

from LP about
fretless guitars

Date: 29 Oct 1999 11:40:04 EDT
From: Larry Polansky
Subject: Re: !Fret Guitars
To: tuning@onelist.com
Bcc: Larry Polansky

Thanks to Glen Peterson for pointing out to me that my recent message didn't get through for some reason.

What I had posted was that, re: the recent interesting discussion about fretless guitars, I've been playing a 1-fret pretty regularly for about two years now. I perform with it a lot, and would say in my life, I use it about half the time. It took (and is still taking) a lot of practice, getting used to, re-education.

It's certainly true that the high strings, especially in the higher registers, are, well, different. This is somewhat compounded by the tendency to use very heavy gauge strings to increase the high string resonance. I've found though, that at least on mine, from the third string down, it's wonderfully resonant, in fact more than any other guitar I have. Over time, I've gotten kind of used to playing on those high strings, and have adjusted my left hand technique a great deal, so that the sound of the guitar and the sound I'm going for is more or less the same. Needless to say, the way you touch the string (LH) makes a LOT of difference, and sarod players are a good source of ideas (as are string bassists, and for me, rebab players).

I've found the challenge of playing this instrument to be daunting and exciting, and musically very invigorating. I also don't think of it as "dead" sounding (in terms of fret-ring) anymore, just different, or, since I'm used to it, simply what my instrument sounds like. In addition, the intonational, timbral and other possibilities are fantastic and well worth the effort.

There is one drawback though, which is that, on a gig or a concert, there is no way for the audience to tell that it's a fretless. Usually that's a plus, but my wife jokes that I should wear a t-shirt that says: "They're just lines."

lp