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Newsletter No 6.

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From Rob

Thanks to all students and their families for a wonderful year of learning guitar in 2012, and looking forward to more guitar in 2013. I get a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure from seeing students of all ages increasing their skills and enjoyment. Remember that practice is the key! Every day is the best way!

I hope everyone had a bright and cheerful festive season, and I look forward to seeing you all again in when teaching gets underway again at the end of January!

Teaching Dates 2013

Term 1: Tue 29th Jan – Thu 28th March
Term 2: Mon 15th April - Fri 21st June
Term 3: Mon 8th July - Fri 20th Sep
Term 4: Tue 8th Oct - Fri 13th Dec

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

Term 1 2013 will be a short term, with only 8 or 9 lessons, depending on your day!

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!

In the last issue I went through some helpful apps for guitar players, covering tuners, metronomes, and recording apps. Here are two more worth a look!

Practice your solos

A great practice App that I use regularly is called iRealb.



This App allows you to type in chord charts for any song, and then plays them back for you at the speed you select, and in one of several styles. Styles include jazz, pop, latin and many others. Hundreds of chord charts for classic jazz, latin and pop tunes are available. For around \$11, this is a great practice tool for anyone who wants to work on their soloing technique, especially if interested in Jazz. It is available for Android as well as ios devices!

Loop it up

Another fun App which is great for practicing is called "Loopy".



It allows you to play a few bars then loop up what you have played, so that you can solo over the top. Or you can keep looping up layers to build up interesting musical textures and harmonies. In the settings, make sure that "count in recording" in track management is set. Then set the metronome to the speed you want, and use the "+" control to add the number of bars you want. Starting with 4 or 8 works well. Then just tap the track, and it will count you in and record the number of bars you set.

You will need a way of plugging your guitar into your ios device to use loopy, one solution is iRig, which can be found on ebay for under \$20. Both "Loopy" and "iRealb" sound much better when you have some external speakers to plug into. This is a necessity for a serious practice tool, as the built in speaker of iPads, iPods etc is pretty poor. If you have a practice amp already, you will find that many of them have an "auxiliary in" that is ideal for plugging your ios device into!

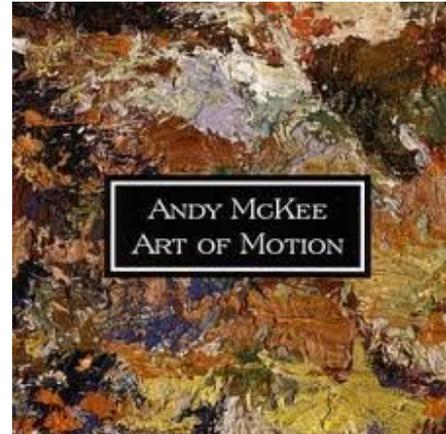
On the Playlist

Part of learning the guitar is getting to know the great repertoire of music, and the great exponents of the instrument. I think guitarists can learn from listening to all styles of music, and all types of guitarists, even if it's not their favourite style of music. As a guitarist, you never know what someone may ask you to play,

and it helps to have a broad appreciation of many musical styles.

So here are a few selections that I have been listening to recently, which you might like to follow up and have a listen to as well.

(1) **Andy McKee.** LP: The Art of Motion.



Andy McKee is a modern finger style acoustic guitarist, who shot to fame based on his youtube clips. He plays the guitar using all kinds of percussive and tapping effects, which gives him a very distinctive and personal style. Many acoustic players are incorporating these kind of approaches in their playing these days.

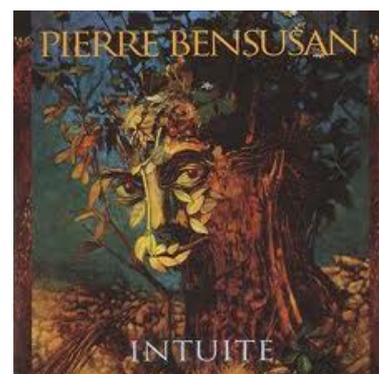
Have a look at

<http://youtu.be/Ddn4MGaS3N4>

where the technique is very non standard, with upside down left hand! The technique is more standard in the next one, but still lots of percussive effects and tapping:

<http://youtu.be/GRAiUzrmkMk>

(2) **Pierre Bensusan.** LP: Intuite.



Pierre is another fingerstyle player, but

with a very different style. Look at the following clip, and notice how the neck and the head of the guitar are pointing upwards instead of down or flat! Also note where his arm is resting on the guitar, and the lovely spiral shape of wrist and fingers.

<http://youtu.be/58m9wDsdqQA>

(3) **The Punch Brothers.**



They are an acoustic blue grass group. Have a look at the following clip. Once again notice the guitar player's technique – where is his elbow resting – and look at the curved wrist – though now this is a picking style.

<http://youtu.be/Hc1EfKiC064>

(4) **Ed Sheeran.**



Many people have probably heard of Ed Sheeran, but if you haven't and are partial to the singer songwriter genre, with a bit of contemporary pop crossover, check out Ed Sheeran. The following track is the acoustic version, where you can see his guitar style nicely:

<http://youtu.be/ZIGPTwNRYtU>

(5) Bob Dylan's latest release "Tempest" has a great track called Scarlet Town on it as well.

So I hope you enjoy exploring some of the above artists – remember to study their technique as well as to listen to and enjoy their music!

Classic Guitars – Fender Strat

Another aspect of learning the guitar is to develop your knowledge about the different types of guitars, and what kind of guitars are suited to different kinds of music. In this newsletter, I will look at one of the classic electric guitars, the Fender Stratocaster.



The classic Strat is defined by single coil pick-ups, a whammy bar (or tremolo arm), and a double cut-away body. The first two contribute to its distinctive sound, and the third to its playability. It also has individually adjustable bridge saddles for adjusting the intonation of each string.

The Fender company was started by Leo Fender, a radio repair man who began making amplifiers and amplified Hawaiian guitars in the mid 1940s. His first solid body electric guitar was released in 1950, and was later to become the telecaster. Design on the stratocaster began in 1953, based on feedback on the telecaster, mainly from country style guitarist Bill Carson, who was also a friend of Fender. Main changes were to make it easier and more comfortable to play. The Fender company was sold to CBS in 1965, and pre-1965 stratocasters are the most highly valued. Many players and collectors believe they have a superior quality and sound to the post 1965 models.

The Fender brand was sold again in 1985, and post 1985 guitars are reputed to have regained the quality and workmanship of the pre-1965 guitars, though some would say there is no comparison to a 1958

model!

The best quality Fender stratocasters are usually reputed to be those that are made in the United States. The base models are marketed today as the American Standard Stratocaster. There are many upmarket additions that will set you back more money!

Usually regarded as a step down in quality and sound is the standard stratocaster. There is a significant reduction in price, as these models are made in Mexico, with cheaper labour costs. However these are still good guitars if the made in America version is unaffordable.

A budget option is the Squier (by Fender) Stratocaster, which has been made in Japan, Korea, Indonesia, China, Mexico and even very briefly in the U.S.A. It is Fender's budget brand and represents good value student instruments. These make a very decent first electric guitar.

From about 1985 onwards, Fender Japan also made Stratocasters, and these made in Japan models may turn up secondhand. While many regard them as inferior to the Made in America models, they often represent good value and can be just as good as an American strat. I have to admit to a little bit of bias with this topic, as I have a 1985 one! The Japanese strats are made from Basswood, whereas the American made ones are made from Alder or Ash – which will give them subtly different tonal qualities. They were made in the same factory as many Ibanez and Epiphone guitars.

So if you are looking at buying a second hand strat, check where it is made – there will be a decal on the headstock.

Also beware of counterfeit guitars which are turning up on ebay and in private seller markets. Since some guitars such as Fenders or Gibsons can be quite valuable, unscrupulous operators are taking cheap Chinese mass produced guitars, and putting counterfeit stickers

on them to fool the unwary. If you locate the serial number, you can check to see the original manufacture date and location at the [Guitar Date Project](#), or find information on Fender serial numbers at [Guitar Attic](#). If this information is consistent with the claims being made for the guitar, that is a good sign! However it's not fool-proof.

If in doubt, confine purchases to a reputable musical instrument dealer. You might pay a bit more, but you will have increased confidence that you will be getting what you pay for.

The stratocaster is one of the most enduring and iconic guitars. One of the first artists to bring it into prominence was Buddy Holly. Hank Marvin from the Shadows also played the Stratocaster, and with it's whammy bar and twang defined the surf sound of the sixties. John Lennon and George Harrison used Strats on some recordings. It has been a mainstay of blues and rock and roll, and has made forays into many other musical genres!



Some great players who relied on strats:

Rock

Ritchie Blackmore (Deep Purple)
Eric Clapton
The Edge (U2)
John Frusciante (Red Hot Chili Peppers)
David Gilmour (Pink Floyd)
Jimi Hendrix
Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits)

Pete Townsend (The Who)

Blues/Roots

Ry Cooder
Robert Cray
Rory Gallagher
Buddy Guy
John Mayer
Stevie Ray Vaughan
Bonnie Rait

Country

Bill Carson
Vince Gill
Eddie Shaver.

Strats have also been played by finger pickers, jazz and funk players!

Pick-ups

The original Strats were fitted with three single coil pick-ups. Single coil pickups are responsible for the twangy distinctive Strat sound! Single coil pick-ups give a very responsive and direct sound, but can suffer from buzz and hum.

Later guitars introduced twin coil humbucking pickups, (a Gibson innovation featured on the Les Paul) which have a different sound, some would say a thicker and meatier sound. These days, strats can be bought with a combination of single coil and humbucker pickups (the "modern player series"). The humbucker is usually placed closest to the bridge (HSS – standing for Humbucker, Single, Single – configuration), as in the image below.



Rock and metal players may prefer the humbucker sound.

The Fender Strat is a versatile instrument capable of producing many different sounds especially in combination with a good amp and stomp box effects! Whatever kind of music you play, the Fender Strat deserves some serious consideration.

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. See [here](#) for some demo tracks! I can also provide a jazz guitar duo, or a Gypsy Jazz trio. See [here](#) for some demos!

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. I also plan to have some special guests dropping in from time to time to join the music. 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 at Zegatos

I have a residency on Saturday nights at Zegatos restaurant, located in the Ashgrove Golf Club, 863 waterworks Rd. Feel free to drop in for a meal and listen to the music – a selection of jazz standards, Bossa Novas, and assorted similar tasty guitar morsels! Please ring 3366 1842 to make a booking, and to make sure that there have been no late changes, as sometimes the restaurant may be booked up with a private function.