

UNAMPLIFIED, THIS GUITAR IS AN INSTANT SUR

ARISTIDES 010

AN ARTISTIC ALL-ROUNDER

Most guitar makers utilise conventional materials, such as wood, for their designs. Whereas most of the other guitar makers search for innovation via various kinds of exotic wood, Dutchman Aristides Poort is trying out a totally different approach: a guitar completely made from a different material. You think that was never done before? Oh, yes, it was indeed done before: as early as in 1953, Maccaferri made his G 53 Django guitar, and in the Sixties, you had the 'See Through' guitar with the perspex body by Dan Armstrong. And, were those successful? Well, just to some extent... But in the meantime, the developments in the field of composite and organic chemistry did not cease. But the key question still remains: is there, by now, a guitar completely constructed out of a different material capable of competing with guitars made from wood?

By **SANDER GEUS**

('luthiers') have been making their instruments from wood. That was it. Essentially, wood was the material that could be best processed, but it was also the best material to amplify musical vibrations, since it produces a warm sound and it possesses a proper character. As such, that last quality is an indication for the downside of utilizing wood: all pieces of wood are different! The differences may even be enormous, which results in one instrument being fantastic and another not so great. Reason enough for guitar makers to look for materials and a production process capable of guaranteeing consistency. Bearing that thought in mind, Aristides Poort came up with a totally new material that renders wood obsolete for making a guitar (except for the peg of the guitar neck, because that is actually made of ebony). The material is called Arium and it was developed together with a number of brilliant scientists from Delft University of Technology (the Netherlands). Their objective was to find a type of material capable of equaling the acoustic and resonance qualities of wood, or, if possible, even to improve those. Do not ask me to describe the chemical composition of the material, however I can say that the 'magic' of the material lies in its 'ceramic cell structure'.

ON THE BENCHMARKS

To us, guitarists, it is important that the cell structure provides a great resonance, and an even greater sustain. The sustain from the low E string is easily 45 seconds (!), which is longer than the sustain of a good Les Paul guitar. That is unheard of for a Strat type of guitar, which, on average, is capable of a sustain of about 30 seconds. In addition to

the sustain and resonance, Aristides indicates consistency as a great benefit of Arium compared to wood. Whereas, after some time, wood is bound to change, warp and bend, Arium always remains unchanged. For even the most desiccated piece of wood will still contain some water, making it effectible by the air humidity, temperature, and radiation. While Arium does not absorb any particles in its ceramic cells, making it free from the effects mentioned above. Moreover, Aristides' design is good for the environment. Because, it will no longer be necessary to cut down trees to supply us, guitarists, with our beloved instruments.

A STEALTH WITH SPOILERS

What do you see, when you open the guitar case? A matte, jet-black guitar, with silver hardware and a small logo plate. A nice detail is the model name, 'OIO', on the twelfth position of the guitar neck, with its tight type for the number, giving the guitar an out-of-this-world look. But most striking, when it comes to the image of the guitar, are the 'spoilors' on the front of the guitar body. The function of the spoilors is purely aesthetic (even though any true Rammstein guitarist will be wanting to put flame-throwers in them), giving the guitar a modern and stylish, but above all, distinctive look. So, you may be sure that, whenever you enter a store where this 'stealth' instrument is standing between other guitars, you will not leave the store without, at least, having felt the guitar.

Although our test model is black, there is also a model covered with aluminum available. According to the guitar maker, after some time, the aluminum will adapt to the hand of the guitarist, making your guitar more and more a 'personalised' instrument.

CONSTRUCTION & PLAYABILITY

When you hang the guitar over shoulder with the attached OIO strap, you are bound to notice how light it is (only 3,8 kg/8.4 lb). The guitar is perfectly balanced and the neck feels very comfortable. The smoothness of the backside of the neck is striking, the finishing on it seems to offer no resistance when you feel it. On stage, that is also a great benefit, because during certain, sweaty gigs, your hands can sometimes begin to stick to the neck of your guitar. To shredders it will immediately become clear how 'nimble-fingered' the guitar neck is. The neck has a comfortable C shape, feeling just right in your hand, regardless of whether you keep your thumb tightly behind the neck or you put your thumb over it. The neck is dead straight (thumbs up for the tuner!) and the action of the strings is comfortably low, without the occurrence of fret buzz or 'dead spots'. In short: this is true craftsmanship. While the medium jumbo frets allow you to still feel the ebony under your fingers, they also provide enough space to be able to smoothly press on the strings. Placed behind the top bridge, made of graphite, you can find the locking tuners by Sperzel. However they feel just a little rigid, the tuning is nicely maintained. And even after being extremely mistreated, the tuning of the Wilkinson tre-molo bridge remains stable.

GOOD VOLUME AND ENORMOUS SUSTAIN

What is special about the Aristides is that the neck runs through into the body. So, the guitar is a whole, joint with the body, and the deep notch on the side of the body allows you to reach the high positions with the greatest of ease. So, there is no irritant little screw plate or neck connection.

PRIZE GOOD VOLUME AND ENORMOUS SUSTAIN



To the backside of the guitar, a large cover plate is screwed. Behind that, the springs of the tremolo can be found, while the passive electronics are located at the bottom and at the top, there is a space that is still empty, into which, potentially, additional (active) electronics of MIDI could be built.

ELECTRONICS

The pickups are done by the famous Seymour Duncan. The bridge humbucker is the TB-5, which, by the reasonably high output, guarantees a slick and heavy rock sound. By extracting the push/pull potentiometer of the volume button, the humbucker can be split. On many humbuckers, this leads to a mediocre sound, but on the TB-5, you obtain a nice 'twangy' sound and a convincing single coil sound on this instrument. The middle element and the neck element are the APS-2, and they stand for a tempered output and a traditional single coil sound. The middle element is reverse wound, making the middle positions 'hum-cancelling'. Just like on a Stratocaster, the pickups can be switched by way of a five-positions switch, and together with the push/pull potentiometer, they do produce enough tone variation, without all of the switching options becoming obscured.

SO NOW... WHAT DOES THIS 'ARIUM' SOUND LIKE?

Fair is fair: the Aristides is a guitar which is perfectly built. Very solid, while some of the best brands in the business are used for the hardware. But let us not forget the key question: does this 'Arium' have a good sound? Well, the sound is surprisingly good. Unamplified, the guitar immediately surprises you by its volume and enormous sustain. Just like you

were to hit one of the keys on a Steinway: the tones 'are there', and they sound slick and 'dead straight'. Also striking are the fierce response and attack, to which the ebony peg contributes. Amplified, can be heard that especially in the summit region the sound is very much present. However this is clear, it can turn too clean, and especially in case of energetic cord touching, it risks turning a bit shrill. Luckily, this can be easily solved by slightly turning in the volume potentiometer and the tone potentiometer.

The all-round character sticks out when you go through all the pickup combinations: varying from heavy and slick, with the humbucker, to more light Strat sounds, with the single coil elements. Many sounds are possible, nevertheless 'transformed rock sounds' are what sounds best on this guitar. When playing live, the sound of this guitar cuts smoothly through the band sound, due to its energetic character and its summit region. So, the Aristides is clearly a guitar with a proper character. You can hear the difference with a 'plain' wooden guitar immediately, because a wooden guitar sounds less powerful and not as slick. By the way, this has nothing to do with a better or worse sound, it just concerns a different sound, earning its own place in guitar music history.

CONCLUSIONS

The Aristides is a guitar that is perfectly built. All its components are of the highest quality, the Arium is most solid and the playability is just great. The guitar can absolutely be called all-round and it can be a good compromise for people looking for the sustain of a Les Paul guitar, while also liking to have the lighter tones of a Strat within reach.

Principally, the guitar has a modern sound, yet due to the pickups selected by Seymour Duncan, having a wide tone spectrum. At this, the tone control is most effective. The modern and somewhat dark appearance of the guitar is, principally, bound to do well with the metal and progressive rock crowd. It is quite likely that more colour options becoming available may change that (it is certain that soon a cream version of this guitar is also becoming available).

With a price of €3350,- for the black model and €3950,- for the silver model (both prices are incl. VAT), the guitar occupies a place in the higher segment of the market. Is that allowable? Yes, it is. Just go to a store and compare it to other, wooden, guitars from the same price category, or, e.g. to the Rautia by Flaxwood, also made from a non-wood material. Alternative materials for guitars are not so much an objective as such, it has to be about the result and the fact whether or not a guitar inspires you to play music. And indeed, this guitar did inspire us. So, it is possible to build a good guitar out of non-wood; it does possess musicality and 'soul'. And that is what is most important for any instrument.

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