

Stringed Instrument Maintenance

Your Blue Lion instrument arrives set up and ready to play. After a period of time, the length of which depends on many factors including your playing style, how much you play and the environment in which your instrument is kept, it may require minor adjustments to keep it in optimum playing condition. If you have any questions or concerns feel free to call us anytime.

Maintenance can be separated into two areas; maintaining the sound and playability and maintaining the appearance and protective quality of the finish.

SOUND & PLAYABILITY

STRINGS

- Change your strings periodically. We recommend light gauge strings for your guitar. For your dulcimer, check your price list or our website under *Accessories* for the gauges we recommend for our different dulcimer models. You can also download a step by step diagram – *How to String Your Dulcimer*.
- Don't wait for strings to break or sound so dull you won't enjoy playing. Even if you don't play very often, you should change strings at least twice a year.
- Wipe off the strings and fingerboard with a clean cloth every time you play to extend the useful life of the strings.

FRETBOARD

All current Blue Lion dulcimers and guitars come with unfinished fretboards. Maintenance involves cleaning and re-oiling with a high quality fingerboard oil, available at most music stores or from us. Fretboards should be oiled about twice a year, depending on use and environment. Follow the product's directions. Avoid getting any oil, *Fret Ease*, *Fast Fret*, or similar product on the finished parts of the instrument as it may damage the finish. 4/0 steel wool can also be used to clean and polish the frets.

TUNING MACHINE MAINTENANCE

Proper adjustment of the tuning machines is important if they are to function well.

- Schaller planetary tuners are not prone to loosening, but over time may require some tensioning to compensate for environmental changes and/or wear. The thumbscrew can be tightened either by hand or with a screwdriver; tighten only enough to allow the peg to hold the string tension, but not so much as to make turning the peg difficult.
- Guitar-style tuners require a screwdriver to adjust but otherwise follow the same tightening principle as the planetary gears. The screws and nuts holding the tuners may also require tightening.

NUT AND SADDLE

Keep the nut and saddle slots clean and lubricated by scribbling some graphite from a very sharp pencil into the string slots when you change strings. If you hear a “creaking” noise when you tune, most likely the string is catching in the nut and needs some graphite lubricant.

WOOD & FINISH CARE

FINISH CARE

The finish on your instrument is nitrocellulose lacquer. Care of a lacquer finish is largely a matter of personal choice. Some players never clean their instruments while others practically wear away the finish with constant polishing. The ideal finish maintenance lies somewhere between these two extremes.

Both satin and gloss finishes can be cleaned with a damp cloth followed by a careful drying. Kerosene or mineral spirits can be used for stubborn dirt but must be carefully wiped away and followed with a damp cloth and then dried, or they will soften and discolor the finish.

Avoid storing your instrument’s strap (or anything else) next to the instrument as the compounds in the strap (either leather or plastic) can react with the finish causing softening and/or marring of the finish. Likewise, be aware that many skin lotions, insect repellents and sunscreens will react with instrument finishes.

A good guitar polish can help clean and protect a finish. Most polishes are, however, intended for gloss finishes and should generally be avoided on satin finishes or the satin appearance will be lost. *Martin Guitar Polish* is one preparation that has very little polishing action and is appropriate for use on both gloss and satin finishes. A polishing compound such as *Meguiar’s #7* is good for polishing gloss finishes.

CRACKS & DENTS

Cracks should be repaired as quickly as possible to prevent more damage from occurring. Keep the crack clean until it is properly glued. Unless you are experienced in instrument repair, check with us before attempting to effect this kind of repair. Nicks and dents can be repaired or not, depending on how much they bother you. Normal wear and tear results in some unsightly marks on most instruments. Cosmetic repair can be expensive and not always completely satisfactory.

HUMIDITY

In very dry environments a humidifier may be needed to protect your instrument from drying out and cracking. Your local music store should be able to furnish you with an inexpensive humidifier to put in the instrument case. We offer the Herco humidifier as a small but adequate humidifier although other brands are equally as effective. Very high humidity may cause swelling of various instrument parts and should be avoided.

ENVIRONMENT

Keep your instrument in a clean and temperate environment. A car trunk in only moderately warm weather can develop a high enough temperature to loosen glue joints and wreak havoc with an instrument. Extreme cold can cause finish cracking and various other problems. Avoid rapid changes in temperature; gradual changes are less likely to cause damage.