

STEEL STRINGS FOR BANJOS

M. L. Hallett Offers Arguments in Favor of Steel Rather Than Gut Strings

Writing in a current issue of The Cadenza, M. L. Hallett advocates the use of steel strings for banjos. Mr. Hallett's views upon the subject are in part as follows:

Never again, unless they stop the manufacture of steel, will I use gut strings on my banjo.

I came to this conclusion several weeks ago when I decided to change the set of steel strings on my instrument and a set of gut strings resting in my banjo case made a tempting appeal to me.

"I'll give them another trial for a change," I thought, and proceeded to string my banjo with the softer string. When the job was complete I "tuned 'er up," first in low, then in high and then in medium, but try as I would I could not get them to sound right. They gave a punk, tubby tone. They didn't suit me. Perhaps they were a cheap brand. I looked at the envelope. On the contrary they were of a make rated as the "best."

At any rate I would try and get used to gut strings. I closed up my banjo case and tried them the following evening, but they sounded even worse than they did the evening before. My mind was made up. I ripped them off and put on a new set of silver steel strings. Ah! That was something like it. The clear as a bell, ringing tone was there once more and I was happy.

I told my experience to a fellow player and he said: "Of course, if you like brilliancy of tone the steel strings have it, but they are so hard on the fingers; make them sore."

Now, my friends, right here is an argument. I very seldom experience sore fingers with steel strings, but I want to tell you that gut strings can certainly raise some beautiful blisters. When I used gut strings my fingers were generally sore. My friend and instructor, Prof. Weidt, of Newark, uses steel strings exclusively on his banjo. At first he strung his instrument with steel strings on account of having so many plectrum players, but after a time he

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grew to like them and now he uses nothing else, and I want to say right here that he can get more real tone out of the banjo to the square inch by finger playing than anyone I ever heard. I have used steel strings on my Whyte Laydie banjo for upwards of three years and they are giving me more satisfaction in every way than I ever dared to hope for from gut strings.

While the war was on, for some unknown reason the gut string began to materially deteriorate in quality. Then in New York came the famine on gut first strings. Music houses could not supply the first string, but urged using the second string for a first string. One music house in the city, with a big reputation back of it, went so far as to place the second string in an envelope and brand it with a rubber stamp "first string." Why the shortage of the first strings? I have never been able to find the reason, but I know that the condition did exist. The other strings were of such a very inferior quality that in desperation I abandoned the gut strings altogether and there is no inducement that would tempt me to return to them again. In the first place, I like brilliancy of tone. You get it from steel strings. They seldom break and you can generally count on finding strings on your banjo any time you want to play. Nothing irritates me more than to find a string snapped when I want to try out a new piece, and it may be the last string, as is often the case.

I know that this arraignment of gut strings will grate very harshly on the sensitive ears of many banjoists who claim that steel strings have no place on a banjo, but I can only cite my personal experience after trying out practically every make of gut string made or sold.

NEW PRICE LIST PLEASES

CHICAGO, ILL., June 26.—The new policy that Ludwig & Ludwig have adopted of eliminating the fictitious professional discount and maintaining a net retail price to amateurs and professionals alike is meeting with the approval of dealers everywhere. Ludwig & Ludwig announce that they have received hundreds of letters from dealers all over the United States approving their stand. This new price policy, together with the idea of sales through dealers, is placing the Ludwig line in general favor, and the dealers welcome the change.

Fire recently damaged the Daniel Shea Piano & Music Store, located at 464 High street, Holyoke, Mass.

HOLTON LINE IN DEMAND

The Kesselman-O'Driscoll Co., one of Milwaukee's progressive musical instrument stores, has had an active month in its band instrument department. Summer demands for saxophones have reached unusual proportions. This company handles the Holton line of band instruments made by Frank Holton & Co., Elkhorn, Wis., and has been featuring the line aggressively with very excellent results.

NEW POST FOR A. J. NEWMAN

A. J. Newman, formerly manager of the Cooper Square branch of the New York Band Instrument Co., is now manager of the firm's store at 111 East Fourteenth street, New York City. W. N. Bartow has been appointed assistant manager.

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