

THE VERY FIRST STEPS

FIRST: LISTEN TO A LOT OF GREAT MUSIC

The most important step for becoming a good guitarist is listening to great music. You should listen to a lot of music and then listen to more music. It's important to understand that the best sources of music aren't necessarily the music provided by the mainstream media.

You need to approach music as a writer approaches literature. A writer studies classics from all ages and his style is inspired by what he studies. The style that you create will be an amalgamation of everything to which you have been exposed. It has been said, "You are what you eat," therefore, consider the importance of what you bring into your mind. The kind of music that you listen to will determine the kind of music you will produce. If you want to sound great, you should listen to great musicians — not only guitarists, but all other instruments as well.

Great musicians surpass the barriers of time. Their recordings have been kept since recording technology became available. I would recommend that you listen to old recordings as well as recent. For a list of some of my favorite guitarists, refer to Page 4. This first step should also become a lifelong habit. I can't stress enough the importance of listening to a lot of great music.

SECOND: SIGN UP FOR GUITAR LESSONS

Music is a language. To think we can learn a foreign language by simply looking through a dictionary is absurd. Scales, chords, and arpeggios like words in any language must be understood in the proper context. To learn music, you should be immersed in an environment where music is being communicated.

Based on my more than 30 years' experience as a professional musician and instructor, I can say without reservation that guitar lessons are critical for a student to become an accomplished guitarist. Good guitar instructors will keep you focused on your goals. They will also make you aware of your mistakes before you develop bad habits. They will teach you concepts and techniques that have taken them decades to learn. And, you will practice harder knowing that you have to be accountable to your instructor on a weekly basis. Make sure you find an instructor that teaches standard notation and music theory and has a structured syllabus using method books. I can honestly say my greatest breakthroughs as a beginner occurred when I was taking private lessons.

GREAT GUITARISTS

While there are numerous guitarists that have inspired me, this is a list of some of my favorites. To see videos of them, visit my website guitarlessonsbybrian.com.

1930s

Django Reinhardt

Charlie Christian

Oscar Aleman

Robert Johnson

1940s

Freddie Green

Oscar Moore

Herb Ellis

T-Bone Walker

1950s

Les Paul

Chet Atkins

Joe Maphis

Muddy Waters

1960s

The Beatles

Jimi Hendrix

Joe Pass

Nokie Edwards

1970s

Jimmy Page

David Gilmour

Steve Howe

Doc Watson

1980s

Steve Morse

Eric Johnson

Phil Keaggy

Stevie Ray Vaughn

1990s

Danny Gatton

Michael Hedges

John Jorgenson

Leo Kottke

2000s

Tommy Emmanuel

Doyle Dykes

John Pizzarelli

Howard Alden