The Kelstone (Stéphane Landtmeters)

It doesn't happen every day that somebody from Belgium invents a new musical instrument. And when it does happen these are instruments that will never become known and sink very rapidly into oblivion. Adolphe Sax on the other hand did succeed in creating a real innovation. The saxophone has become an established value and the world of music today can't be thought without it. What Adolphe Sax was for the saxophone, is Jan Van Kelst for the Kelstone. Question is whether there is a future alike for the Kelstone, but it looks promising.
For 15 years Jan Van Kelst (JVK) played another instrument with bass and high notes and that you play by hammering on the strings. The difficulty to master this instrument was the motivation for JVK to create a new instrument. Two years ago JVK made his first prototype and now that the Kelstone is protected by an international patent application, JVK is ready to step into the spotlights with the Kelstone.

Presentation:

In fact the Kelstone is made of two new, also complete instruments that are positioned opposite of each other. They are put on a stand and lie in front of you like a piano or a keyboard. They are inclined a bit so that the public can see the fingers of the Kelstonist (how do you call someone who plays the Kelstone?). It also gives a good visibility of the fingers, strings and touchboard while you are playing it. With your left hand you mainly play the bass-strings on that part of the Kelstone (guitar-arm) that lies the furthest away from you. The right hand plays on the nearest arm and mainly chords and/or melody. You can also do the reverse for a lefthanded guitar- or bassplayer who want to start on the Kelstone. To do this you have to mirror the strings like you do on a guitar for lefthanded people. It is logic that a lefthanded person wants to keep his left hand to do the most virtuoso parts, that is mostly in the high register. This gives a complete unique situation, best compared with that of a piano… but totaly turned around.
What you also can do, is play on one Kelstone-arm with both hands, and that gives a impressive possibility for virtuosity.
For amplification you use bas- and guitaramplifier. All the usual effects like distortion, Chorus, Wah-wah, delay, etc can perfectly be used.
To put it simple: the Kelstone is a cross between guitar, bassguitar and piano and is totally analogue.
Maybe in the future there will be like with the guitar MIDI-pickups that will give acces to all kind of synth-sounds. Think of all the possibilities here.

Description:

A complete Kelstone have two arms, imagine two very wide guitar-necks. Each neck has 9 strings, so 18 in total. Each arm has frets and pickups just like a guitar and a bassguitar. The lowest strings are like those of a bassguitar and the highest like those of a guitar. With the top of your fingers you hammer on the strings. The strings are, contrary to the guitar, consequently tuned in fourths. So from low to high: Melody Kelstone: Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, B, E, A, D. For the Bass Kelstone: G, C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, B. The advantage of this is that once you know a chord or a scale,

you can play that figure all over the arm independently of where you start, unlike the guitar or the piano: only the fundamental changes, the fingering stays the same, as well horizontally as vertically(= 'Barré'-principle).
You might think: Guitar= 6 strings, Kelstone= 18 strings thus 3 times as hard to master. The contrary is true thanks to amongst others this 'Barré'-principle.
Because of the fact that on one arm there are bass- as well as guitarstrings, you can with one hand play intervals of 5 octaves and the total range of the instrument is 6 octaves. This you can't do on a guitar, bassguitar or piano.
Thanks to the muter you can mute the strings and control the dynamics of your play like guitarplayers do when they 'palmute'.

Ergonomics:

Here the Kelstone has a lot of advantages compared to the guitar and piano. JVK states proudly that there has been done a ergonomical study by IDEWE that says that the Kelstone rates better in this area than the guitar or piano. The arms of the player as well as the wrists have a natural position while playing and because the Kelstone arm for the lefthand is the mirrored version of the instrument for the righthand, the patterns stay the same for both hands unlike the piano where the order of the fingers is inversed. Another thing that makes the Kelstone easier than guitar is that you don't need to synchronise left-and righthand to play one note: one action of one finger gives you one note.

Practical:

JVK came to our editorial office to demonstrate the Kelstone, just with a drummer to accompany him. JVK played at the same time the bass-and guitarpart and sang as well. What you heard was just the sound of a rockband although that they were just the two of them. We could clearly see that with the Kelstone you can accompany, solo, compose as well as arrange. Doing bendings and slidings poses no problem whatsoever, a thing that keyboardplayer will envy.
The Kelstone is visual also attractive: as a watcher you can see the fingers dance over the touchboard while the player is free to move and dance while he is performing.
The sound is like that of a guitar and a bassguitar but due to the hammer technique it has a specifique character. Effects can be used and combined separatly so that for instance you can have a clean bass-sound with a distorted guitarsound.

Conclusion:

It sure is an innovation! There are ergonomical advantages to other instruments that can't be denied. The Kelstone in innovative and offers infinitive possibilities. The Kelstone is to the guitar, bass and keyboard what the snowboard is to the ski's. And for all the bass-guitar and keyboardplayers who fear this competition: the Kelstone can do all that but doesn't have to necessarily: it is nice to combine the Kelstone with other instruments such as guitar, bass, keyboard, horns and so on.
We believe there is a bright future for this instrument and wish JVK a lot of succes with his new invention.