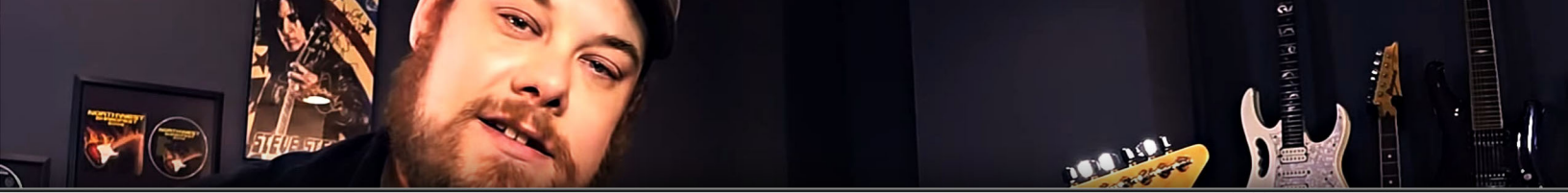


ah ha

We polled a handful of our instructors asking them a very simple, but important question.

**WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST 'AH-HA' MOMENT
YOU HAD IN THE HISTORY OF YOUR PLAYING?**





Allen Van Wert

25 Years of Playing. The "Robot". Author, composer, virtuoso player.



In terms of improvisation....

I caught on to placing notes along the rhythmic subdivision in a way that lets me play *any* and *every* note I want. I found that notes you play on **strong** beats make them more important, so "*good*" notes will resolve well on strong beats while non chord tones will sound overly tense. But there are usually more **weak** beats and ways to play around - to twist and turn your way until you hit a strong beat again with a target note. Melody itself likes to move in half steps so you will find that a linear chromatic idea works well due to its innate simplicity. A strong beat is easy to feel. It is usually where chord changes happen and also where a kick or snare lives. A weak beat is basically everything else.

In terms of phrasing...

I started to relax and allow myself to think in terms of continuity of elements. I started thinking about *who much needs to remain* from one musical phrase to the next for it to feel connected. I found that around 70% of the musical elements tend to remain from one phrase to the next when it sounds "good". Elements like the rhythmic pattern, note count, scale tones and the overall direction of melodic motion. I sometimes demonstrate this by playing randomness but keeping most of the elements and people hear it as connected phrases regardless of the notes I play. I think that rhythm plays the most important role in this.

In regards to modes...

I realized that modes are simply the *tonal center being compared* to the scale you are using. They have nothing to do with where you play them or what note you start or end on. That allowed me to 100% understand and apply them to anything I do. I did some scientific testing of my own theories about this and determined that most people have been teaching it in a way that is either incorrect or overly complex for no reason at all.

In regards to composition...

I noticed that there were only a few scales in music and they are pretty much just the major scale with one note moved a half step or some notes avoided. I used to think there were a bunch of scales and they all had their own theory to memorize. *But it was just the major scale with one note shifted.* That allowed me to feel more free and understand that there are less options than I thought. The options became more creative and compositional in nature.



Brendan Burns

25 Years of Playing. Jazz Performer, Composer, Educator. Department Chair.



An important “Ah-Ha Moment” for me was when I realized how long an “Ah-Ha Moment” takes for me to achieve. I noticed this somewhere around my 10 year mark of playing guitar.

I had learned enough scales, chords, tunes, etc. to realize that it takes me about 9 months to really fully digest a topic. That usually breaks down to about 3 months of hard work, followed by an adjustment period of a week or so when I distance myself from the task at hand. After that, when I pick it up again, it feels familiar (instead of “new” material). From there, I usually find that I have to force it into current repertoire and new tunes that I want to explore, and then after time, I notice that I don’t have to think about it anymore.

Whatever the concept is, it’s available at my fingertips and in my imagination. **That point is the 9 month mark for me.**

I’ve found this is very much a personal reference point based on my own brain, fingers and musicality, but I have noticed similar arcs with students. For me, this is a helpful “Ah Ha Moment” in that it gives me perspective and patience when I’m working on something new that might be difficult and overwhelming. Knowing my trajectory and pace can be a comfort as I’m exploring further into the depths of guitar and music.





Dave Isaacs

30 Years of Playing. Nashville Session Player, Educator and Performer.



I had my first “a-HA!” moment pretty early on in my playing life. I was taking lessons at a neighborhood guitar school, and time came around for the annual student concert. I had been playing for a little over a year, and had never performed in front of anyone other than my teacher. He had selected a little classical piece for me to play, which I remember really struggling with. I hadn’t really learned to read well yet, and while I had absorbed a good number of rock licks and could play some songs I really wasn’t confident with music I had to learn off the page.

I was so stressed out about the performance that my Mom let me stay home from school that day so I could practice. I played the piece over and over, trying to memorize it so I didn’t have to look at the music and could concentrate on my fingers. It wasn’t a difficult piece, but because I didn’t have the ear yet to be able to absorb what I was playing all I had to go on was the finger patterns. I got it down pretty good, though, and figured I was ready.

When it came time to play, I was *terrified!* I set my music on the stand, tried to steady my nerves, and launched into it. But my memory failed me, and about halfway through I realized I was hopelessly lost and didn’t know what came next. In a panic, my mind raced to figure out what to do.

I don’t know if I knew I was in the key of A minor, but I did know that I could play the intro to “Stairway To Heaven”, which is also in A minor. So not knowing what else to do, I just **shifted gears and started playing it.** My face was red, I was sweating and sure that everyone knew just how badly I had messed up. But because the Zeppelin part was so familiar I had learned it well, and I was able to get through it.

When I got offstage I wanted to run and hide. Somehow I got back to my seat and sulked for the rest of the concert. To my amazement, when it was over I got *compliments* on my playing! And I learned something huge: two things, actually. I learned that the audience doesn’t always know what you’re going to do, and didn’t necessarily know that I hadn’t planned to play both things. As long as I executed the switch well and didn’t stop playing, everything was fine. I also learned that I could make a quick decision onstage and hold the music together. I couldn’t have known it then, but it was my first experience taking a chance as an improviser and landing on my feet.

I’ve been taking chances ever since.





David Wallimann

25 Years of Playing. Rock and Jazz Composer, Session Player, Scholarship Recipient.



The most important thing I have learned in my career as a musician is that no one in the world could ever play the way I do. Now before you write me off thinking that David Wallimann is an egocentric full of himself player, please hear me out. Let's think in terms of speech for a moment. If I wanted to sound EXACTLY like my wife - same intonation, same choice of words, same exact everything, it would be impossible. I might get close if I was very skilled at imitating someone, but it still wouldn't sound exactly like her, right?

This applies to guitar too. It has nothing to do with technical skill or knowledge. What I'm talking about here is your musical **fingerprint**, the way you **touch** the fretboard, the way you **interact** with the strings, the **notes** you chose - all that is *unique* to you. Realizing this gave me the confidence to play with others and to simply create music without the fear of having to perform in front of others. The new found freedom a musician gets from realizing that they are indeed unique and that no one can sound like them (and they can't sound like anyone else too) has been the most important thing I learned musically.





Dustin Prinz

20 Years of Playing. Singer/Songwriter. Performer. Parapicking Enthusiast.



I feel that many of us put a lot of pressure on ourselves to be creative and to create that next best thing, or that cool new riff. I at least do... lol. When I first picked up the guitar I got quite caught up in trying to emulate the guitarists that I looked up to. Without having the knowledge, skillset, or experience with the instrument, it was more of a frustrating feeling than anything.

It was actually detrimental to my progress as a guitarist.

My "Ah Ha Moment" happened when I realized that the guitar doesn't need to be something that I use to try to emulate others. I realized that I can learn songs from my idols at my own pace, have fun doing it, and not pressure myself to sound like anyone. **I can be myself.** My mistakes, my perspective, and my own approach are all pieces to the larger puzzle that create my own voice. I accepted that my learning curve is of my own and I can use the guitar to speak for me not against me. Once the pressure to perform was gone, I felt *comfortable with being myself and developing my own style.* I played what I wanted to play, enjoyed learning songs that engaged me, and I didn't feel pressure to create. The songs naturally found their way to my fingertips when I was enjoying myself and having fun learning new techniques or songs from artists that I looked up to!

I approach the guitar in the same way to this day and it has made the instrument a source of absolute pleasure for me ever since that "Ah Ha Moment". This mind set has been an invaluable approach to my playing and the way that I've defined my life through the instrument! If you're ever lost on where to go, remember that no one is putting the pressure on you but yourself. Put some headphones on, take in the music, and pick up the 6 string with no preconceived notions! It's your voice, your time, and your approach.

Who cares what the next guy is doing.

Be you.

**Be
yourself
.....
EVERYONE ELSE
.....
IS
ALREADY
taken**



Hawkeye Herman

50 Years of Playing. Famed Educator and Performer. Iowa Blues Hall of Fame.



All licks and scales on the guitar are movable up and down the neck. By keeping the fret relationship between the notes in a lick or scale the same, one can move a lick or scale anywhere up and down the neck of the guitar to play the lick or scale in any key.

Always keep in mind how the guitar is tuned and the relationship between the adjacent strings. I call this the '**compass**' of the guitar, always '*pointing*' to '**true north**,' and helping to prevent getting lost on the neck. The guitar is tuned in 4ths going across the neck from low E to high strings, and in 5ths, going across the neck from high E string to low strings. The exception is the relationship between the G string and the B string, as the B string is a 3rd above the G string.



The 5th string (A) is a 4th above the 6th string (E)
the 4th string (D) is a 4th above the 5th string (A)
the 3rd string (G) is a 4th above the 4th string (D)
the 1st string (E) is a 4th above the 2nd string (B)

the 2nd string (B) is the 5th of the 1st string (E)
the 3rd string (G) is the 5th of the 2nd string (B)
the 4th string (D) is the 5th of the 3rd string (G)
the 5th string (A) is the 5th of the 4th string (D)
the 6th string (E) is the 5th of the 5th string (A)

Know and understand well how the guitar is tuned, and you can easily find the 4th/5th (IV & V) in any key.

Be aware that **muting the strings is very effective** in enunciating, playing clearly, hearing licks and accompaniment on the guitar. Pluck any string on the guitar and let it ring, and you'll see/hear that it vibrates for a good period of time. If you play notes on the guitar without muting the strings to cut the vibration, strings that you've already played are still ringing. This can create a muddy and unclear sound, whether playing chords or single notes.

To more clearly enunciate and define the chords or notes on the guitar, muting the strings allows the notes and chords to stand out on their own. Muting can be done with the heel of the picking hand, or by momentarily easing up on the tension of the fretting fingers to stop vibrations. I prefer to mute using the heel of my picking hand, and use muting techniques about 80% of the time when picking single notes and playing chords, in all styles of music.



Marcelo Berestovoy

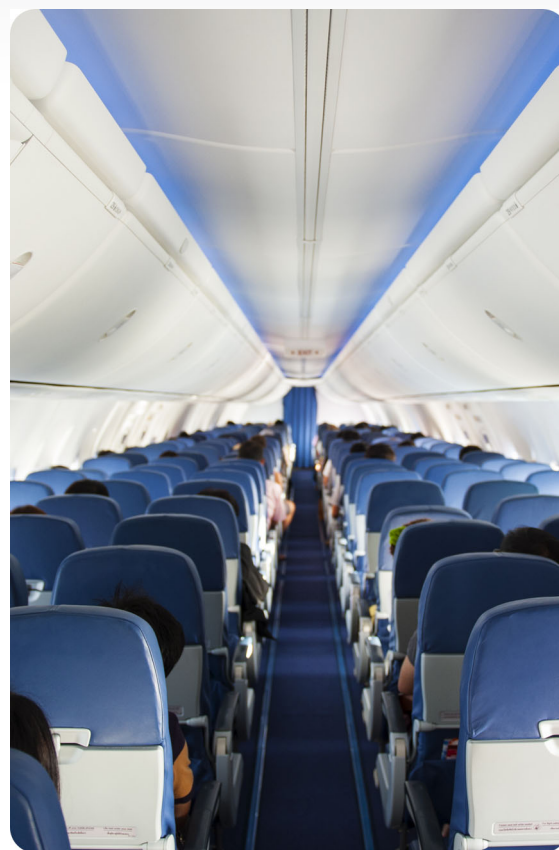
35 Years of Playing. Flamenco Artist, Educator, Grammy Nominee.



In my long journey to decipher the mysteries of music I've had many events and people that helped me put together some of the pieces of this endless puzzle. One of them I'll always be thankful for, happened on a flight from NY to LA.

Sitting next to me in the plane during a tour with a pop singer in the 1990's, the keyboard player / producer of the group told me: *"If you can play the Flamenco rhythm of the Gypsy Kings I can get you a lot of session work in my studio"*. I took him seriously and learned the strum that now, more than 20 years later remains the most popular Spanish guitar rhythm on earth!

Back then, I was living in Los Angeles, touring and doing session work for different artists and movie projects and although I always played different styles of music, this rhythm opened a lot of doors for me. In time, the Rumba Flamenco rhythm, also lead me to publishing articles in *Guitar Player* and *Guitar World* magazines, writing curriculum and teaching a Spanish guitar class for Musicians Institute in Hollywood to hundreds of students that played other styles of music and finally, to making instructional videos for JamPlay wishing you now a happy holiday season and that in 2017 you'll take the step to bring your playing to the next level!



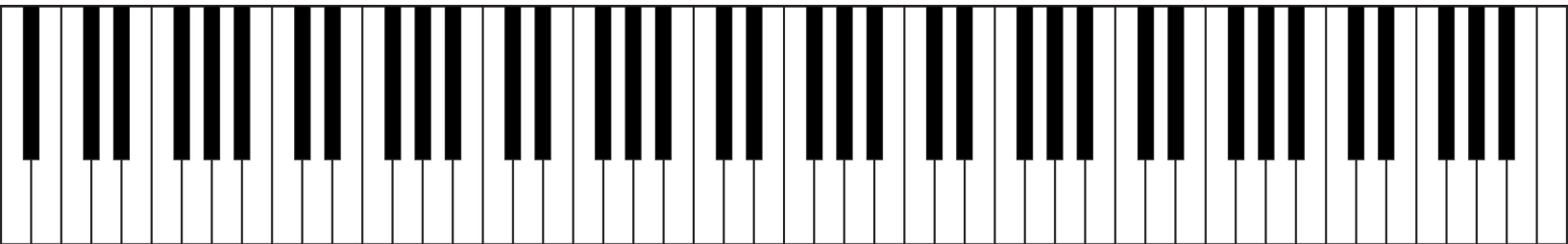


Nick Kellie

25 Years of Playing. Jazz Artist, Performer, Educator, BBC Big Band Jazz Winner.



One of the biggest revelations to me was learning that music is comprised of intervals. Once I learn my interval formulas for major chords and minor chords, it helped me to really see how chords were constructed. The next stage was learning what an interval sounded and looked like, then, once I could start to see and hear where these intervals were situated within my regular guitar chord voicings, whole world started to open up. I could see that if I could lower the third (after learning where the third is) it would end up transforming the chord into a minor chord, which in turn show me a shape I was already familiar with but had never understood or view it from that angle of understanding. This was the tip of the iceberg for me, it really got my brain working overtime. I could finally understand music and how it applied practically on the guitar to help me become a better musician.



From working with pianists over the years, I was always astounded how much better their understanding of music was compared to guitar players. It struck me that it was so much easier to learn the notes on the piano as every octave looks the same, and it is laid out so logically left to right. The guitar seemed like a confusing matrix in comparison. That had to be the reason guitar players seemed so behind. Then, once I started teaching I realized that some people had been playing for 20+ years and still didn't know the notes names on the guitar!

This realization made it more evident than ever why guitar players get so confused about theory. Want to learn where the middle C is on the piano? There is only 1 location for it! ON the guitar? There are 5 places to play that exact same note! What this means is that we end up with multiple shapes for everything. Without a clear learning method, it can end up bewildering to say the least. People get confused by equating a "shape" with a chord or scale, instead of seeing what notes it contains (like a pianist would).

Learning the notes on the guitar and identifying the notes inside the various shapes I knew finally got things to click in my mind. I soon realized that scales could cover the entire fretboard and not just one "shape". And that chords could also be player all over the neck. This opened up new worlds to me! The guitar then became a wondrous thing because I realized that, depending on where I played a chord, even if in the same octave, it would sound subtly different, tonally. Something which is not the case on the piano.



Michael "Nomad" Ripoll

30 Years of Playing. Movie Scores. Performer. Artist. Barbra Streisand, Celine Dion, Babyface.



The biggest light bulb moment for me as a guitarist was learning the Major and Minor scales and then tackling the Modes. It seemed like I was trapped in Pentatonic Purgatory forever until I started hearing players like Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen, and several others utilizing other scales and making them sound cool not only with technical prowess, but also in a musical context without sounding like exercises.

This epiphany came when I was probably around 14 and jamming with my band on a regular basis in the basement back on Long Island. I was figuring out how to play melodies that went along with the chord progressions of our songs and I started unlocking the mysteries of a simple Major scale pattern. Then I went on to the Minor scale and finally my teacher showed me fingerings for all 7 of the Modes each pattern starting with the middle finger of the fretting hand. This allowed for consistency in the patterns and made it simple to really grasp a hold of.

Learning this helps to cement the sound of the chord/scale relationship into your psyche which is paramount in learning how to apply scales. Don't worry too much about the theory behind how they work or why they exist, but just enjoy the process of learning the patterns and practicing them for speed gradually. Start at 60bpm playing quarter notes, then once you've nailed that, play eighth notes, eventually moving on to sixteenth notes. Once you've nailed 60bpm with sixteenth notes, then move up incrementally on the metronome 2 beats at a time. Eventually you'll be blazing through these Mode patterns at 120bpm playing sixteenth notes or faster! But remember, in order to increase speed, you must practice slowly without mistakes so your muscle memory doesn't learn the mistakes. The fingering? Simple...always start each mode with your middle finger and stretch your index finger and pinky to reach the notes that are beyond the frets within the pattern!





Paul Musso

35 Years of Playing. Jazz Author, Educator. Director of Guitar, University of Denver.



It took me so long to discover the mystery of the melodic minor scale and its modes. I knew that I had to learn the scale but had no idea how important it was beyond playing the scale over a minor chord (Am/Maj7 = A melodic minor). I knew that jazz players played the ascending version of the scale only, even when descending, unlike classical musicians.

The light bulb went off after taking a lesson with John Stowell (world renown Portland guitarist) and after watching Emily Remeler's video on bebop and swing. Melodic minor scales are mostly played over dominant seventh chords.

Here are the two simple rules:

- (1)** If the dominant seventh chord resolves (G7 to CMaj7), play the melodic minor scale up a half step (Ab melodic minor).
- (2)** If the dominant seventh chord does not resolve (G7 to Gm7), play the melodic minor scale up a Perfect 5th (D melodic minor).



In the first rule the melodic minor up a half step provides all four altered notes: b5 #5 b9 #9. This creates the most tense and altered sound for the dominant chord so that when it resolves to CMaj7 we hear a beautiful contrast. Rule two provides a b5 alteration, which is the implied altered sound that we hear when dominant seventh chords don't resolve. An example of this would be Take the A Train on the second and third chords: D7b5 to Dm7. The D7b5 does not resolve so the correct scale played would be A melodic minor.

Two simple rules changed my playing **forever**.



Phil Demmel

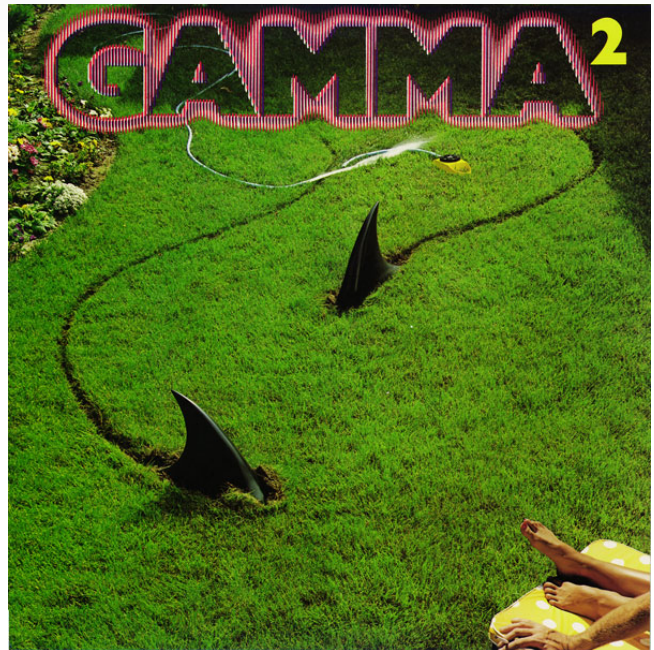
30 Years of Playing. Metal Composer, Performer. Lead Guitarist, Machinehead.



When I started playing and learning about the guitar, I was all about just trying to learn Iron Maiden, Scorpions, Judas Priest and Y&T songs. Very guitar-driven bands that had amazing players and high-energy songs. I played in thrash bands and tried to write the fastest riffs with the flashiest solos.

It wasn't until I sat down and tried to learn the solo to a guitarist that I really admired but didn't emulate in my own playing. The song was "Voyager" by a band called GAMMA and the guitarist was Ronnie Montrose. An amazing blues interlude by an underrated player. That experience showed me that you can say so much more with so much less.

Emotional bends and slow, sad streams of notes can have such an effect and provided an alternate avenue for me and playing. It made me go back and delve into other players like that (Ty Tabor of Kings X) and light another way. A lot of times it can take just sitting down and learning a classic, like the solos in "Free Bird" or SRV's "Pride n Joy" to see what another player did and see if that opens something up for you. And then there's always trying to learn Slayer songs to work out your right hand!!





Steve Eulberg

50 Years of Playing. Folk Author, Artist, Performer. Over 15 Albums. Multi-Instrument.



"Don't you know the patterns?" the tall bass-playing, music major in my college dorm asked me. "*There are patterns?*" I wondered. We were both students of an Ear-Training class in which my arranging professor, David Wheeler, had encouraged me to enroll.



Every Monday and Wednesday, he would walk into our classroom and write a series of numbers on the chalk board. We would copy them down in our notebooks and he would say, "We're going to play this tune in our jam session on Friday. Start in E flat and then we'll try some other keys, too."

I studiously wrote down the numbers and hurried home to try and figure out where an E flat was on my guitar that would be my number 1 and then I would stumble all over the frets and strings trying to play the rest of the number pattern.

So my classmate's question was actually an act of mercy after witnessing my stumblings in the hallway by my door. He proceeded to tell and then show me the pattern of the major scale which became the backbone of unlocking the secrets of the fretboard for me: 2---4, 1-2---4, 1---3-4.

Wow! Now, no matter where I started on either the 6th or 5th string, this pattern would help me to find the notes of the major scale, and I no longer needed to try and tax my slow-number-processing brain to play the tunes in the jam session, I just needed to know where to start! And when it was time for a new key, I could move the whole pattern to a new location.

This understanding further cemented the importance of hearing the relationships of notes and intervals to each other, rather than being pitch-specific and paved what had been a rather rocky road of transposition. I'm sad that I can't remember that classmate's name, but I am indebted to his question and the generosity of sharing what he knew. It became a very important tool in my guitar-playing kit.

Tyler Grant

30 Years of Playing. Bluegrass Artist and Performer. National Flatpicking Champion.



I remember exactly where I was when I first heard Bill Frisell. I was about twenty and was already quite serious about guitar, studying as a Music Major in College. The change happened to me then, and I have heard it happen to several other guitar players I know since then. Bill showed me a new way to approach the Guitar, and my playing can be easily traced through the eras of *Pre-Frisell* and *Post-Frisell*. His playing is not overly technical, though his style requires solid technique. It's not super-flashy or notey, but it is perfectly musical and therefore requires a high level of musicality and focus. Describing a sound is like trying to describe a flavor of ice cream, so I will leave it up to you to seek out and listen to Bill Frisell. Pretty much anything he plays should have an impact on curious guitar players. The album that got me hooked is called "The Ginger Baker Trio," and the players are Ginger Baker on drums, Charlie Haden on bass and Bill on guitar, so there is plenty to like for music fans throughout.

What influenced me about Bill's playing is how well he plays melody, and how expressive and dynamic his feel is. Bill can milk so much out of a couple notes and when he strays from melody he finds a way to tie it in with a cohesive statement. The main thing is that he is almost always playing melody. Even on an improvised jam, the melody is the main course and the approach to presenting it is always very deliberate. To play this way, one must be fully aware, in one's mind, about what is happening with the music. This requires a player to break free of thoughts about notes and scale patterns on the guitar, and gets the player thinking about music in it's *purest* form - Melody, Rhythm, Harmony and Dynamics.

Sit and try to play a simple tune like "Amazing Grace" and play it as expressive and beautiful as you can. You can make it artsy and creative in its arrangement, but it will never be played better than when you know exactly what you want to play and how you want it to sound before your fingers even touch the strings. Having an approach like this freed up my playing across the board in all styles and genres, to the point that I *think way more about how things sound* than about where my fingers are going to go.

Trust in yourself and your ability to make music. Work your practice routine around ear training and music-making rather than learning how to play scales really fast. Practice your scales, intervals, chords and such very slow and deliberately to work toward a true understanding of those elements rather than a tactile understanding of them. This approach will enrich your life as a musician, as it has mine.



Bill Frisell



Will Ripley

20 Years of Playing. Rock Guitarist, Performer, and Educator.



I had massive drive inside of me to play like Jimi Hendrix. The song “Voodoo Child” was on repeat on my CD player. All the solos and riffs that were happening in that song - especially the super fast, crazy licks, had me so inspired. This is truly step 1 - find that lick, song or solo that you are insanely passionate about. Once you have that inspiration - it’s tough to ignore.

My guitar instructor in college introduced me to software that would slow down music without changing the pitch. He recommended that to understand the details of Jimi’s playing that I was seeking. I went on to dissect every note that Jimi played. Sometimes, this would be less than 1 second of music! Eventually, I would chain a few notes together, practice that sequence and speed it up over time.

I was *developing* my musical ear by listening to the notes, singing them, and finding them on the fretboard. I did this night after night. Although it was frustrating at times, I had that massive drive in me - I HAD to learn it. I was obsessed! There was so much benefit for my playing going on here through this process that I didn’t even realize at the time.

I was *analyzing* some amazing guitar playing. Just like a scientist puts something under the microscope, you can become that ‘mad scientist’ and discover so much about your favorite guitar playing when you slow it down. And by starting out slow and gradually speeding up, I had something that was *measurable*. I had a percentage dial that I could reference in the software. When I could play that lick flawlessly, I would speed up the track by just 1-3% and continue. This, along with the metronome, created accountability and gave me a ‘measuring stick’ or ‘speedometer’ my progress.

After dedicated and consistent effort, I could play along with the original recording note for note! Yes! I was playing the solos in “Voodoo Child” right along with one of the best guitarists who has ever lived. I had expanded my knowledge and had all kinds of new licks... it was outstanding. I had achieved a new level of confidence with my playing that I didn’t have before. What an incredible feeling! I felt unstoppable.

The last big ‘ah-ha’ moment was when I went to play “Voodoo Child” live with my band in front of an audience... and I screwed up and crashed and burned pretty hard. Ouch! After all that hard work, right? Although a bit of a bummer, I realized that just because I could play the song in my basement didn’t mean I truly had these ‘Jimi like skills’ ingrained in me. Playing with other people, and for an audience, really challenges the truth - do I have these skills? Or not?

So in a nutshell, the biggest breakthrough that I want to share with you is to GET INSPIRED. Find that riff, that solo, that song that just FIRES you up. You’ll get charged up with natural motivation this way. From there, don’t be afraid to use tools like software, video lessons, 1-on-1 lessons, tabs and whatever other resource you can find to support you in your journey.

Lastly, prioritize uninterrupted, focused, consistent effort towards your goal and you’ll be rippin’ up the fretboard in no time! Keep on rippin’ it up!!



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Friday, December 16th

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