



Purchasing a Guitar and Learning to Play

Last time I discussed the three types of guitar, classical, acoustic steel string and electric guitars, and which type of guitar you should select for the style of music you want to learn.

Whether you decide to purchase a guitar from a music store, a pawn shop, an online auction site, like ebay, or from a private seller there are several things to look for when selecting the instrument that is right for you.

The easiest place to select a guitar is, of course, a music store. If you don't already play, don't worry, most shops have staff more than willing to play a guitar so you can hear what it sounds like. Shops have a wide range of instruments and also normally guarantee and fix any 'problems' that may not be obvious to a beginner. Different shops carry different brands so shop around for the best deal.

Private sellers, pawn shops and online auctions are also a good source for buying used and new guitars, but I only recommend buying online if you have some knowledge about the brand of guitar for sale. Unfortunately I have seen too many students who bought new guitars online that were poorly made and unplayable.

So what should you look for? Pick a guitar that you like the look of. Believe it or not, it will inspire you to pick it up and play. But more importantly, pick a guitar that sounds good. The range of tone between woods and construction can make a huge difference to the sound of the guitar.

Inspect the neck of the guitar to determine if it is straight. Though steel string acoustic and electric guitars can be adjusted this can be expensive and is not a job for a novice. Nylon string guitars with a bent neck are nearly impossible to fix. Also check string height off of the neck. If the string's 'action' is too high the guitar will be hard to play. Play each fret of each string up the neck. If you hear a buzzing sound it may indicate a bent neck or frets that are too high or low, which can be an expensive repair.

The tuning machine heads should turn easily. If

they are stiff or barely budge they may be faulty and break. Also, check for any structural damage like cracks or breaks and avoid instruments with structural defects or repairs.

So now that you have your new guitar, how do you learn to play it?

Many of you will have friends or relatives who play and these people can show you a few chords and melodies to get started. Hopefully they will show you how to play correctly. I get a lot of students who break into the *Smoke on the Water* riff during a lesson and usually they play it incorrectly because they learned it from a friend who didn't know the right way to play the song.

Teaching yourself can be a good way of learning if you have a good ear, are patient and disciplined enough to set your self a realistic practice routine. There are a lot of great players who are self taught and with the multitude of online lessons available the resources for teaching your self have never been better. However, online lessons and tabs are only as good as the person who puts them on the net. I see a lot of tabs and chord charts that are wrong because the 'author' didn't understand the way the song was played or the theory behind selecting the right chords. It is also easy to develop bad technique and it is much harder to change a bad habit than it is to learn correctly the first time.

If you decide to select a professional guitar teacher it is important that you select someone who understands the styles of music you want to play and who can demonstrate but, more importantly, explain to you how to play that way. A good teacher will be a good player, but a good player may not be the best teacher. The best teachers are patient, understanding, able to provide good technique and guidance, have a good knowledge of music theory and different playing styles and most of all love teaching.

Next time I will look at how to get the most out of your practice sessions to help you progress as quickly as possible.