



Avoidable Mistakes Most Guitar Players Make

Well it's a whole new decade and if you are like most people you will have made some New Year's resolutions. Hopefully, since you are reading this, one of those resolutions was improving your guitar player skills and becoming a better musician.

No matter what level you are currently playing at or what level you aspire to get to there are always areas where improvements can be made. Playing music is commonly thought of as an innate and easy task and therefore many people think you are born with musical credentials, or you can learn to play a guitar in quick time. Of course that is not true, there are many traps ahead for the unwary that hold you back, create frustration and disappointment, and severely limit your success rate.

In my teaching practice I have many experiences where prospective students have been playing for 20-30 years, but only have the know-how and ability of a student with 3-6 months private tuition. There are many mistakes that keep appearing in guitarists' previous educational background evident when they begin lessons with me. I thought I would share some of those mistakes with you so you can quickly get on the right track for 2010. The mistakes that follow here are only a few, there are plenty more.

Teaching yourself how to play

If you have the ability to structure a good learning program and oversee yourself doing it, then great, do it. However, trying to go it alone is very frustrating, stressful, and time consuming which I don't recommend. It is much easier and quicker to achieve your musical goals with a great teacher who has a proven strategy and track record.

The electric guitar is a relatively new instrument and many players from the 1950s and 1960s had to teach themselves because there were no teachers or proven methods in how to play modern rock, jazz and blues tunes of the day. Today that has changed and there are many good teachers and schools about who you can take advantage of. Having a good teacher will also make your learning experience a lot more fun.

Many players will say they have taught themselves to impress others, but the best way to impress others is with your musical skills, not verbal skills, so get yourself a good teacher now. Before you do however, make sure to check out their background, what they teach and their success rate – don't just settle for the cheapest or closest teacher to you – or risk being dissatisfied.

Overwhelming

A common problem and affects nearly all players at some stage in their life, although it is more common among learners and intermediate level players. Overwhelming is caused by the taking in of too much information and content and not being able to apply it to the music you play. The problem used to be bad enough before the internet came into being, but now with so many guitar-related sites and information available on the web the problem is immense. Many players think that the more content and theoretical things they can cram into short spaces of time the better the player they will be, but it generally makes you worse. To avoid this problem, narrow things down to small bits of information, learn to apply them, and take your time before moving on.

Taking lessons from or listening to ineffective others

Although there are many good teachers in NZ there are also a lot who have had no training at all and are really ineffective. These teachers will cost you a lot in terms of both money and time. Although a person might be a quality player, having teaching qualities is another different area and takes years to learn and develop. Taking musical advice from friends, family, and inexperienced guitar players can also be very costly in terms of frustration and time wasting. Be very careful who you learn and take advice from.

Learning things in the wrong order

This problem not only occurs for the self-taught, but also players who get lessons. When learning any new subject there is an order that things have to be achieved and understood for progress to happen, you witness that at school or university. However many players get a little confidence up and want to jump a few rungs on the learning ladder, which results in work that is not only misunderstood but cannot be implemented properly by the player. To avoid this problem, stick to what your teacher is going through with you, or if you are teaching yourself (I hope you are not) – try to keep within your limits.

Ignoring problem areas

Having trouble with your right hand technique? What about your left hand? Can you do pull offs and hammer ons smoothly? Are some other areas of your guitar abilities sloppy? If so, what are you doing about it? Quite often we ignore areas of our playing technique if the problem seems small, but it is these small areas where large improvements can be made. Whatever you are having any slight trouble with – isolate it, slow it down, and analyse what you are doing wrong. Then

all you have to do is begin doing it slowly in the correct way.

Not having a clear goal

Having clear, achievable, and measurable objectives are paramount if you want to become the best you can possibly be, but many guitar players have not thought about this. When players first begin lessons all they want to do is to play a few songs and that is enough of a goal in itself, but when you have been playing a while your goals need to change. Goals are not set in concrete; they need to change as you become more proficient and musically aware. If you haven't got any good goals to achieve this year then it would be best to begin thinking about them now, write them down and begin implementing them.

Focusing on aspects that are not goal related

It is surprising how many players are learning things that have no relation at all with their goals. Pursuing other areas of guitar technique outside of your specific goals can waste immense time. For example if you want to be heavy metal guitarist, then learning finger picking technique could hamper your progress. Or if you only want to play fingerstyle, correct pick technique or strumming styles will not interest you. It is handy to know other guitar techniques and styles no doubt, but you need to achieve your goals first and then learn other areas of guitar technique you think will come in handy later.

Not being able to read notation

Many guitar players read tablature but not music notation. If you are among that group it is a serious musical disadvantage. Sure, you don't need to read music if you just want to do your own thing and work in a narrow area, but being able to read real music notation increases your learning rate and the things you can do within the music business. The great blues guitarist B.B. King advises all upcoming players to be able to read notation – good advice I think.

How many of these mistakes are you currently making? Most of them are easy to implement, but if you can only work on one or two right now you will find a big improvement in your abilities and have more fun playing guitar. You also might like to check out my very first NZM article titled 'A Common Mistake' from the Aug/Sept 2002 issue, see it here online, or see it on my website at www.guitar.co.nz

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