

Larkin ASAD Nylon-Strung Solid

YOU THOUGHT NYLON STRINGS were strictly for the fluffy of heart and peaceable of soul? Ireland-based luthier Chris Larkin's latest effort has power and guts to spare. Review by Jerry Uwins

ASAD

RRP: IR£1266

The ASAD acronym by which Chris Larkin identifies all his solid electrics, sounds pretty space-age. In fact its meaning is the delightfully untech-y 'All Singing All Dancing', in much the same way as the defining name for his acoustic range is ASAP ('All Singing All Picking').

On this new Headway-powered ASAD Solid Nylon, which as the name suggests is a solid instrument and nylon strung, there is a connection with the ASAPs in that the body width and profile are similar to Larkin's smallest flat-top and archtop cutaway acoustics, with a span across the lower bouts of 382mm – a gnat's over 15".

The similarities end there, because despite the piezo-based powering, construction is firmly in the electric camp with a solid back of two-piece Brazilian mahogany topped by a 3mm-thick front of

Alaskan yellow cedar, bound with ivoroid. The slab body, radiused around its back edge but otherwise unchamfered, measures 38mm in depth, thinner than most solidbodies, presumably to achieve a manageable weight – 8lbs on the scales – for what is a fairly large instrument. Apart from the wood routed out for the control cavity, there are no 'acoustic' chambers.

The guitar is beautifully finished with an acid-catalysed gloss lacquer, left natural on the back and neck. The deep purple colour of the front isn't as originally intended. Because the instrument was to be showcased at an exhibition, Chris wanted to spray it a transparent blue that would allow the top's ultra-fine graining to show through. Unfortunately, the first coats came out a nondescript pink on contact, so he ended up darkening the mix to the non-transparent but still handsome result we see here.

But doesn't that make the expensive yellow cedar top somewhat redundant? Chris agrees, going on to express the opinion that, in the context of a solidbody, the additional thin facing probably has little effect on tone one way or the other. The upshot? If you fancy a Solid Nylon with an all-mahogany body, that's fine by



A flamed-maple centre line graces the glued-in neck

CHECK OUT...

Other electric nylon-stringers of a thinline persuasion...

ARIA's spruce and mahogany/maple-sandwich NXG (£789) has piezo plus internal-mic powering and an offset, ramped soundhole. Nut width is 45mm, **contact** Aria UK ☎ 0181-572-0033. The **GIBSON** Chet Atkins series includes the semi-solid CE (£1160) and CEC (£1195), and the hollow, fan-braced Studio CE (£1539) and Studio CEC (£1585). All are spruce/mahogany with two-band EQ and internal, individual string-gain adjustment. The CECs have 51mm nuts, the CEs are 46mm, **contact** Rosetti ☎ 01376-550033.

GODIN's semi-solid Multiacs comprise the spruce/mahogany Duet (£1140) with LR Baggs piezo/mic system, and two models – the Nylon (£1310) and maple/mahogany ACS (£899) – with direct onboard access for Roland GR Series synths. All have 47mm nut widths, **contact** EMD ☎ 01865-341597. The solid spruce-bodied **PARKER** Spanish Fly is due soon (£TBA), with specially designed ebony bridge and 'classical-like' string spacing, **contact**: Korg UK, 01908-857100. **YAMAHA**'s spruce/alder AEX500N (£379) is a hollow-body, f-hole design with bolt-on neck and three-band EQ, **contact** Yamaha-Kemble ☎ 01908-366700.

him. It'll probably knock a few quid off the price, too.

Body accoutrements include a rosewood bridge secured by four screws and supplied with two additional saddles so you can opt for a higher or lower action than the medium one fitted. The jack socket is a recessed, slanted Strat type, located on the rear of the body next to the control cavity (this positioning serves to keep the guitar's front uncluttered but I was aware of the jackplug sticking into the

suggests that both bands are purely additive rather than cut and boost. In this respect the arrangement seems vaguely similar to EMF's New Frontier/B-Band system which, coincidentally, Chris has just begun evaluating. A third system for which Larkin has long been a keen advocate is a straight-out affair from Highlander, so there are some excellent options to choose from.

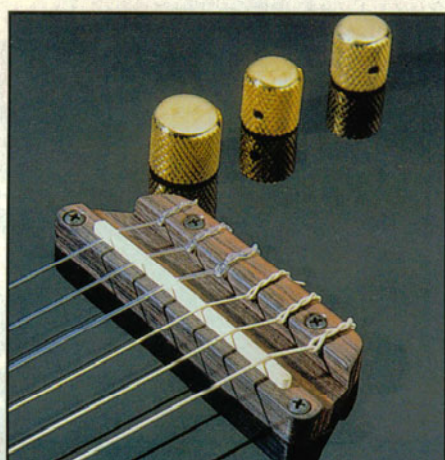
The ASAD's glued-in neck, with a rosewood-faced Spanish-style headstock



Lock o' the Irish: Larkin's trad Spanish-style headstock

top of my thigh, whether using an angled or straight variety). The strap buttons on our sample are conventional, but the instrument will normally carry Dunlop straplocks as standard equipment.

The Headway pickup system has a battery mounted within the control cavity and comprises the company's HE1 under-saddle, coaxial piezo-cable transducer linked to a customised version of their G1 preamp providing two- rather than three-band active EQ because, as Chris rightly points out, the need for dedicated midrange tailoring is far less important with nylon-strung voicing. The unmarked, brass-knobbed treble and bass controls – lined up aft of the volume pot just behind the bridge – have no centre detents, and the way tonal alterations are heard



Tele-like knobs yield volume, treble and bass control

and Schaller Hauser machineheads, is fashioned from a seven-piece laminate of mahogany and quarter-sawn flamed maple, the latter used for the centre section and for two of the coachlining strips either side. An example of Larkin's precision craftsmanship – and something of a trademark – is the shallow-angled scarf joint extending under the 1st and 2nd fret positions. It's immaculate, with ne'er the hint of a break in the line of the fillets, such that if you weren't aware of the contrast in grain that indicates where the joint is, you'd be convinced that the neck was all of a length.

Although it's not required for the gentle pull of nylon stringing, the neck is fitted with a truss rod, access to which is a discreet wood cover plate behind the nut.

FACTFILE

LARKIN ASAD SOLID NYLON RRP: IR£1266 inc case

Nylon-strung solid electric. Solid yellow-cedar top on mahogany back. Mahogany/flame-maple laminated neck with unbound 20-fret rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut, micarta saddle, Schaller Spanish-style gold-plated machineheads, twin strap buttons. Headway preamp system with under-saddle piezo-cable transducer linked to volume and active two-band (treble and bass) EQ.

Options: Full custom menu – details on request. Choice of neck widths/string spacings to order at no extra charge. For version with straight-out pickup system, deduct approx £70.

Left-hander: No extra charge.

Finish: Deep purple front, natural back and neck. All gloss. Range of custom colours available.

Contact: Chris Larkin Custom, Castlegregory, Co Kerry, Ireland ☎ 00353-66-713-9330.

Dimensions (In mm unless stated)

Scale length	650 (25.6")
Width of neck	
...at nut	51
...at 12th fret	60
Depth of neck	
...at 1st fret	20.5
...at 12th fret	21.5
String spacing	
...at nut	41
...at bridge	60
Action as supplied	
...at 12th fret treb	2.5
...at 12th fret bass	2.5
F'board radius (approx)	610 (24")
Body depth	38
Max body width	382
Approx weight (kg/lbs)	3.64/8.0

Chris's rationale is that since there's no reason why the guitar can't be used with steel strings (though the nut slots might need to be altered for the thinner plain strings), it's no big deal to install a rod anyway. An incidental benefit is that the extra weight at this end helps compensate for the bulk of the body, and the guitar balances well on the strap.

Dimensionally, the 650mm-scale neck is uncompromising classical territory, with a 51mm (2") width across the nut, and a span both at the octave and for the bridge string spacing of 60mm. In traditional manner, the unbound 20-fret rosewood fingerboard is virtually flat. This broad, plank-like nature is accentuated by the neck's relative shallowness and flat-backed D section, but as an aspect of classical-guitar design in solidbody form, such characteristics go with the territory. You'll either feel familiar with the set-up if already a nylon-string player, you'll learn to

adjust, or you'll ask Chris to fashion a thinner neck, which he'll be happy to do.

In its existing format, the only enhancement that wouldn't go amiss is the addition of an octave-position side-dot, even though markers are already provided at the 5th, 7th and 9th-fret positions. Classical players – who admittedly get by without any dots at all on their traditional instruments – would probably find a 12th-fret reference helpful in adjusting to the 14th-fret neck join (done for reasons of better up-top access via the cutaway), and it would be useful for the rest of us to get our bearings when reaching for higher positions. I kept overshooting, prompting a realisation that you only miss something like this when it's not there!

SOUNDS

It's pretty much good news all round. The Headway system is well balanced across the strings and packs one helluva punch, gain-wise, yet unless you take the EQ ranges to near maximum, the sound remains impressively natural and classic-like. There's none of the glassy brittleness you sometimes get with piezo powering, although dialling in too much treble will result in some stridency. However, in setting up a decent sound, this isn't something you'd be prone to do with any preamp.

Handling the EQ takes a little familiarisation, mainly because the bands are mucho sensitive. A modest tweak goes a long way – and adding tone in either band results in an increase in gain, so some juggling of the volume pot is required too. Having got used to that, it's an excellent system to work with. The knobs have no 0-10 markers, but their relative positions can quickly be ascertained by sighting the grub-screws as indicators. The only aspect of EQ tailoring I'm not entirely keen on is the way the addition of bass much beyond halfway

begins to overshadow the treble response rather than just add plentiful enhancement in its own band.

On top of a great repertoire of tones, one of the ASAD's most impressive plus-points is its fluidity and length of sustain in the bottom end, something which adds tremendous expression and maturity to the overall sound. Another distinct benefit when compared with a traditional classical electro-acoustic is the instrument's near-total resistance to feedback, so you never need worry about turning the wick up to true electric performance levels.

VERDICT

Demand for nylon-strung solids is never going to be huge, but the need for classically-voiced textures across all forms of music is always going to be with us. For the stage player – electrically-orientated or hitherto traditional – a feedback-snubbing yet sympathetically expressive instrument like the ASAD Solid Nylon is immensely more practical than an amplified but otherwise traditional acoustic classic. It should also provide a quick, painless way of recording

realistic studio tracks without the palaver of miking up, avoiding acoustic spill and so on.

On top of that, the guitar is built to Chris Larkin's usual exacting standards with the highest quality materials, and if the neck is too much of a purist handful you can have it fashioned to your own specification. The asking price is also keen for what is a professional piece of kit: indeed, the Irish pound's rate of exchange at time of writing means that in the UK this ASAD costs little more than £1000... sterling value in both senses of the word. **G**