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Subject: Elixir strings or...?

Posted by [Pioneer](#) on Wed, 07 Jan 2015 23:01:07 GMT

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Do we have any other guitar players on the forum? I have a Taylor acoustic that came with Elixir strings and I'm wondering if I should go back with those or if another brand might be even better. Thoughts on guitar string brands? Recommendations?

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Subject: Re: Elixir strings or...?

Posted by [Thermionic](#) on Sun, 25 Jan 2015 22:03:32 GMT

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Pioneer, in my opinion Elixir strings are a good choice for the way most people play their guitar. Most play their guitar daily or at least quite frequently, and Elixirs will allow you to go much longer between string changes, just as they claim. For those individuals with uncommonly acidic skin oils and sweat, Elixirs retain their tone long after other strings have went dead. That is, of course, until their coating begins to fray and wear away. If you have a guitar set aside just for live gigs and use a different one for practice, coated strings will get you through a few more gigs before they go dead enough to change. But for studio work, most would prefer uncoated strings for the very best tone (read below).

Now, the bad part: to my ears they're just not as ultimately crisp, chimey and harmonically complex sounding as most strings, and also lack just a bit of the razor-crisp percussive attack of uncoated strings. But, these things will prove true for ANY coated strings, regardless of brand. And, their high price (especially Elixir) still works out to about the same same cost per playing hour between changes, making them no more or less cost-effective. But, I still recommend them and AAMOF just put a set of Elixir 80/20 on a friend's guitar for him.

On the topic of other brands, I've found Martin Marquis, Earthwood, D'Addario, Curt Mangan and GHS strings to all be good, just different, as each has its own subtle tonal variations and playing characteristics. The construction of all acoustic guitar strings is quite similar to a point, with all having 1080 steel plain strings and a core of the same in the wound strings. The major difference is the winding material, whether 80/20 bronze or phosphor bronze. BIG difference in tone there; much more so than brand difference!

80/20 bronze sounds brighter and crisper than phosphor bronze, although they do break in and mellow to a nice, rich balanced tone much more quickly. Phosphor Bronze takes a while longer and has a more "metallic" sound until it does, and even then is less crisp and chimey than broken-in 80/20. But, phosphor bronze feels subtly softer and more slinky under your fingers, and will retain its tone noticeably longer.

You can use this to your advantage, in matching these properties to the guitar in order to achieve the best tone. For example, if your particular guitar leans towards the bright side you might consider phosphor bronze. But on a darker sounding guitar, you'd likely choose 80/20. Of course, a lot of that darker or brighter thing has to do with three major variables:

1. The types of woods used in the guitar

2. The shape and size of the guitar
3. The bracing under the guitar's top

For example, mahogany backs/sides sound warmer, fuller and darker than rosewood, which is brighter and more harmonically rich and complex in the upper registers. Maple has a more pronounced midrange with a certain "ping" to the attack of hard-picked notes. Mixing the wood types nets yet another, different overall voicing.

Shape and size are self-explanatory. All other things being equal, a dreadnought body will of course sound thinner than a jumbo body concert. Cutaways slightly reduce the resonant internal volume, somewhat reduce the desirable resonances of the top by stiffening that particular corner, and cause said resonances to be asymmetric.

Bracing is also self-explanatory. Thick, unscalloped bracing is very strong but also sounds dead because it damps the top's vibrations, especially in the frequency extremes. Thin, highly scalloped bracing sounds great but is weak and as time passes can cause the top to warp or pull up under string tension.

Another important consideration is your playing style. Do you mainly do a lot of strumming? Flatpicking? Fingerstyle? Fingerpicks, fingernails, or fingers? Metal or plastic picks? If plastic, then are they nylon, delrin, or acetate, as each sounds very subtly different. What gauge pick do you use? Do you attack the strings aggressively or softly? These things strongly affect what we call "tone" every bit as much as your guitar and strings do, if not more so! For example, strumming with a thin pick sounds brighter and thinner with more pick noise than a thicker pick, which sounds fuller and darker.

In the end, the only way to truly know what your guitar and your ears like best is to experiment with different string types and gauges. That takes a lot of time, money and effort, but once you find the string that offers the best tone with the least compromises for your individual tastes, you've got it made from then on!

Of course, regardless of which brand you choose for your particular guitar(s), poor or infrequent post-playing cleaning regimens will greatly hasten their demise. A good cleaner like Dr. Stringfellow after EVERY time you play (even if for a few minutes) will preserve their useful life by miles. Along with the cleaner, I use a thin cotton cloth passed under and pinched around each string, and moved back and forth from bridge to nut a few times to remove all dirt and residues.

Hope you found this helpful! Since you didn't let us know your general level of playing experience, I just took some liberty and wrote a little thesis on the subject. BTW, I apologize for not posting sooner; I've been working some very long hours, 7 days a week, and haven't had much time to surf the forums lately.

Thermionic

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