

I had the Aquila autoharp for a couple of weeks early last year but then got it back a few months later and have now had it for almost a year. As it turns out holding off on a review was a good thing because my initial thoughts have changed over time with playing and working with the Aquila. New thoughts about its potential came slowly with use and the realization that new sound dynamics required adjustments and new thinking about playing.

The first and most obvious thing we hear with the Aquila is the volume, it is quite a bit louder than a standard autoharp. After playing it for some time I realized that volume is just one characteristic of this autoharp. Because of the deeper and longer body, longer strings etc. a whole new sound dynamic is available with this autoharp. It was striking and fun just playing the Aquila and listening to the "new" sound, but then it started becoming obvious that the new sound dynamics required a new playing style and much better control over the picking and strumming style used in order to make full use of the new sound. Softer passages can be just as soft as the typical AH but when needed increasing the power in the picking or strumming the Aquila responds with strong volume and power. Learning to control this dynamic spread is a new necessity in mastering this instrument but the result is phenomenal and supremely worth the effort.

To be honest, when I heard about the Aquila I was concerned about balance in the sound from the low end to the higher end but in use I have found it to be exceptionally well balanced across the entire spectrum of sound delivered by this autoharp. It would be easy to dismiss this autoharp if one plays it for only a few minutes because the sound is so much more pronounced than the original autoharp I could see someone finding the sound jarring. But with more control in the actual playing I find that this autoharp is more responsive and offering so much more in terms of sound layering; and not getting lost in the background is one great accomplishment of this autoharp.

There are a couple of caveats that one needs to be aware of in playing the Aquila. Since the strings are longer, their vibrating force is much stronger and the player has to be careful to make sure that the strings get effectively damped using the chord bars. It's not a big deal at all, one just has to be aware and is one of the changes I mentioned above in terms of learning to take full control of this autoharp. The sustain that we are all aware of in playing the autoharp is also increased with the Aquila, but I have to tell you that it is nowhere as much as I thought it would be and doesn't really interfere with the sound.

The Aquila is a huge stride in moving the autoharp up front as an instrument. In group playing the autoharp becomes a full and vibrant part of the group. In solo playing, the Aquila provides a full and complete sound. This autoharp may not be for everyone but for someone willing to put in the time it will give you a lot of new possibilities in your playing.

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