

Versoul Guitars

Design departures from Finland

THE WORLD doesn't need "just another guitar manufacturer."

And Versoul isn't. It's more like DaVinci decided to become a luthier, lived in Finland, and turned the popular notion of the guitar on its head.

Kari Nieminen the brains and prime mover of Versoul, is a designer (with a Master's Degree, no less) who has brought the principles of sound physics into the arena of lutherie, with dramatic results.

We grabbed the guitars off the wall at Fred Walecki's Westwood Music in L.A. (the American dealer for Versoul), and the range of instruments was pretty impressive everything from acoustics to die for to a complete electricline that includes the ES-350-type Bigsby-equipped Swan, a Raya electric that jumps foot-first into 'Tele territory, and the category-defying Caspian electric sitar with a Finnish vibe, baritones, electric fretless basses, a lid yes, a neat-o resonophonic that kills.

The Zoel six-string acoustic is a good starting place, with its ergonomic shape and a proprietary neck-to-body joint that showcases what Kari is known for: the sustain and power are remarkable for this guitar with a big variety of colors and tonewoods, split spruce scalloped braces, and tons of choices including cedar top and mahogany back and sides. About the size of a good 000-18, this is like playing a stealth guitar - what a balanced big sound, more like a Guild F series. Nitro finishes and Kari's little trademark design - a Gold leaf or Silver label - pronounces it a Versoul.

In the area of further innovation, Kari has the Tuco, a classical instrument with a unique open headstock that allows for quick string changes, latticed top-bracing that provides a wonderful, rounded sound, and locking tuners.

Sounds and plays like a guitar seasoned by years of playing. Moving into the electric arena, the Raya is a modern six-string that has good looks, and real innovations at its core - a unique neck joint, alder body, one-piece mahogany neck - the quality throughout is just great. The dual pickup, custom radius (12") guitar has a hidden weapon - Kari's custom

pickups that switch easily from humbucker to single-coil - and sounded magnificent through our tests amp an old blond Fender Twin.

The baritone model was equally impressive, just big, fat sound with a finely crafted neck, and dead silent background - very well shielded.

Moving, on the Swan has a big feel to it that I love, being a big fan of the fat old 350s and thick-body Gretches of yesteryear - with its Kari-designed f-holes, proprietary back-ups, and a neck that was to die for, this guitar works super for jazz, blues, or low volume rock, and the sounds approximate a vintage

PAP equipped Gibson to a T. Plus, the Bigsby actually stays in tune!

Kari's attention to detail is impressive, from moose shinbone nuts (!), to green abalone position dots. There's a bit of an overwhelming "What do I pick?" sense when looking at the choices, but it's all good - the levels do make a certain sense, from Silver Label (red cedar or Euro spruce tops for the acoustics, with mahogany backsides), to Gold Label (rosewood back and sides and a bigger choice of topwoods), to Platinum (Honduras rosewood, AAA Cedar, all the trimmings) work for me. Rock on, Finland! - Stephen Patt



VERSOU GUITARS

Type of Guitars: Acoustic, electric, dobro, sitar, baritone, bass, more.

Features: Unique, innovative designs, high quality, (primarily European) tonewoods, hand made construction. Contact Westwood

Music, 1627 Westwood Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90024, phone 310-478-4251, versoul.com