



## Are You In A Rut?

It's been wintery for a few months now and things do slow down in the cold. A few people have asked me lately how to get out of a 'rut' situation?

A 'rut' is, it is when you think you are not making any, or much progress, and they evidently were feeling like they were completely stalled in their efforts of getting better on guitar, even though they might have been practising and playing every day. Sometimes you might even hate everything you do on guitar, it really can get that bad.

A lot of guitarists suffer from it at some stage, and some have suffered from it for many years. Some of the symptoms are that you haven't learnt anything new for a long time, practising and playing has stopped being enjoyable, you fall back on the same old songs, riffs, licks, all the time, and start to think you should be a lot better than what you are. There are many more symptoms and signs too numerous to mention but this column will take a look at just the few of the main ones.

**You haven't learnt anything new for a while.**

Many players don't know what to learn next, or the order they should learn things in. This can stop you in your tracks. If you are like most people, you are trying to learn stuff that is way over your head and far too difficult to make any real progress – and that is definitely de-motivating.

If that describes you, then you need to lower your sights and begin to play and practice some easier things. Those easier things can sound just as good as the difficult ones if you play them well. You will have much more fun if you keep within your limits, while just stretching yourself every now and then.

**Practising and playing is not enjoyable anymore.**

This can stem partly from the previous fault, trying things that are too difficult. Or maybe your instrument is not well set up to make it easy to play? Maybe your environment is not well suited for practising.

Make sure it is not too hot or cold in the practice room, which is a sure killer of enjoyment. Try leaving your guitar on a stand. If you have to get it out of a case and put it away all the time that can be a motivation killer as well. How many other environment issues like those can you improve?

**You keep playing the same old songs, riffs and licks, etc.**

Many players do only play their favourite songs and riffs but it comes at the expense of personal musical growth. Some are just too lazy to learn new things, but often those same players who repeatedly play all their favourite songs don't ever master them very well either.

The trick here is to be learning one or two small things a week that aid your musical growth, and also learning how to use those new things in some songs you like so that you can be out playing with your friends.

**You think you should be better than what you are now.**

If this is your thinking, how are you measuring it? Who are you comparing yourself with?

You can't compare what you are doing now to something you were doing a year ago if you can't measure it. Remember that if you can't measure it, you can't see the results. All you are doing is assuming something, and when you assume stuff much of the time you are wrong.

There are many ways you can measure things in music. For example you can get a metronome to measure your scale speed in terms of beats per minute. You can record yourself playing something, then play it again a year later and compare the two recordings. You can record yourself playing to a metronome and listen back to your timing. There are plenty of other ways you can measure your musical growth and challenge yourself.

In fact, the weirder it seemed to me at the time, the more I seemed to love it. You might too.

You also want to be thinking about playing with people who are more advanced than you in terms of their musical journey. I am not just talking about people who can physically play better than you, but also who are more advanced in their theory, ear skills, composition, arranging and recording skills as well. Physically playing the guitar is only around 10-15% of what you really need to know. You can learn a lot from other people if you get to play or jam with them.

**Even the internet hasn't helped.**

I've saved the best one for last – many people call me to say that the internet has not helped them in any way, and in fact it has only increased their frustration. As Albert Einstein once said, "Information is not knowledge, the only source of knowledge is from experience."

The internet is full of information, but can't give you experience. The only way you can get experience is to be sitting right next to someone in the same room who is experienced and working with them. Similar to what you do

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Who are you comparing yourself with? Joe Satriani, Joe Bonamassa, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page? Those guys are professionals who have been playing for many years, and putting in long hours practising and playing. If you haven't been putting in the practice time or been playing for as long as they have, then it is no wonder you are nowhere near them in terms of skill level. But really, you should never compare yourself to anyone else. You should only be comparing yourself to what you did last year and measuring the changes. If you haven't improved since last year, then you will need to do something about it.

**The people you jam with play the same boring stuff all the time.**

Then you need to be a bit more selective in who you jam or perform with. The people you pick to play with should challenge you in a few different directions like, playing new genres of music, playing with different instruments, like trumpets etc. This is the challenge that I loved when I first started and found myself playing in big bands, jazz, country, blues and Irish bands.

at work when you are learning something new. That experienced person will be giving you feedback on your progress, correcting faults, steering you in the right direction and so on. That is what you don't get on the internet.

There are many ways you can get into a rut, and there are also many ways you can get out of a rut as well. The most efficient way I know of is to get some lessons with an experienced teacher – one who has a track record of success. Experienced teachers are working all day long with people who have experienced ruts, they have antidotes and know how to get you out of it quickly so you may never have to experience that pain again.

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