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Welcome

Well the first term has come and gone, and now we are into the second term! I hope everyone has had a great Easter break, and is refreshed and revitalised and ready for another term!

New Teaching Location at Samford

My teaching location at Samford has changed, and now will be at the Farmer's Hall, in Main Street. I now have a permanent office on the ground floor, in the front of the building. The Farmer's Hall is located centrally in the Village, opposite John Scott Park, and next to the Foot Health Clinic. Many thanks to St Paul's Anglican Church for allowing me the use of the Church Hall for lessons for the past 12 months or so! The Gap teaching studio remains at 39 Kirri St.

Mount Nebo Open Mic

Every now and again I organise an open Mic session at the Mount Nebo Hall. The next one is this Saturday, 30th April. Any of my guitar students are welcome to come along and play a tune, or have a jam. Just bring your instrument and a lead to plug in. If you want to come along, just give me a ring on 3289 8020, or speak to me in lessons, so I can make sure everyone gets a spot! The cost is \$5, tea and coffee are available, and the night goes from 7pm to 11pm. This Saturday, the featured act will be The Hinterlanders.

Rob at the Homestead

I am continuing with my residency at the Samford Homestead restaurant on Friday nights (except the first Friday of the

month). I play a set of jazz standards and grooves, seasoned with some Latin and Balkan flavours. The show is called Rob Reeves and his Virtual Guitar Orchestra, and features me and my looping software. The next date is Friday 29th April, and then continues on the 13th, 20th and 27th of May. The music starts at 6:30pm! Phone Steve on 3289 1485 to make a booking.

Samford State School External Enrichment Program

I am pleased to again be involved with the Samford State School External Enrichment Program this term. The program will be running on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. The format is group classes of five to seven kids for a one hour class. The program will be offered for students of Samford State School, with classes for years 3 & 4, and for years 5 to 7. For more information, or to confirm your booking please contact Meagan Scaysbrook on 3289 3991. The program will be commencing in week 3.

Mount Nebo S.S. Guitar Ensemble

I am also happy to be working with the students of Mount Nebo State School to develop a guitar ensemble! We meet for half an hour per week, and learn the basics of playing together, and fulfilling different roles in a band, such as lead, rhythm and bass guitar parts. Group lessons after school on Thursday are also available – contact Rob for details!

What's in a pick?

Many popular styles of guitar make use of a plectrum, or pick for plucking the strings. Styles include rock, country, jazz, blues and some folk styles such as bluegrass. In fact, as far as guitar playing goes, guitar plectrum style comes mostly from the 'flatpicking' bluegrass style, from where it made its way into blues, country, jazz and subsequently rock. Flatpicking refers to the fact that the pick is flat, to distinguish this style from the blue grass picking style where picks are attached to the thumb and fingers.

The use of picks became more prominent when steel string guitars began to be more common, in the early twentieth century. These guitars were made to be louder than the classical style guitars with their gut (today nylon) strings, and to achieve this increase in volume high tension steel strings were used. Using a pick helped to preserve the fingers, and helped to get the most volume out of these guitars, in the days before electrical amplification.

I encourage my students to learn both picking and finger style playing. Both have their uses, and each has it's own distinctive range of sounds, tones, and expression that can be achieved.

Most picks today are made from plastic, and come in a range of gauges. Most picks can be bought in a heavy (0.85-1.2mm), medium(0.70-0.85mm), or thin (0.45-0.69mm) gauge. Heavy or medium picks are favoured by most lead players, as their stiffness makes it possible to play quickly and accurately. A heavy or medium pick tends to produce more volume than a thin pick, and a brighter more definite sound. However some people prefer thin picks because of the variety of sounds possible to achieve. Best thing is to try out some different gauge picks for yourself, and see which you like best!

In the Gypsy Jazz style, a very thick and heavy pick is used, traditionally made from an old button. The thickness and heaviness helps to gain extra volume,

and assists with the fast lines used in this style of playing. In traditional playing of this type, the guitarists had to compete without amplification with the rest of the band, and whatever ambient noise was about. These days of course, amplification is used, but the thick heavy pick is retained because of the distinctive sound it helps to create. While most picks are made of plastic, other materials are used as well. These include metal, wood and glass. Metal gives a bright tone, but can quickly wear strings and damage the guitar finish with scratches! Wood picks give a warmer tone than plastic, and each pick produces a different sound due to natural variation in structure. Hard woods like Rosewood should be used. Glass picks can make a great variety of sounds, depending on the shape, size and finish.

So there are a lot of possibilities with picks – it can be worth while having a few different options to experiment with, to see what kind of different sounds they can help you to make, and how they can help you get the best out of your playing!

Basic Guitar Care

A guitar needs to be looked after well in order to stay sounding good, and to remain in good playing condition. A guitar is constructed out of wood and glue, and needs to be protected from things that can adversely affect wood and glue! There are two main enemies to beware of, heat and moisture. Heat can soften glue, and cause wood to expand or crack, leading to problems with the guitar including warping, joints opening up, and similar disasters. The guitar has to be made to very strict tolerances in order to stay in tune and remain playable (having a good "action"). Any warping in the neck or body, can affect the tuning and action (the height of the strings above the fingerboard), making the guitar unplayable.

Moisture can also be deadly, as it can soften glues, cause wood to swell and soften, and cause veneers to delaminate. This can lead to annoying rattles, a loss of sound volume and tone, and can affect the action and the ability to tune up

properly.

So always keep your guitar away from heat and moisture as much as possible. Never leave it in a locked car, as the temperature inside will almost surely damage the guitar. Never leave it in direct sunlight, even inside its case. And never leave it in a damp room or basement for any length of time.

When you finish playing, wipe down your guitar with a soft polishing cloth. With a separate cloth, wipe each string, which will help you to prolong the life of your strings. If you notice anything that's not right about your guitar, it's usually best to get it seen to as early as possible. The worse a problem gets, the more expensive it usually is to put right! Warning signs that indicate attention might be required include the guitar not tuning up as well as it used to, or getting harder to play up the neck.

If there's anything you are not sure of with your guitar, feel free to get me to have a look at it in lessons. I can recommend a luthier (someone who makes or repairs guitars) for you if required!

Oh I almost forgot. **Never put steel strings on a classical guitar!** The extra tension will quickly damage your guitar, and it may not be possible to repair it. It probably won't damage a steel string guitar if you put nylon strings on it, but even so, you won't get a very good sound. The strings will be under tensioned, and this may affect the playability of the guitar. The steel string guitar needs the extra tension of steel strings to bring out its best qualities. So always use the type of strings that your guitar is designed for. This will give you the best sound, and avoid damaging your guitar. If you have any doubt about the correct strings, just ask me in lessons!

Steve Vai

One of the things I like to do for my students is get them to have a listen to great music and great guitar players, which they might not otherwise be aware

of. Anyone who is serious about playing the guitar should have a listen to some Steve Vai. Steve Vai played in the Frank Zappa band in the 70s, and was part of David Lee Roth's (ex singer from Van Halen) band. He later joined Whitesnake, the band formed by ex Deep Purple singer David Coverdale, playing with them from 1989 to 91. However it would be wrong to pigeon hole Vai as simply a rock guitarist, or a heavy metal guitarist. He is first and foremost a brilliant musician. Apparently, in his days playing with Frank Zappa, he would challenge audience members to bring musical scores, which he would sight read brilliantly. Vai actually considers himself as much a composer as a guitarist, and has composed many pieces for orchestra and electric guitar, a new form of musical expression he calls "evo," short for evolutionary.

Some quotes from Steve Vai: "Once you understand the written language of music and the possibilities and limitations of various instruments, composing music is pure liberation. It's an art form that allows for deep personal expression. For me composing is the ultimate playground for my imagination." He also says, "my task is to merge my authentic rock sensibilities with my orchestrational skills to create a brand of contemporary music that is unique and fulfilling on an emotional and melodic level for the listener".

Steve Vai has made some of his tunes available on Youtube. Search for "Steve Vai Tender Surrender" and have a listen to this great piece of guitar music. You will see him start off using finger picking and thumb strokes, reminiscent of jazz great Wes Montgomery. His sound here is very George Benson-esque, playing octaves in a melodic sequence. He then moves to using a pick. Listen for the difference in sound and musical expression that results. Look out for how he uses repeated patterns moving up the fingerboard, and use of bends, tremolo, and hammer ons and hammer offs. Also note how the technical aspects of his playing are always subservient to the melody, and the energy of the piece! Enjoy!

