

STRINGS

A S P U B L I S H E D I N W O O D & S T E E L

Selecting strings for your Taylor guitar can be a lot of fun, especially with a little knowledge under your belt. In this article, we'll share our opinions and those of some high-profile guitar handlers. We encourage you to use this information to develop your own preferences.

MATERIALS

There are many philosophies concerning the proper methods and materials for manufacturing strings, and many opinions as to which strings are best-suited to particular guitars. After experimenting with various materials over the years, manufacturers have settled on their individual choices, based on their marketing and research. Still, one thing is certain: The better the quality of the materials used to make the strings, the better they sound. We encourage you to investigate these differences on your own by reading each manufacturer's packaging and talking with your local retailers. At Taylor, we prefer (and install) phosphor/bronze strings, because that material has a "bright" quality that complements the tone we demand from our instruments.

GAUGES AND TENSION

Speaking of tone, we all tend to perceive it a little differently. Fortunately, there are a great many types of strings available to match our individual tonal preferences. So, instead of trying to describe tone, let's discuss the factors that can affect tone and playability. Personally, I think it is most important to get the tension right.

Light-gauge and medium-gauge are both generic descriptions for the overall size of a set of strings. It helps

TAYLOR STRING GAUGES

Grand Concerts/Grand Auditoriums/Baby Taylors:
light-gauge phosphor/bronze

E	B	G	D	A	E
.012,	.016,	.024(w),	.032(w),	.042(w),	.053(w)

Dreadnoughts and Jumbos:
medium-gauge phosphor/bronze

E	B	G	D	A	E
.013,	.017,	.026(w),	.035(w),	.045(w),	.056(w)

12-Strings (except Leo Kottke model):
light-gauge phosphor-bronze

e/e	b/b	g/G	d/D	a/A	e/E
.010/.010,	.014/.014,	.009/.023(w),	.013/.030(w),	.017/.039(w),	.027(w)/.047(w)

Leo Kottke Signature Model (factory-installed gauges):
heavy-gauge phosphor-bronze (tuned down to C-sharp)

e/e	b/b	g/G	d/D	a/A	e/E
.013/.013,	.017/.017,	.014/.030(w),	.018/.040(w),	.027(w)/.047(w),	.035(w)/.056(w)

Acoustic Bass (factory-installed gauges):
soft-gauge phosphor-bronze, model PBB 170

g/G	d/D	a/A	e/E
.045(w),	.065(w),	.080(w),	.100(w)

to think of a string set as representing the sum total of tension being put on the top of the guitar. String manufacturers might use the term "light," but there are many string sets on the market bearing that description, and they all vary in gauge and in tension. A set might have different core sizes on the wound strings, thus altering the tension, even if the outside diameter is the same. More commonly though, it is the combination of different individual string sizes that causes variances in tension.

Changing the string tension can affect playability, because it alters the factory settings. If you change either the brand or the sizes of your strings,

you might need to have your guitar set up again. It's possible that the truss rod and/or the nut and saddle will need adjustment. It is always best to consult your local repairman for advice on these matters.

Taylor uses light-gauge strings on all Grand Concert and Grand Auditorium 6-strings. On these models, the light-gauge strings create less tension, thus enabling the top to move more freely. Strings that exert more tension can cause a smaller top to tighten up, thus adversely affecting responsiveness and tone.

We use medium-gauge strings on all Dreadnought and Jumbo 6-string models. In these cases, the greater ten-



sion actually *helps* the larger tops to move. In our opinion, light strings just don't produce as much tone and volume on the bigger bodies, because they don't move the top as much.

We use light-gauge strings on our 12-string guitars, the exception being the LKSM, which can take either light or medium strings. When using a medium 12-string set on the LKSM, or any other Taylor 12-string, make sure that the overall tuning is at C#. *Do not* tune to pitch with medium strings. We designed the LKSM model with scalloped bracing to complement the lower overall tuning. On the other hand, there is no reason why you can't tune any of our 12-string models down and use medium strings on them.

CLEANING

Most guitarists can get away with simply wiping their strings with a clean cloth after playing, and their strings will last a long time. Some people, however, have more acidic perspiration, which can cause a set of strings to go dead after only a little playing time. Everyone agrees that one secret to long-lasting strings is washing one's hands before playing. When the grooves of the strings fill up with dirt and sweat, they do not vibrate as freely. So, clean those fingers!

Over the years, I have heard some great theories about string care, but I am not sure that any of them are viable. These range from removing your strings and washing them in the dishwasher to treating them with cleaning solutions. Then, there's the one about *freezing* strings after they

have been used for a while. Sounds like a good way to end up with very cold strings. Personally, I think strings are relatively inexpensive, and I recommend replacing them, as frequently as possible, with brand new strings. Hey, consider it an opportunity to visit your favorite music store and check out the latest gear!

BACKSTAGE

We thought it would be fun, and possibly educational, to check in with some of the people who either play or handle Taylor guitars professionally.

NORIK RENSON—guitar tech for both guitar players in **Kenny Loggins'** band (Loggins and Guy Thomas).

Responsibilities: Caring for 22 guitars on the road (14 acoustics, half of which are Taylors). Handles all aspects of guitar care, from loading and unloading to fret jobs.

String Changing Habits: Changes each guitar, as needed. On guitars that Loggins fingerpicks with a lighter attack, he can get away with changing the strings every other show. On guitars that Loggins strums with a heavy attack, he changes the strings every show, even on guitars used for only one song. On the one nylon-string guitar Loggins uses (not a Taylor), Renson changes the strings once every seven shows.

Cleaning: Wipe the strings with a clean cloth (in very humid conditions, Renson uses GHS Fast Fret to keep the strings fresh).

Worst Experience: "During a large concert, I was running on stage to hand

Kenny his guitar, when a string just broke, making a loud noise. I had to turn around and get another guitar ready while Kenny waited."

Worst Fears: People ("posers") hanging out backstage, who bump into the guitars when Renson's not looking, causing them to go out of tune before he hands them to Loggins or Thomas.

Strings: Likes GHS products; uses both light- and medium-gauge strings.

DOUG SUMAN—guitar tech for the group, **America** (Gerry Beckley, Dewey Bunnell, and Michael Woods).

Responsibilities: Caring for 12 guitars on the road, of which five are acoustics (including four Taylors). Handles the tuning, restringing, and general care of the instruments for the whole band.

String Changing Habits: The whole band uses light strings, except when playing in drop tunings, in which case the guitar needs a set of medium strings to offset the lower tension being exerted on the top. Each guitar player in the group requires a different frequency of re-stringing. Bunnell needs his changed every show, because he has more acidic perspiration. Gerry can play three shows on a single set.

Re-stringing Tips: Change your strings often. This will prevent string breakage on stage and better enable the strings to stay in tune. Always set the ball end by pulling on the strings while tuning up. Cut excess string wire close to the tuner, and then bend the sharp point down with pliers to prevent poking a hole in your finger.

Cleaning: Just wipe them down after playing.



Worst Experience: "Once, I didn't set the ball end properly. Then, onstage, Gerry was bending a note and the string popped loose, causing the whole guitar to go out of tune in the middle of a performance."

Worst Fear: Poking holes in his finger while changing strings ("It always seems to happen on 12-strings"). Also, having the guitars blow over in the wind. "We do a lot of outdoor gigs, and it is important to take the guitars off the stands when it is windy."

Strings: They like Martin Marquis. The whole band uses light strings (except

on drop tunings, when they like a heavy-bottom/light-top set).

CHRIS PROCTOR—solo acoustic guitar concert and recording artist (Flying Fish) and Taylor clinician.

Responsibilities: Takes care of his own guitars on the road (955 maple 12-string and 912-C).

String Changing Habits: Regardless of how much he plays, he changes his 6-string every three days when on the road. He changes the 12-string every two weeks, unless he is using a lot of alternate tunings, which tend to cause

more wear and tear in tuning back and forth. In those cases, he may change more frequently.

Cleaning: Just wipe them down after playing; they will last longer.

Worst Experience: "One time, I placed my guitar on the stand, walked off stage, and had a string break all by itself."

Worst Fear: See "Worst Experience."

Strings: He likes phosphor/bronze GHS products.

By Terry Myers

