
Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/10/23 08:58

Hello, fellow enthusiasts of the alto guitar! I'm new here, and wondering if any of you have an opinion about bronze wound basses. I am using them primarily to give myself a visual reference point, by using standard silver basses on strings 4-6, and bronze (Aranjuez classic gold) on 7-11. That way it's easy to see where the diapasons begin.

So far the sound is ok. I could not find the individual basses in higher tension for the bronze, and they are a bit boomy rather than punchy. I think I will also try the reverse with strings 4-6 as bronze, since I'd be able to use whatever I like on 7-11.

I am anxious to hear anyone's opinion on this. On a side note, I have treasured all of the great advice I've already read on this forum, and am very pleased to finally be a part of it. I've played 6 string for 23 years, alto for 3 months. These last three months have been quite a challenge, but they've rekindled my passion for the instrument.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/10/23 15:57

Hello, Sean,

Delighted to welcome you to the alto forum.

The alto guitar is a very capable instrument, usually played as a transposing instrument, i.e., one finds the frets as though playing a standard tenor in E. The pitch of the alto strings, a minor third higher, returns the music to the desired key, usually a flat key. This, of course, works very well for renaissance lute music, which, traditionally in the guitar world, is transcribed in positional fret format, rather than absolute pitch.

Baroque lute music can present problems because of the marked difference in course intervals for a baroque lute, as against typical guitar string intervals. Occasionally, some chords, ornaments, and slurs become difficult or impossible on guitar. However, careful selection of pieces will give music that can be fairly accurately reproduced on alto. The reason for the 'fairly;' is that guitarists in transcribing baroque lute music can miss the fact that successive notes on baroque lute may occur across courses, rather than along a string, as they may appear to a guitarist. Thus, a baroque lutenist may create a campanella effect that can be missing in a guitar transcription. An advantage of an alto is that, on average, it moves baroque lute music three frets nearer the nut compared to a 10s in E, say.

With regard to strings, Glen Campbell, a member of this forum, has done a fair amount of experimentation with strings, and may be able to advise strings for a crisper sound. My advice would be to try Hannabach high tension basses. Additionally, those who have tried Aquila nylgut strings speak highly of their sound. They have gut brightness without gut environmental sensitivity.

James.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/10/23 19:27

Thanks, James,

I appreciate the welcome. I've tried Aquila strings on my 6 string, and like them quite a bit. I will definitely give them a whirl on the alto soon. Perhaps the Hannabach basses as well.

Right now I'm working on the Weiss Gm Chaconne, which is one of the primary reasons I decided to start playing alto. I'm learning the Sollscher transcription, which I like very much. I hope to eventually bring in some of the passages that I hear in the original, but time will tell if that is possible in this tuning.

I have the "Altgitarre" book from Per-Olof Johnson as well. I got it from Stephen Bright's website, along with Carulli's decacorde method (which I have not yet used).

I also play my Alto in my trio, The Orion Guitar Trio, along with Matt Grasso (a marvelous seven string player) and Greg Williams (an equally marvelous six string player). We play transcriptions of classical works, movie themes, and even some jazz standards. So, while I love the Renaissance and Baroque literature, and plan to learn more of it, I am by no means a purist. :)

Sean

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Sten - 2017/10/24 05:54

Hi,

Yes, Hannabach high tension basses are good.

Sten

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/10/24 08:19

Thanks for the second opinion, Sten. I will certainly give them a try soon. They are rather expensive on this side of the Atlantic, but I'm willing to pay to get the right sound.

Sean

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/10/24 12:43

Hi, Sean,

My impression of the members of the alto forum is that they have a strong interest in baroque and baroque lute repertoire, but also other musical genres. If you look down the list of posted sheet music, you will find "Smoke gets in your Eyes", by Jerome Kern.

I am quite fond of some of the light music of the inter-war years, particularly pieces by Kern, Rogers, Gershwin and Porter. The arrangements I have are taken from original piano scores, so, not easy. though that Kern number is straightforward. A point I found interesting in this period of music, with its strong vocal element, is that keys frequently chosen by the composers were much the same as those used by renaissance lute composers, i.e., flat keys, and therefore suited to the alto, rather than a tenor in E.

The Orion Trio sounds very interesting. Any recordings?

James.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/10/24 18:30

Hi James,

I've noticed the interest among other members of this forum in transcriptions of works from many genres as well. It's part of why I feel at home here, being a person of eclectic and varied tastes myself.

I've started to appreciate and learn more about American songbook standards myself during the past few years. I agree that the alto is perfect for transcriptions of these, since our home keys are Eb, Bb, F, and Ab (concert pitch). Singers love these keys! Not to mention horn players such as you might find in a big band setting. The potential for transcriptions here is really quite staggering. When I've learned my current batch of tunes, I will give your Jerome Kern transcription a try. A friend of mine who is a jazz singer recently gave me a copy of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" in lead sheet format. When I'm ready to do a transcription of my own in this genre, I think that's where I'll begin.

As for the trio, we just did a concert at a local college and recorded the whole thing. I will keep you posted if we decide to publish any of it. The alto is on the first half of the concert, for Mompou, Faure, Debussy, and a couple of movie themes. At the very least I'm sure some of it will end up on YouTube. I'll post a link when it is.

Thanks for all your feedback, encouragement, and interest. Not to mention all those nice transcriptions in the sheet

music section. That's an impressive body of work.

Sean

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/10/25 17:18

Hello, Sean,

With regard to coloured strings, one really only needs a coloured 7th. So, one packet of appropriate bronzes at a time is the requirement. Once you have been playing for some time, even this minimal help is not necessary.

In my experience, it takes about 2 to 3 weeks to overcome the undermining of visual cues in moving to a multi-guitar, and somewhere around 3 to 6 months to develop thumb reliability for the bass strings. The less one plays a 6s over this period, the quicker and more secure one becomes.

The lutenists have some useful techniques regarding thumb technique for multi-course instruments. Usually, let the thumb come to rest on the next highest string, thus one knows where the thumb is. Although as a 6s player one uses the thumb for strings 4 to 6, where the thumb is having to find a number of sub-basses, it is often useful to use, where appropriate, one's 1st finger for strings 4 to 6. This saves having the thumb make large jumps.

If you have not already found him on YouTube, Mark Bueno plays some baroque lute music on a 13s guitar tuned like a 13c baroque lute. There are some useful close-ups of his right hand. He plays beautifully on a very fine instrument by Lucio Nunez. I think LN is a maker in Texas.

I imagine we all look forward to anything you can put on YouTube.

I probably should get my hand-written versions of 20's/30's standards typed up.

James.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/10/25 19:31

James,

Thanks you for your insight. Using just one colored string is a nice idea, one I will probably try.

I have been using thumb rest strokes whenever possible, and it's been a big help. I will try to use more i finger on strings 4-6, I can already think of a piece where this will be of help.

Mark Bueno's Weiss videos on YouTube are really good. He is definitely one of the people that inspired my transition to a multi string guitar.

I'd love to see some of those 20s and 30s transcriptions. As for me, gig season is settling down, and I hope to focus on developing my alto rep., and doing some transcriptions of my own.:cheer:

Best,
Sean

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/10/26 12:43

Sean,

I will make a start on tidying up some of my 20's/30's manuscript pieces. They will get fitted in between more classical items lined up for my son, Justin, to typeset.

A problem that can arise with this genre, and works by Kern are frequent examples, is change of key in the middle of a piece. The opening key may fit the alto well, but the changed may or may not fit so well.

All the best with the gigs!

James.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/10/26 18:26

Thank you, James!

Sean

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Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Glen - 2017/11/01 05:42

A little late to reply to this ...

I had my alto guitar's 8th string extension removed and a new nut made that goes across 8 strings instead of the traditional 7. Now that the 8th string is shorter it requires a thicker string and after experimenting I found that the Aranjuez 7th string from their 10-string set = .053 and is bronze-wound. Not only is it the perfect diameter for this purpose but the color is different from all the surrounding silver-wound strings and makes it easy to distinguish which bass is which with a quick glance down at the strings.

On my 10-string guitar I use a tuning James introduced me to that is up a whole step to F#. To achieve the same effect that I described above for my 8th string I needed to find a 6th string from a set that is a bronze color. I ended up ordering Hannabach Gold. They are expensive strings but are the perfect color and have a wonderful tone. You can order the strings individually, so no need to buy an entire set.

Here is a link to Hannabach Gold strings at Strings By Mail

<https://tinyurl.com/y8ft5ttk>

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Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/11/01 13:55

Thanks, Glen, for the information on suitable strings. Yes, the experiments with strings may be expensive, but the result is worthwhile.

Thank you also for raising the modification of the nut to have 8 strings of the same scale length. I hesitated to mention it to Sean so quickly, and members may be a little irritated by my mentioning this important improvement, yet again. I have to say that having the nut so modified completely changed how I approached new pieces. For example, in looking through a piece in tablature, prior to the modification, I would tend to avoid pieces requiring sharpening the 8th. In many cases, it is possible to fret the 8th string at the 1st fret in pieces requiring a sharp 8th, so, no retuning!

Also, although I have one 10s in E, tuning a tone up in F sharp gives an attractive brightness and reduces the over-ring of the four basses in baroque/romantic tuning. Hannabach supply good strings for this tuning for strings 2 to 10, but an excellent choice for the first string is a low tension D'Addario top E, which tunes up to F sharp and remains stable and long-lived. Of course, F sharp is close to renaissance/baroque pitch for G.

James.

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Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Glen - 2017/11/01 14:44

James,

I actually use the D'Addario light tension (J43) for strings 1-3 now. The wound basses of that set end up being a bit too high in tension, but those first three strings are just right. I will say though that my particular 10-string likes high tension strings, so the J43 trebles work just fine tuned up a whole step. I also prefer the feel of those strings to the D'Addario rectified, which is the only option when ordering their single strings.

I have tried just about every conceivable tuning on my 10-string and keep coming back to that F# tuning, basically treating my 10-string like an alto guitar. It's fantastic.

Glen

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/11/01 18:31

Hi Glen, James,

I've missed a few posts, so allow me to catch up.

On the subject of strings, I've just put on a set of Aranjuez Classic Gold on the main six. They have a really nice, smooth feel, and the tension is just below that of the D'Addario EJ46 set that I had on before. As to the tone, the trebles are a bit brighter and clearer than the EJ46s. The basses are more balanced, a bit warmer than the D'Addarios. They are bronze wound. For strings 7-10, I'm using Savarez 5207R (a 0.050 D string), and for string 11, a Savarez 5208R (a 0.59 C string). The tension of the extended basses seems balanced with that of the main 6, and I can clearly see where the main 6 end. I am waiting for them to settle in before I pronounce judgement on the tone, but I'm certainly getting more volume than with the set I mentioned in my first post.

On the subject of tuning, I had an interesting idea to solve the problem of fretted extended bass notes without altering the nut (although that seems an excellent solution). Use a re-entrant tuning, tuning the 7th string a fourth below the 6th (D concert). The basses (7-10) would then be tuned D-F-Eb-C-Bb. Admittedly, this would take some getting used to, and some experimentation with string gauges, but think of the choices it would give you. I may try this with my next string change.

Not having a 10-string, I can't weigh in on the F# tuning, but it sounds like fun.

Cheers,
Sean

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/11/03 15:05

Glen,

I was interested in your view of the role of the low tension D'Addarios for the 1st three strings. I have never tried that combination. Next time I need to re-string, will try this.

I have tried Yepes tuning on my 10s's a couple of times, but have been disappointed in the claimed enhancement of the 'black notes' on the first string. Indeed, on some guitars I have found the effect underwhelming. In addition, I have found it unsuitable for my preferred repertoire, viz., renaissance/late renaissance lute music. Other than the question of pitch, the bass line of much of this music becomes largely awkward or unplayable. Against this finding, if one is prepared to lose the 'enhancement' in Yepes tuning, tuning down the 9th and 10th strings half a tone, does make the repertoire of the 11c baroque lute much more playable than is often the case with 'baroque'/romantic tuning of the four basses.

I am forever grateful to Peter Rueffer, leader of the Cambridge Guitar Orchestra, for introducing me to a tone-up F sharp tuning. It has suited every 10s I have, including a sweet-toned, but bass heavy 10s Ramirez when in baroque/romantic tuning, turning it into a balanced instrument of good projection. I was first alerted to the brilliant effect of this tuning when hearing PR and another, now deceased, English guitarist, Chris Kilvington, playing some Scarlatti sonatas with this tuning on a 10s. I suspect if players of standard 10s's would try F sharp tuning, they would not go back to E tuning, whether romantic or Yepes.

James.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/11/03 15:28

Sean,

Using a re-entrant tuning on the 7th string may well work, i.e., help with the fretting of the nominal C sharp, etc.. This is how 7s guitars and 7c renaissance lutes achieve an effective bass line. It would certainly be worth a try for several musical genres. Although fretting the 8th is often workable, I have in some cases found that re-tuning of the 8th is the only viable option.

With regard to Savarez strings, I have not tried them for many years. My experience of their six sets was that they were mostly well above average. Unfortunately, I found that their extended range bass strings had very poor durability, often lasting only a few days. Of course, quality may have been improved.

James.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/11/03 20:36

James,

Thanks for the tips on tuning. I will let you know how it works out for me on the next string change. I think I will try the Aranjuez "C" string that Glen mentioned, and hopefully use it as a "B" or "D" on string 7 as needed. Some pieces I want to play are written for 7 string with some 7 note strummed chords, so the tuning is pretty important for those.

As to the durability of the Savarez strings, I am on my second set of basses with no issues. So far, so good.

Sean

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Glen - 2017/11/04 15:20

Bear in mind that I use that Aranjuez 7th string for my 8th string that does NOT have an extension, so I need more tension than a standard 6th string. The Aranjuez 7th might be too thick to replace a standard 6th string on a typical alto 8th string.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by tenvec - 2017/11/06 12:46

Sean,
The Aranjuez 7th is a remarkable string, even producing a passable tone when tuned down to A', and I have regularly used it tuned to D on a 65 scale. I would be very interested learn how you get on. The only reservation I have using a dropped 7th is that a fair amount of music does seem to require a 7th at D for a standard guitar, and a 7th at F for a renaissance lute. Nevertheless, it must be worth ac serious trial.
Interested to learn that Savarez extended basses have improved durability.

Ralph.

Re:Bronze wound strings

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2017/11/06 19:10

I look forward to being able to report my results!