



TENSION AND RELEASE

My initial experience with the SOMA DVINA.

Preface.

There is something distinctive about string based music: The elegant, warm and vibrating sound of classical music evokes pathos and immediate emotion. The seering tone of a single violin suddenly entering the soundtrack of a movie may give us a feeling of creeping tension or the foresight of sudden events. String music is universal in expression: calming, yet suspenseful or chaotic.

As a kid I became fascinated by strings in music. I could hear them on the radio as a part of popular music arrangements, as a bittersweet note in synthpop or as a dense monolithic layer in eurodance. I simply fell in love with the sound that so easily can go from the rather clichée to the absolute academic (speaking of Neue Klassik).

One of a kind.

I ordered my DVINA in 2022. SOMA sent me an email out of the sudden: Your DVINA is ready for purchase. I must admit, I forgot that I subscribed for one many many months ago when the world was battling pandemia. I decided after a few hours for the DVINA. To unveil something here: I cannot play a string-based instrument in a classical fashion. But my idea was the opposite: How about exploring the instrument from a different angle and view? How about using the strings for something most classically trained musicians wouldn't come up with?

I ordered the DVINA, guided by luthier Victor Grigoriev. Everything went smooth, Victor sent me updated, photos from his workshop, let me experience the building of an unique instrument. And then, a few days after completion, the war arrived right in the middle of Europe. Again the world was in turmoil – on pandemia followed cruelty, death, destruction. Channels of supply were cutted but Victor assured me there would be a way to deliver my DVINA. He was right: Three weeks after the war begun she was shipped and after two weeks travel time she finally landed on my doorstep in April 2022.

She is here.

My DVINA has a white lacquered body, without fret marks. After assembling her she forms the shape of a elongated cross upside down. The base can easily be placed on the knees (hence the cross form) and the main body be embraced easily. I guess most cello players would have a very easy go with the DVINA. She has two strings (recalling the chinese Erhu) that can independently be tuned. To assemble here the base needs to be fixated on the main body with a

screw – a matter of seconds. That's what I love so much about her: a simple yet powerful design, minimal but bearing all essential parts. The weight of the instrument alone is just about one kilo and easily carried. Speaking of carrying: the DVINA comes in a soft bag offering plenty of space for rosin, strings and a bow. The bag is rolled up (like a small carpet) and fixated. If you travel abroad the bag can be stored inside a black cardboard tube with acrylic caps. The tube is extremely durable and offers also a carrying handle.

How does she sound? Pure, very very pure. Plugging the DVINA into the mixer offers you a sound like sitting on the strings: voluminous and rich of detail. No noise, no interferences. No need for a contact microphone anymore. DVINA is a living sonic wire in your hands. You can create glissandos and the sound on your headphones rushes from glistening highs to bassy lows. It's fun to dabble across on the strings, exploring what is possible with this instrument. You can create effects of extreme random notes just switching fingers quick on the imaginary frets. Or you let the strings drone on and on.

DVINA webs two worlds together – either you play her classically trained or in my case free of any notation or harmonic system. She can be a truly serene beauty recalling the elegance of John Cales violin or a beast matching the microtonal shifts of György Ligeti. It's up to you and your finger slide, your playing behaviour with the bow and the mood your in. The DVINA serves as an entry into a world where each stroke and hand gesture has an instant impact. Tension and release, struck chord and picking. Everything is possible.

Conclusio

„I never played a cello before“ – „Not sure if my fingers are able to create something beautiful on a string“ – „That's an instrument for people who want to learn it over the next ten years“: Don't let these arguments stay between you and your interest. The DVINA offers a steep learning curve indeed. It will take months of practice and years of experience to m a s t e r her but in the meantime you should be able to find a way to express yourself with her. Expression far off from notation, „good“ or „bad“ sounds. DVINA offers a very unique world and her possibilities are endless. You can use her as a envelope trigger in your modular setup, you can place an e-bow on her and turn her into a drone machine. The DVINA serves as a translator of your ideas. You just need your hands and imagination. ■ THORSTEN SOLTAU