William "Grit" Laskin

Experimental Guitar

Grit Laskin built this experimental guitar after listening to a symphonic performance and observing that the harp, even though a plucked nylon-strung instrument like the guitar, was able to project its sound above the rest of the orchestra. He realized that the key difference between the two instruments was the harp's soundboard, which was tilted at a 35-degree angle rather than the parallel positioning of a conventional guitar. Laskin wondered what would happen if he built a guitar with a 25-degree soundboard tilt, as close to a harp's 35-degree angle as he felt was possible.

This odd-looking and ergonomically challenged instrument was the result. The nylon strings were also attached like a harp's, with the ball ends inserted through the bridge from inside the guitar, by means of a hinged access door in the endblock. Laskin asked a renowned classical player to test the guitar, and he declared the sound "orchestral" but found the body angle very difficult and uncomfortable to deal with. Laskin says he then drew up plans for a second instrument with a reduced 18-degree soundboard angle and a redesigned back shape, but those plans remain on his drawing board.

Experimental Guitar, 1988
William "Grit" Laskin
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization

SPECIFICATIONS

BODY AND SIDE WOODS: Indian rosewood
TOP WOOD: Sitka spruce
BODY WIDTH, LOWER BOUT: 14 9/16 inches (37 cm)
NECK WOOD: Curly maple
FRETBOARD MATERIAL: Ebony
BRIDGE: Rosewood
NUT AND SADDLE: Bone
TUNING MACHINES: German, handmade
BINDING: Ebony
SCALE LENGTH: 26.4 inches (66 cm)
NECK WIDTH AT NUT: 2 1/16 inches (5.2 cm)
NUMBER OF FRETS: 19
BRACING: Red cedar
FINISH: Lacquer
BODY DEPTH: 7 5/16 inches (18.5 cm) at deepest point
BODY LENGTH: 19 1/2 inches (49.5 cm)
OVERALL LENGTH: 39 3/8 inches (100 cm)