

Effusive hyperbole? The answer will come if you ever have the opportunity to either play or hear played this instrument in a full-out old-time instrumental JAM. The description absolutely fits, based on my experience Monday night.

FANDANGO Pizza Parlor, Palo Alto California: During set-up/warm-up time, I sat opposite the two lead fiddles (10-12 feet away). In fact 5 of the 7 fiddles--right across from me.

Fast backward to the 1950's or 1960's. Recall a planed-off, lowered Chevy with flat out but *tuned* tailpipes?

Well I strummed both midrange as well as bass-enhanced glissandos & then launched into Arkansas Traveler @ vigorous tempo w playful volume. Dave, one lead fiddler scrunched up his face & Sarah the other lead fiddler frowned discernibly & admonished: 'Ron, that's awfully loud!'

I said it was a new 'harp I was just warming it up; that it couldn't be played cold or it would hurt the instrument's muscles! She looked puzzled, dubious & maybe even a little worried. I thought but did not say: 'Lady, this is a six fiddle jam & you're worried about one Autoharp?'

It had to be an historic first: the add'l instruments were five guitars, 2 banjos, a banjo-like uke, 3 mandolins, harmonica, lap dulcimer, accordion, a sort of mando-cello, & Sarah was worried about one autoharp? How many times have I been in a jam & someone says they can't hear me (unless I play right at them during the music?). The noise volume is very high in that room, & the players over 95% top-tier in ability.

The verdict came early!

By the end of the 2nd number, Sarah called out to me: 'Ron, I really like what I'm hearing out of that'(!). Maybe 5 minutes later Dave, the other guitar lead, came out of his other-world focused-concentration, & smiled at me, winked, & then returned to his ostensibly preoccupied world.

The approval of those two says it all!

RESPECT! Rodney Dangerfield, please note.

I'd say 10% of the time, especially as I led off a tune, I did note for note approximation of the fiddler; often melody notes on some of the times thru; maybe 50% of the time just nice bass strums on the beat or back-beat.

Because the Aquila is tall, it sits up nicely on the left knee (wonderful knee notch in the butt). This allows me to move it away from my chest/belly & that baby really resonates. Sound broadcasts not just forward, but also sideways and behind me, hits the walls &

surrounds!

Lately, I personally have been drifting more towards solo dynamic explorations & small ensemble, but I really really had an off the charts JAMMING experience with the Aquila, so I realize what I've been missing.

At a NorCal event Sunday, Carey Dubbert, was my side-kick in a demo experiment. I'd play a few bars of Pachelbel's Cannon, employing the bass in arpeggios, & other note runs first on my Desert Rose GD diatonic, then quickly repeat the same phrase on the Aquila (also GD diatonic); back & forth alternation for purposes of 'compare & contrast'. The consensus of the group was mixed; they seemed impressed by the Aquila, but the trick of getting the bass coordinated with the impressive mid-range sustain of the Aquila was noted. A few had a couple of minutes w this instrument. The different sound of this 'mountain harp' takes some time to get used to. Around Thanksgiving I'm going to do some justice to it by running it thru a lot of my solo repertoire -- I may have more intelligent findings to share then. I will try to do a couple if youtubes with it in early Dec. I also intend to get it into Carey's hands for solo but especially to ascertain his jam experience with it.

I'd say you couldn't go wrong with this interesting instrument for solo playing, but it will take some time to get used to it; for jams, though, I GUARANTEE it is an *instant* complete & total winner--it contributes to the jam product clearly & distinctly, particularly the bass line. I've NEVER felt more 'part of' than I did Monday nite at that jam.

Not hyperbole!

Only two downsides: (1) you can't hide! Ordinaily in a jam with my conventional 'harp, if I had initial glitch finding the key, or the modal leap, nobody knew. I could softly set this up with bone conduction. The Aquila exposes what one is doing, so ya better have it right. Really stands out. (2) when this 'harp gets passed on to others for trial evaluation, & I go back to my regular jam 'harp, jamming will never be the same for me! :(

Ron Bean
San Fran