

The Guitarist Vs the Musician

I thought with this article I would take many of you out of your comfort zone and see how you fare. In my seminars and workshops I constantly talk about guitarists vs musicians and slaves vs masters. Many people find this difficult to understand at first and even months later are still thinking about this subject.

When most people begin playing guitar they normally get a chord book and begin to teach themselves a few things like chords, a few strums, then onto a few songs. There is nothing wrong with that, but few get any further than that because it is too difficult to teach yourself, you make real slow progress, and it is very frustrating because you don't know if you are doing things right or wrong. All this leads to low motivation and therefore never achieving your goals. Afterall, how can you teach yourself something you know nothing about?

This type of beginning rarely happens with other instrumentalists. For example it is very rare that you will come across a self-taught pianist, sax player, violinist, etc. This explains why many guitarists find it intimidating playing with other players. When playing with trained musicians it becomes frustrating for guitarists because the other instrumentalists expect them to perform things that they can't do, and when they communicate they do it in such a way the guitarist just cannot understand. So what is the difference between a guitarist and a musician?

A guitarist is one who plays the guitar physically, hasn't got much in the way of what I call head stuff (theory, aural, composition, and reading skills, as well as many others) and is generally either in a musical rut or not far away from one because they are self-taught. A musician is one who is generally well trained in guitar technique, they have all the head stuff well rehearsed, and they express themselves through the guitar. See the difference? Which one are you, a guitarist, or musician?

Why would one want to be a musician and not a guitarist you might ask? Well after a while you will tend to wake up to the fact that generally guitarists tend to be slaves and musicians seem to be the masters. The guitarist slaves away doing all the lower order work and getting no recognition for it because they haven't got the skills the musicians want. So they tend to get stuck with people of the same ilk and mindset and then are trapped in a situation that is sometimes difficult to get out of. The musician tends to get all the higher end jobs with the recognition and contacts to go onto bigger things within the industry. Because they work in a lot of areas they tend to have larger networks of people to draw work from.

Whether you want to be a guitarist/slave or a musician/master is up to you. Making the transition to a musician is reasonably easy if you have the desire and determination to do it. Here is why and how.

There is only one way that you can become a complete musician and that is to study with a top teacher or attend one of the many good tertiary courses now available in NZ. Whether you want to be a rock, jazz, classical, blues or any other sort of musician, there is a well-planned course that can take you along the path to being a complete musician. Even if you consider yourself an advanced player there is always something new to learn.

Many of New Zealand's leading professional musicians teach in one of the tertiary institutions. It is in these places that you will meet them, perform each day in front of others to increase your confidence, and to make life-long friendships and contacts that will help you later on in your career. You might have already noticed that music jobs are not advertised like other jobs. Musicians are employed by word of mouth referral all the time, which is why contacts are so important.

No matter whether you want to be a professional or an amateur, other musicians are expecting a lot more from guitar players these days. Like reading charts, playing gigs with no rehearsal, recording sessions done in one or two takes, playing unfamiliar styles of music and the like. You do not need to be the best player in the world, but you do need to know what you are doing. The stories of someone

picking up a guitar learning a few chords and becoming an overnight success are myths I'm afraid.

Becoming a musician is a bit like becoming a "born again guitarist". The more you learn, the more fun you have with the instrument and the more time you will want to spend with music. If you are in a dead end job or looking for a new career, then I challenge you to throw it in, go and study and become part of the largest industry in the world, the entertainment industry. The NZ entertainment industry is on a roll at the moment, so why don't you roll with it?

Being a musician as opposed to a guitarist is the key to having a successful career in the music business no matter where you live, and no matter whether you want to be a pro or an amateur. The key to longevity in music is in a good education so make sure you get one. Once you have all the required knowledge at your disposal you can then teach yourself, but I prefer to call it self-discovery. Have I got you thinking now?

They are the definitions of a guitarist and a musician. How you sell yourself is another matter.

.....
This article was first published in the [New Zealand Musician Magazine](#) Aug/Sept 2003 issue.
© Kevin Downing 2003 © New Zealand Musician Magazine 2003. Used with permission

For more great tips see Kevin's book *The Secrets of Successful Practising for Guitarists* here
<http://www.guitar.co.nz/products/>

Kevin Downing is a professional guitarist, teacher, and author. Join his FREE monthly newsletter NOW at www.guitar.co.nz It is full of tips, news, songs and many other interesting topics concerning guitarists.

.....