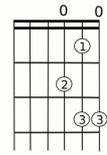


Rob's Guitar School

Guitar and Bass Tuition

Proprietor: Rob Reeves - ABN: 94 844 580 924
PO Box 176, Mount Nebo, Q, 4520

Email: rob@robsguitarschool.com
Web: www.robsguitarschool.com



Ph: (07) 3289 8020

Mob: 0408 854 077

Newsletter No 5.

May 2012

From Rob

Well the year is well underway, first term is done and the second well on the way. I hope all students are enjoying their increasing aptitude with the guitar, and their music. Remember that practice is the key, a half an hour each day will have you advancing well on the road to meeting your musical goals!

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, Bossa Novas and grooves. The restaurant is doing a seafood basket on Friday nights, which is great value at under \$20. The music starts at 6:30pm! Phone Steve on 3289 1485 to make a booking, and check that there hasn't been a late change.

Rob's Guitar Jazz

Looking for music for your party, function, wedding or other occasion? I have available a number of musical offerings which you might consider! I do a solo set of jazz standards and Bossa Novas, which is ideal dinner music creating a great atmosphere – and which I play at the Homestead Restaurant. See [here](#) for some demo tracks! The East West Hot Club Gypsy Jazz band featuring Sean Quinlan and Henry Wang on guitars and myself on Double Bass is also available. See [here](#) for some demos!

Teaching Dates 2011

Term 2: Mon 16 April – Sat 23 June

Term 3: Mon 9 July – Sat 22 Sept

Term 4: Mon 8 Oct – Sat 15 Dec

Note that lessons are not held on, and no charge is made for public holidays. However lessons are held on pupil free days.

Principles to play by

Over many years of playing I have developed six principles which will help you get the most out of your guitar playing and practice time. Here they are!

(1) **Slow down!**

Mistakes are a sign that you are trying to play something faster than your current level of neuro-muscular development permits. If you make a mistake, slow down and try the passage again. Slow down until you can play the passage perfectly, then practice it at that slow pace. This gives your fingers a chance to learn how they need to move to play the passage flawlessly. If you don't slow down, you will be practising making mistakes, and that's what will happen when you play!

(2) **Keep it Simple!**

Don't try to play things that are overly complicated, and way beyond your capacity. Go for simple things that you can enjoy playing, or things that you can master with a small amount of practice. That way, you have plenty of brain power available for adding musicality and expressiveness to what you play. People will enjoy it and respond to the musicality.

If you try to play things which you find complex and difficult, they will sound like a technical exercise to listeners. Over time, as your ability improves, things you once found impossible will become easy!

(3) **Be Relaxed!**

Everything works better if you are in a relaxed state – relaxed in mind and body. If you find yourself tensing up, it's probably because you are trying to play something too quickly, or something too difficult. See (1) and (2)! And learn how to consciously relax your hands, arms, neck, back and stomach muscles. Stretches are good, as are "shaking out" the tension in your hands and arms.

(4) **The power of Focus!**

There are so many things to learn on the guitar. It's easy to feel swamped and over-whelmed. But we can only go one step at a time, so focus on learning one thing at a time. For example, work on learning one new piece at a time. Likewise, work on one particular aspect of your playing for a period of time, such as three or four weeks. By focussing, we can learn one thing well, and this then becomes a foundation for learning other tunes, or scales, or chords, or arpeggios or other aspects of playing.

(5) **The power of Repetition!**

The guitar, as any musical instrument, is a physical skill based on the development of fine motor skills. These skills develop through regular practice. Best is if we can set up a daily routine of practice. The power of repetition then begins to work, both within each practice session, by playing a small passage over and over, and in improvements from day to day as you continue working on the same piece or technique as the weeks go by. But please see (4) – focus and repetition work together!

(6) **The principle of Economy**

With guitar, try and do the most with the least! I always encourage my students to reduce finger and hand movements to a minimum. That way there is more time to play accurately. There is more scope for expression and playing up tempo with

economical movements, because fingers and hands have less to do!

So to make the best progress on the guitar, slow down, keep it simple, relax, focus, and make the power of repetition and economy work for you.

Practice tracks

Don't forget that I have uploaded a wide selection of practice tracks on my website, at robsguitarschool.com. These are great for helping you to develop your improvisation skills, and will help you lay the foundation for playing your solos. You will find practice tracks in many styles, including rock, folk, funk, blues and jazz. So hop onto the website, and click on "practice tracks" under the list of categories. For each practice track, I give you some hints and guidelines. For maximum benefit, read these and try to put them into practice. Many practice tracks also have some examples of Solo's I have recorded – have a listen to these, and see if you can do better!

The power of the app!

With so many people now having iPhones, iPods and iPads at their disposal, I thought it would be useful for many students to know of some handy apps that can help with guitar practice.

Metronomes

iBeat: This is a free App for iPhone, iPod, and iPad. It does everything most students will need in a metronome, and you can customise the sounds and volume of each beat. Being free, you have to put up with an advertising banner, but that won't stop you using it usefully for your practice! If it really bothers you, you can pay \$0.99 to get the add free version!

Pro Metronome: Also a free app for iDevices! Has more time signatures than iBeat, but the sounds are more "electronic" sounding. A pro version is available for \$0.99 that lets you see a visual representation of a mechanical metronome, or makes your iphone flash in time. The free version is all most people will need.

There are many other metronome apps available for free or a small fee.

Tuners

There are a lot of free tuner apps that just make the sound of the guitar string for you to tune to by ear. This is not very helpful for beginners – it is much more accurate to get a tuner that tells you the actual pitch that is being played, and whether it is sharp or flat. That way you can begin training up your ears to the right pitches for each string.

One free tuner app that does this is *n-Track Tuner*. Just load the app, and play, and you see what note is closest, and whether you are sharp or flat. For a small fee you can get rid of the adds! There are many other free tuner apps, but none of the other ones I have looked at work satisfactorily!

Multi Track Recorders

A really useful practice tool is to be able to record yourself playing some chords, then play them back while you make up a melody or play a lead break. Some Apps that will make this possible are *GarageBand* (under \$10), or *Music Studio Lite* (free). Another which is available for a small fee is *Multitrack DAW* (\$10.49). I have used *GarageBand* and can recommend it. In addition to recording yourself playing chords, you can very easily lay down your own practice track using the “smart drums” and “smart guitar” auto play functions, and enjoy playing along to a very good sounding guitar and drum track. There are also auto play “smart bass” and “smart keyboard”, so it is very quick and easy to set up a great sounding practice track to play along with. *Music Studio Lite* is limited to 2 audio tracks in the free version, a small fee unlocks many more. The two audio tracks are all you need for a practice tool. It doesn't seem to have the smart play functionality of *GarageBand*, which would make it less useful. I haven't used *Multitrack DAW*. While you can use the built in microphone for worthwhile practice, to get best use of

these apps, an input device that allows you to plug in an electric guitar is needed. This will greatly improve the sound quality. A cheap option is the *iRig* unit from Amplitube.

So enjoy your playing and practising!

Merle Travis

In this issue of the newsletter I want to look at a guitar player that has contributed greatly to the modern style, particularly in Country Music: Merle Travis. Known by some as the man with the golden thumb, Merle Travis is remembered for his picking style now referred to as Travis picking, which is a mainstay of country style picking. Merle was born in 1917 in Kentucky, and died in 1983. According to Wikipedia, he was one of the most influential guitarists of the 20th century! Chet Atkins acknowledges his debt to Merle Travis's guitar style, and Australia's own Tommy Emmanuel to Chet Atkins! In fact Tommy Emmanuel has performed with Tom Bresh, Merle's adopted son. Merle's early influences were drawn from a tradition of guitar finger-picking stemming from black country blues guitarists such as Arnold Shultz. The basic finger picking style combines a bass note picked with the thumb (or thumb pick attached to the thumb), with a melody line picked with the index finger. This thumb index finger style was also a feature of early black blues guitarists like Mississippi John Hurt. Merle's left hand technique made use of the thumb on his bass strings, a technique later employed by Jimi Hendrix, among others. Today, picking techniques involving thumb and index and middle fingers can be referred to as Travis picking, though Merle used only his index finger.

Check out the following tracks on YouTube. The first is a duet between Merle and Chet Atkins. Unfortunately just an audio track, but great playing in the Boogie Woogie Style that went on to influence so much of the modern electric blues:

[Boogie for Cecil](#)

In the next video, a country blues track

you can see Merle's thumb index finger technique, with the other fingers supporting his hand against the guitar body:

[Lost John](#)

And finally, check out this great performance by Merle and his son Thom Bresh:

[Merle and Thom](#)

I hope you enjoy finding out and listening to some music from Merle Travis, and enjoy getting to know a bit of guitar history.

Fund Raising Help

I am happy to help out with local fund raising activities from time to time, so if you are involved with a local school, church or community group, feel free to ask me if I can help out. In the past I have been able to provide assistance with fund raising to the Samford State School, Hilda Rd State School, and The Gap Uniting Church.

Reminder to all students

Please remember to bring along your manuscript book and guitar method to your lessons. Your manuscript book is important, as it allows me to keep track of the things you have been learning over the last few weeks – if you forget to bring it, it makes it difficult for me to keep you on course with what we are learning!

Staying free of injuries

A friend of mine who has studied martial arts for 25 years, once told me that an injury is a lesson in correct technique. This little snippet of wisdom has stuck in my mind, and I believe it is just as applicable to playing the guitar. Guitarists make a lot of use of their hands and fingers, and it is very unsettling when something goes wrong. Guitarists, like all musicians and people who use their hands and fingers a lot, are susceptible to the various forms of over use and

repetitive strain injuries.

As in many things, prevention is better than cure! I begin my day with a series of stretches of the hands, arms, and shoulders, which I have acquired over the years from various sources such as Yoga and physiotherapy. Experience has shown that injuries are far less likely when muscles in the arms and hands are kept well stretched.

Another important playing habit is to begin slowly, with a few warm up exercises, and gradually increase speed and complexity. Don't try the hard stuff cold! Also develop the habit of taking stock of your posture and state of relaxation in hands, arms, shoulders, neck and back. Regularly check that all these parts of your body are relaxed. If there is tension somewhere, put the guitar down for a minute, and stretch out, or shake out the relevant part of your body, or move a little. And don't forget to take a break for ten minutes every hour, when playing or practising!

Good technique, as I began this piece by saying, is also important to prevent injuries. Make sure that movements are relaxed and economical. Make sure that the wrist of each hand is not unduly bent, but follows a natural curve, and that the fingers are aligned with the forearms. Sometimes small differences in the way you hold the guitar can make a big difference to your technique – moving the elbow forward an inch on the guitar, for example, can put your strumming hand in a better position, raise the neck slightly, and help with the alignment of your fretting hand.

So think about your technique, stay relaxed, work on your economy of movement – not only will you play better, but you will increase your chances of staying injury free!

Rob carries a selection of strings, picks, stands, leads, tuners, and metronomes for your convenience. Enquire at Lessons.