickups “utilise a multilayer damper in order to absorb excessive vibrations and control feedback,” says Yamaha. The level of each pickup can be adjusted on the preamp before the mixed signal passes to three fixed-band slider EQs (bass, mid and treble with +/- 12db boost/cut) and finally to the

Onboard tuners come into their own with nylon-strings, which take longer to settle and can drift more than steel



The classical-style tuners are the ‘right’ choice for the NX’s slotted headstock



The System 61 offers all your electric needs – EQ, preamp and onboard tuner

The NTX700 moves from bright and articulate by the saddle, to darker and mellower over the soundhole

master volume. We also get an onboard tuner that's engaged, by a fast action push-switch. The red LED note display is very clear, as are the sharp/flat indicator arrows. Onboard tuners come into their own with nylon-strings, which take longer to settle and can drift more than steel.

Sounds

The NTXs are a good place to start your nylon-string odyssey. They have big necks compared to an electric but in classical terms are very manageable.

Acoustically the NTX700 moves from bright, balanced and articulate by the saddle, to darker and mellower over the soundhole. It has very reasonable dynamics and only compresses when really hit hard. The NTX1200 is a classier act, with additional clarity, edge, crispness and dynamics.

Neither guitar is overly loud, especially when compared to a full-bodied classical. The NCX has more low-end room, clear trebles and balanced mids.

Plugged into an AER Classic Professional combo and a more affordable Fishman Loudbox, the NTX700 (EQ flat and the pickup and master volumes set to three o'clock) produces a really excellent starting point. There's extremely good balance, clear, clean highs and, best of all, an almost piano-like low string response. Slight alteration of the pickup volumes yields great reward – increase the treble a little and back off the bass and we have a more percussive flamenco-style tone; reverse that ratio and it's smooth in the highs, more applicable for softer classical or jazz styles. Interesting too is the way the pickups handle percussive techniques – the

guitar is lively, but not excessively so slaps and taps sound very accurate, not boomy or explosive.

You barely need to touch the EQ (and be warned the cut/boost range is dramatic, less is more) – a slight dip in the mids is really all that's needed here.

The NTX1200 ups the quality: the voice is a little clearer and more detailed. It has all of the sonic flexibility of the NTX700 but just a notch or two up in its quality. With the NCX900 we hear a different voice again. It's 'flatter' in overall balance with more lows and less of the mid-range emphasis of either NTXs. Again we achieve excellent results with the preamp's pickup volumes and just use the mid-range slider to dial out a little

honkiness – quality-wise it sits perfectly between the NTX700 and NTX1200.

The Verdict

What elevates the NXs from the rest of the pack is this purpose-designed pickup/preamp system, which from the NTX700 up to the 'dream-on' NCX2000 sounds fantastic, translating the dynamics, nuances and quality of each different-sounding model in a very natural fashion.

The more steel-like NTXs will probably be the best sellers. The NTX700 is a great place to start and might well prove to be a little too good to justify going up to the only slightly higher spec NTX900FM (although that does have flamed maple back and sides). However, the

The Expensive Cousin

The NX range isn't just for the budget player

At just over £3,000 a piece, the NCX2000R (solid rosewood back/sides) and the NCX2000FM (solid flamed maple back/sides) are the deluxe, made in Japan NXs. They're considerably upgraded from the NCX900 and 1200.

The top wood is solid spruce from Hokkaido, northern Japan, married with either back wood option and contrasting wooden edge binding. The 'boards are jet-black ebony (with bone nut and saddle) and the tuners are Rogers-style by Gotoh with engraved, clear-coated brass plates and black, marble-like buttons which typify the subtle class of the instruments.

The 2000s use a different bracing too, more classical in origin, and the top wood is also subject to Yamaha's ARE (Acoustic Resonance Enhancement) process that aims to 'age' the materials to create an older, more 'played-in' sounding guitar.

Using the same pickup system as our review models you clearly hear, well, just a richer, more detailed and responsive instrument. But at two grand more than the 1200 series, you're going to have to be a well-heeled obsessive tone-hound or a Yamaha artist (check out Antonio Forcione's video demo on this month's DVD) to justify owning one.



bigger leap to the NTX1200 is more than worth it – perhaps the gem in the whole range, it's an evocative sounding nylon-string with a great feel, sound and slick, easy playability.

The NCXs are more traditional in all regards and the NCX900 has to be seen as a pretty serious instrument – one that more than holds its own at its price-point. We'd strongly suggest you also try the NCX1200 – if it's as good as the NTX1200 it could be money well spent.

If Yamaha does nothing but raise the profile of a previously 'niche' instrument, the NX project will have been worth it. But we'd say that the Japanese giant might have redefined the nylon-string electric genre here. We're not saying these are the 'best' out there but, to-date, we've not heard a plugged-in electro nylon that, price-for-price, sounds better across such a broad stylistic range. Go try one. **G**

The Bottom Line

Yamaha NTX700

We like: Steel-meets-nylon vibe, sound, price

We dislike: String spacing too narrow for some, the tuner should mute the output, no feedback reduction on preamp

Guitarist says: The ideal start to your electro nylon life

Yamaha NCX900

We like: More 'serious' nylon vibe, wider string spacing

We dislike: Same tuner and preamp issues as the 700

Guitarist says: Well-priced, great sounding guitar for the player who prefers a more classical neck and sound

Yamaha NTX1200

We like: As the NTX700 but more magnified!

We dislike: As the NTX700

Guitarist says: The NTX1200 nearly made Guitarist go to press late: this writer couldn't tear himself away from playing it to finish this review. Can I get back to it now?



Yamaha NTX700BL

PRICE: £575
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Medium-bodied cutaway, nylon-string electro-acoustic with 14-fret neck joint
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK/SIDES: Laminated nato
MAX RIM DEPTH: 90mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: Nato
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6-inch)
TUNERS: Classical-style three-a-side with black rollers, nickel-plated with brown marble-like buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Urea/48mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood black-bound, side dots only, 356mm (14-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium/small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Yamaha System 61 comprising ART two-way pickup (treble and bass-side contact pickups), preamp with master volume, individual bass/treble volumes, three-band EQ and tuner, battery check LED, quick-release battery holder, black chrome end-jack/strap button
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.3/5
OPTIONS: The NTX700 is the same guitar with natural finish
RANGE OPTIONS: The NTX900FM (£785) is the same style but with laminated flame maple b/sides and rosewood body edge binding
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss black body/satin black neck (as reviewed), Gloss natural body, satin neck (NTX700)
Yamaha
01908 366700
www.yamaha.co.uk



Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha NCX900R

PRICE: £785
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Classical cutaway nylon-string electro-acoustic with 12-fret neck joint
TOP: Solid sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 100mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 370mm
NECK: Nato
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6-inch)
TUNERS: Classical style three-a-side with black rollers, gold-plated with brown marble-like buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Urea/52mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood black-bound, side dots (fifth & seventh frets only), no radius
FRETS: 22, medium/small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/58.5mm
ELECTRICS: Yamaha System 61 comprising ART two-way pickup (treble and bass-side contact pickups), preamp with master volume, individual bass/treble volumes, three-band EQ and tuner, battery check LED, quick-release battery holder, black chrome end-jack/strap button
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.3/5
OPTIONS: The NCX900FM (£785) offers a laminated flame maple back and sides with a solid Engelmann spruce top
RANGE OPTIONS: The NCX1200R (£1,149) has same material specs as the NTX1200R but in the 12-fret classical cutaway NCX-style. The NCX2000R and FM top the range at £3,135 (see box on p114)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss natural body and a satin neck

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Yamaha NTX1200

PRICE: £1,149 (inc case)
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Medium-bodied cutaway, nylon-string electro-acoustic with 14-fret neck joint
TOP: Solid sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 90mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 380mm
NECK: African mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6-inch)
TUNERS: Classical style three-a-side with black rollers, gold-plated with brown marble-like buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Urea/48mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony black-bound, with side dots only and 356mm (14-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium/small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/52.5mm
ELECTRICS: Yamaha System 61 comprising ART two-way pickup (treble and bass-side contact pickups), preamp with master volume, individual bass/treble volumes, three-band EQ and tuner, battery check LED, quick-release battery holder, black chrome end-jack/strap button
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.3/5
OPTIONS: No
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gloss natural body and a satin neck



Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Playability ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★