

Limitless Learning
Through Guided Self-Study

YOU
&
YOUR
guitar

by
CHARLOTTE ADAMS



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FOREWORD

In *You & Your Guitar*, Charlotte Adams has found a way to explain the things that students need to know that lie beyond the normal approach of developing techniques or learning songs. This is a book that goes beyond the mundane things that we all teach and clearly defines strategies that will help the student reach their full potential. I'm fairly successful as both a guitarist and teacher, but I still wish I could have read this book 50 years ago.

I came to the realization many years ago that “talent” was often the result of an effective approach to practice. I personally witnessed what a focused and “whole body” approach can do for a student when a student who was initially “less gifted” won her first Grammy through the application of a focused and dedicated practice routine. I have wished that I could find a better way to articulate this process to my own students.

It's been my experience that, due to impatience or misconceptions about how to approach learning music, students rarely reach their full potential. Learning how to learn is not a common topic in guitar lessons. *You & Your Guitar* offers insight into the learning process unlike anything I've ever read before.

If you are a student, you need this book. If you are a teacher, you need this book (I know I do!), and so do your students. There's a lot to learn here, but it's not about scales or chords or songs or techniques. It's about learning, and about reaching your true potential as a musician. I feel it's a book that we all need. Read the book. Take your time, and remember to enjoy the journey.
— Grant Mazak, *Professor of Guitar*, Texas State University

INTRODUCTION

You & Your Guitar is about you. It is also about your guitar. Most importantly, it is about the unlimited potential that lies in the alliance between you and how to turn that potential into reality.

Do you want to experience what it's like to learn without limits? I've written this book for you. *You & Your Guitar* is a resource for any guitar player, regardless of playing level. I designed it for self-study, but you will find it equally valuable if you're enrolled in lessons. After all, you are alone most of the time that you play and practice. What you think, how you feel, and how much strength you develop during the time away from your instructor ultimately determines your success. This is why the best way to reach your musical potential is to become your own best teacher. But before you can do that, you must first define what being a great teacher means to you.

For me, a great teacher has attributes like patience, competence, positivity, resourcefulness, creativity, and open-mindedness. What qualities are on your list? Those are the qualities that you will cultivate in yourself as you direct your own learning. This book will help you do that.

In addition to becoming your own best teacher, you will become an exceptional student, completing the circuit that fires lifelong learning. By employing proven learning techniques, you will carve new pathways in your brain and discover that you are smarter, more musical, and more disciplined than you might have imagined. The music you hear

will become more alive and meaningful to your ears and you will discover a new level of creativity. You will also come to understand and interact with your guitar in ways that you might not currently think possible.

What you think, how you feel, and how much strength you develop during the time away from your instructor ultimately determines your success.

I started playing guitar and performing over fifty years ago, and I've taught for almost as long, authoring six instructional books and more than one hundred articles in the process. Because I was musically literate and understood the principles of learning, I was able to teach not only guitar, but also piano, ukulele, bass, voice, ear training, and music theory. Those same skills enabled me to transcribe music for songwriters and composers and to write, produce, and direct musicals for children, direct a chorus, lead workshops for adults on listening, rhythm, lead playing, and improvisation, and create and maintain a guitar instruction website since 2003.

The concepts, learning devices, and tools you'll derive from this book have been gleaned from a lifetime of observing both my own learning processes and those of thousands of students, but there are numerous scientific studies that confirm their effectiveness and explain the science behind them. In the Appendix I have listed some of my favorite books that relate to learning, the brain, and guitarists' health and I encourage you to seek out more information on all of those topics.

Although playing guitar may seem magical, the path to playing is simple science. Enter this path with a beginner's mind and surrender to the process of discovering—or rediscovering—your guitar.

1

THINGS YOU NEED

Efficient and effective learning starts with thoughtful preparation. Before you pick up your guitar, gather both the tangible and the intangible things you need to succeed!

Talent & Ability

Do you fly across the fretboard in your dreams, spontaneously and effortlessly conveying sounds and emotions from deep within? You're not alone. Although the details of our dreams may vary, at the core of them all is a desire to make music freely. But many of us wonder whether we have the talent or ability to reach our dreams. Is it possible to grow into talent?

It seems that the answer lies less in our genes than in our personal history and beliefs. We are all products of not only our experiences, but also the countless messages we have received in our lives. Conveyed consciously or unconsciously from family, teachers, classmates, the media and all advertising, these messages inform us of who we are and how to survive in the world. Many of them are well intended and potentially useful, but others are based on agendas that have nothing to do with us personally. All of them, however, encourage beliefs that can cause us to have a distorted and limited view of who we are and what we are capable of.

For example, if as a child you didn't respond to the type of instruction you received in math, you may have gotten the

message that you didn't have a head for numbers. If so, you might have continued to believe that message, influencing choices regarding further study or even your career. Or, if you were ever told that you were tone deaf or had no sense of rhythm, you have probably missed out on the joy of carefree music making.

If we want to remove limits in our lives, we need to examine the messages we have unconsciously accepted and decide, consciously, whether we want to believe them. In the examples provided, it's easy to see that a lack of appropriate instruction does not define capability in a student, whether the subject is math or music. Considering this, is it not plausible that you have abilities that remain untapped, due to your acceptance of illogical or untrue messages? And is it not also possible that, given the proper nurturing, those abilities could extend into the realm of talent?

Before you can find your own answer to that question, you will need to determine your definition of talent, which may require taking a new look at the term.

If you look up the word talent in a dictionary, you will find "a natural aptitude or skill" and "the natural endowments of a person." In other words, talent is something you are born with and either you have it or you don't. Like most music teachers though, I refute that definition. Recently, a growing number of researchers have done the same.

Perhaps the most well-known proponent of the theory that greatness isn't born, but is instead grown, is Daniel Coyle, who presents findings that support this theory in his book *The Talent Code*. Coyle traveled the world, visiting hotbeds of talent, in order to discover the qualities of environments that

breed world-class talent. He concluded that the most talented musicians benefitted not from an inherent aptitude, but from three elements: ignition (which refers to motivation and passion), master coaching, and deep practice (a process you will learn in this book that involves evaluating and correcting errors and employing repetition effectively). These elements work together in the brain to create a substance called myelin, a fatty sheath that wraps around a nerve cell and affects the brain in multiple ways that include learning, attention, motor control, memory, and problem solving.

Part of the deep practice that Coyle identified as an essential element in creating talent involves repetition. It's no secret that repetition is key in learning, and you may have read certain "facts" about exactly how much repetition is required. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell promoted the idea that in order to reach the level of expert in your chosen topic, you need to practice a skill 10,000 times. There are too many variables in the mastery of any skill to assign a number to the repetitions required, but we know that without sufficient repetition, learning won't be complete. I will guide you in using repetition successfully in Chapter 4.

Of course, there are people born with remarkable aptitude that is expressed without the benefit of the three elements Coyle identifies as necessary for developing talent or the repetitions Gladwell recommends. We have all heard stories of masters such as Mozart, who began playing the keyboard at age three and was composing by the time he was five. We've also been impressed by videos showing young musicians who haven't lived long enough to have received long-term, quality instruction or engaged in years of deep practice. These prodigies, however, are rare compared to the number of people

YOU & YOUR GUITAR is a treasure-trove of wisdom and practical advice for guitar students of all skill levels. Venturing beyond technique and music theory, Charlotte Adams reveals the secrets of self-education by way of self-discovery and daily commitment.



Exploring the physical, mental, and emotional aspects, she creates a unique approach designed to elevate the student's experience from simply learning to play songs to creating a lifetime of guitar playing practices.

The reader is guided in mapping a personal plan, and encouraged to question and abandon obstacles often accepted as fact, opening new pathways to joy and mastery.

This book is a must-read for all guitar students, supporting them in their own personal quest to thrive in a space of limitless learning and establish an alliance with the guitar that will continue to reward and endure. ★