

*I was alive in the forest,
I was cut by the cruel axe
In life I was silent
In death I sweetly sing.*

(Inscription on a 16th Century Elizabethan lute)

A Little bit of History

The history of stringed instruments is a long one. We know that simple bow harps, where a single string is stretched across a bow, existed as early as 3000 BC in Egypt and Sumeria and that lyres (a type of early harp) from at least 2800 BC. Today there is a great variety of stringed instruments from electric guitars through to violins, pianos, mandolins, lutes and so on! Despite their many obvious differences they all make their sound by possessing one or more strings that vibrate when plucked (guitar), hit (piano) or bowed (violin).

The Corrulute

The instrument you are going to construct is called a 'Corrulute' and has been designed especially so that anyone can construct it without the need for prior experience or specialist tools. This doesn't make it any less of an instrument however, and if you work carefully you should produce an instrument that can be tuned and played for many years to come!

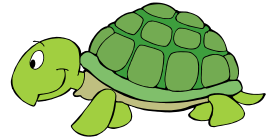


You can think of the Corrulute as a small four stringed guitar if you like, but in designing it we borrowed bits from many different stringed instruments. The triangular body shape for example, is based on the Russian Balalaika (see if you can find some pictures on the internet) whilst the tuning we use (G C E A) is the same as a soprano ukulele.

Some Important Design Criteria

Before you start we would like to explain some of the design criteria that are important in stringed instrument building. This should give you a deeper understanding of why the Corrulute is designed the way that it is, as well as giving you the background necessary to design your own modifications or maybe even build a completely new instrument.

Firstly, the string vibrating alone will not produce very much sound – try stretching an elastic band between your fingers and plucking it – not very loud is it? So all stringed instruments (with the exception of electric ones which rely on electrical amplification) need a sound box which acts to amplify (make louder) the sound of the vibrating string. Sound boxes come in all shapes and sizes. The Ancient Greek Lyra (said to have been invented by the God Hermes) used a tortoise shell as a sound box, and many instruments have been built with carapaces of turtles and armadillos! Don't worry, the Corrulute uses a sound box made from recycled cardboard. The corrugations in the cardboard helped to give the Corrulute its name.



The second consideration is that in order for the strings to vibrate they must be under tension (try making a loose elastic band vibrate). This means that the structure of the instrument must be strong enough to withstand the tension of the strings. The place where this tension is strongest is at the join of the neck to the body. In the Corrulute the neck actually passes through the body so that there is no need for a strong joint.

When I grow up I want to be a luthier!

Most shop bought instruments today are manufactured in factories with very little work done by hand. However, the very best musical instruments are still made by hand, often by individual craftsmen and women working with great skill to produce beautiful instruments that come alive in the hands of musicians. A person who builds stringed musical instruments is called a luthier.

We hope you enjoy making and playing your Corrulute and maybe one day you'll become a great luthier!

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