

Supporting Skills

Abstract

This unit is concerned with the principal aspects of general musicianship which form an integral part of playing the guitar. The first part tackles the problems connected with fluent sight reading and offers some strategies for overcoming the inherent difficulties. The second part functions as a practical guide to transcribing, arranging and editing educational material for the guitar in ensemble and solo situations. The final part examines the integration of improvisation and composition into the context of learning music through the guitar. The personal assignments are designed to offer practical experience of the techniques and ideas discussed in all three parts.

Whilst the text offers some solutions to notoriously difficult aspects of teaching the guitar, it is not designed to be prescriptive or dogmatic. The teacher is encouraged to use my text as the basis for experimentation and then to feed their experience into a developing repertoire of flexible teaching techniques. The more tools the teacher has at his disposal, the more solutions he can offer.

Mtpp Unit 3E : Guitar - Supporting Skills

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Stephen Goss

July 1997

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Part One : Sight Reading and the Guitar

1 *Introduction*

Guitarists are notoriously weak sight readers. Many factors have been suggested as to why this is the case, ranging from the inherently idiosyncratic nature of the guitar to a lack of general musicianship proliferated by the guitarist's isolationist existence. There is truth in both these views but the whole picture is a great deal wider and there are more fundamental musical issues which affect sight-reading on all instruments. We must carefully consider how sight reading and music reading are taught in lessons. Audrey Sheard, in the *Mtpp Piano unit P3d* (1995), has said:

Every child can sight read and every teacher can teach it. Possibly the failure to learn to read and to sight play is one of the most prevalent reasons for student dropouts.

She concludes that the most productive approach to sight reading comprises daily practice of appropriately graded exercises.

If we give pupils sight reading tests which are too difficult they cannot achieve fluency. Difficult sight reading tests merely discourage, and sometimes there is such an enormous gap between performance and sight reading ability it might almost mean in some cases we would be wise to give a Grade 8 pupil Grade 3 sight reading. With easier tests confidence can grow with an "I can and I will" attitude. One professor of mine used to say "knowledge begets confidence and confidence banishes nerves and doubts". This is a good maxim to follow. The student who says "I can't sight read" and therefore won't try, never will improve.

It is important that the teacher puts aside time for sight reading in every lesson and encourages the student to develop a daily sight reading habit. André Previn achieved his excellent sight reading ability because his father presented him with new musical material every day to sight read.

In the next two chapters I shall cover issues which refer specifically to guitarists and suggest some ways of overcoming these inherent weaknesses.

2 *Sight reading problems encountered by guitarists*

There are several technical obstacles for guitarists when sight reading that other instrumentalists do not have. People who play other instruments in addition to the guitar find sight reading on the guitar more difficult. Martin Teale, syllabus secretary for the Associated Board, has drawn attention to this fact in his chapter on guitar examinations in the book *The Guitar A Guide for Students and Teachers*:

[Sight reading] is the skill that most guitar students find difficult to acquire with any proficiency, partly due to the number of possible alternatives in locating any given note on the fingerboard, and the necessity of fingering a passage of music within the context of what precedes or follows it.

The guitar is a polyphonic instrument, but there are only 4 available fingers as opposed to the more usual 10 on the piano or harp. Moreover, apart from the open strings, each note requires the precise co-ordination of both hands. The same pitches are available in many different positions and can be played with any finger. This appears to be an advantage and is, when, like the violin or cello, the guitarist is reading single lines. However, when even simple chords are introduced we encounter a myriad of complicating factors:

- a Every note has to be played on a different string

- b Only 4 fingers are available apart from open strings

- c All the notes of a chord must be within a very limited reach

d The fingers of the left hand often have to move a long way out of position and in opposing directions to reach the next chord.

e There is often only 1 correct permutation of fingers that works for a specific chord and a sight reader often has to quickly reject many other possibilities before selecting the correct one.

These problems become compounded when students lack even basic cognition skills. The real danger, for a guitar teacher, is to assume knowledge. The most alarming aspect of my examining work is the frequency with which I encounter students who are unable to give letter names to notes or explain simple rhythmic notational constructions that occur in pieces that they have just played correctly. The problem here lies in the way that students interface with notation.

Rhythmic cognition is often not read but accumulated through repetition and aural memory, the student gradually works out how a piece is supposed 'to go'. Pitch cognition is often confused by a cornucopia of additional information that overcomplicates the look of the printed page and diverts the guitarist away from the very nature of musical notation. In addition to the black dot of the note itself, there is information regarding; left hand positioning, left hand fingering, right hand fingering and string number. This is before we even consider phrasing, slurring and dynamics. Guitar notation is too complex. A student cannot possibly take all this information in at one reading. What does the average guitarist actually read, the notes or the periphery? If a child is always carried it will never learn to walk.

It is no surprise, therefore, that most student guitarists have a very scant knowledge of the fingerboard and, as a result, underdeveloped inner hearing and musical conceptualisation. If sight reading isn't taught in a methodical and structured way there is virtually no chance that the situation will improve. All too often sight reading is included as a necessary evil that takes up valuable time in the crucial last few lessons before an exam. In this situation the 'training' comprises running through a few difficult tests with a 'how can we pull up a few marks here then?' approach. Let us now consider ways in which sight reading might help the guitarist develop musically.

3 Strategies for developing sight-reading proficiency on the guitar

Students are often told, “keep the pulse going at all costs, do not worry about the notes so much” and this is sound advice. However, unless the student is equipped with the necessary skills for reading rhythms quickly and correctly their sight reading will never improve. In his excellent book *Sight Reading - A Guitarist's Dilemma*, Paul Gregory suggests the use of simple but progressive rhythm tests to help familiarise the guitarist with all the common rhythmic groupings in all the standard time signatures. At the end of his book he gives 6 pages of very useful exercises.

Sight rhythm work is of enormous benefit and pupils can gain much from these and similar exercises. I would strongly recommend Kodaly's *333 Elementary Exercises* or, for more advanced students, Hindemith's *Elementary Training for Musicians* and Leland D. Bland's *Sight Singing Through Melodic Analysis* to help develop rhythmic reading. These books are also extremely useful for the sight singing and sight reading of pitches.

The sight reading of pitches is inextricably tied in with aural awareness. The path to fluent reading is through the ability to hear a sound in your head before you play it. One of the most common faults in reading is caused by the pupil never being sure if what they have just played is correct. This doubt is the cause of much anxiety and the pupil will often 'check' that the sound is correct by looking at the chord he has just played and then looking down at the fingerboard to check that the fingers were in the right place. Frederick Wieck, father and first teacher of Clara Schumann, would not teach any notation for about a year, instead he would concentrate on the

development of the ear and gently awakening musical activity in his students. There are many ways that the guitarist can develop his inner hearing. The most productive is sightsinging.

Looking down at the fingers unnecessarily is the biggest single cause of hesitation in sight reading. In order to become a fluent reader the guitar pupil must develop a thorough knowledge of and become familiar with the fingerboard. C.P.E. Bach once said;

If you want to become a good sight reader, play in the dark.

Playing pieces in the dark is extremely productive as it emancipates the guitarist from visual dependency. Audrey Sheard (1995) describes an experiment that took place at the University of California with 175 advanced pianists comprising university lecturers, professional accompanists, teachers and advanced students:

Each (pianist) tried a test of eighty-six bars length and answered simple questions on it before they commenced playing. This experiment revealed the following points. There were, on average, 286 eye movements from keyboard to score during the test. The less one looks down, the more fluent the playing, so we should learn from this not to look down at our hands because it really does not help. The many errors which arose included incorrect perception of clefs, intervals, ledger lines, accidentals and key signatures. Yet the participants were advanced pianists. The pre-performance questions proved that those who were able to audiate (hear within) fared best. The students failed to notice simple things like key changes and clef changes. Approximately twenty seven per cent of students missed harmonic changes, but the teachers were visually perceptive and scored very high with viva-voce.

The following suggestions for improving fingerboard knowledge should be made within the context of a “no looking down” regime.

In the early stages of learning try giving sight reading tests with a very limited number of pitches (possibly as few as two) and encourage the pupil to say (or better still, sing) the names of the pitches as they play them.

A common pitfall later on, when the guitarist is very familiar with first position, is that the higher positions are never taught in the methodical way that pupils learn the first position. The outcome of this is that many very advanced guitarists are horrifyingly ignorant of notes on strings other than the 1st string in higher positions. This results in the guitarist only venturing out of first position when a high note occurs and then plummeting straight back to safety when the moment has passed, despite the fact that the whole passage could be played in a higher position without the effort of shifting positions. The more thorough the knowledge of the whole fingerboard, the more options are available to the sight reader.

The learning of the fingerboard is not difficult, it just requires application. One of the best ways is by systematically going through each position in turn and completing exercises solely in that position. Stephen Dodgson and Hector Quine's *Progressive Reading for Guitarists* does precisely this. The aim of the book is to improve reading through familiarity with the fingerboard starting with the 5th position. In conjunction with this the teacher can ask the pupil to play certain patterns of fingers in certain positions and to name the notes as they play them. For example, if the teacher says '7th position fingers 2 and 3' the pupil has to start on the 6th string and play the

fingers required across the whole instrument calling out the pitches as quickly as possible i.e. C, C#, F, F#, Bb, B, Eb, E, G, G#, C, C#.

Another way to help learn the fingerboard is through visualisation techniques. Firstly, try these techniques yourself and then unleash them on your unsuspecting pupils. With the guitar away in its case, try to visualise the whole fingerboard. Think of a piece that you know well and play it in your head imagining all the sounds. Visualise your fingers playing the notes, occasionally stop the piece and name the notes that you have just played. Another idea is to visualise certain scales in certain positions. For example, if you take 5th position, think systematically through all the major and minor keys and where your fingers would go in 5th position. Where would you have to extend the position up or down a fret? Which keys work well in which position? Try to hear the differing patterns of tones and semitones. In fact this is a much more productive way of practising scales in general and it is the way that jazz musicians get to know the fingerboard so well.

Another exercise, this time with the guitar, is to play a three octave E major scale. Now using the same starting note (bottom E) and top note (top E) play scales of C, D, F, G, A, B and C# minor, D minor, F minor, A minor and B minor. This exercise can be repeated from every pitch.

The sight reading of chords presents the biggest challenge to guitarists. Chords, like words, must be conceived as whole entities and not the conglomeration of disparate elements. If the guitarist has to read each note independently then the chord will not

be played in time. Here is a simple illustration of this note by note approach applied to the reading of words.

If the letter C is closely followed by an A and then one more letter is used to finish a word, perhaps a T, then by writing them down one after another we get a word. Then by using our knowledge of phonetics we attempt to say this word. However, as we do not know the meaning or context of this word, even when we have said it we are not sure that it is correct.

This oversimplified example illustrates that our knowledge of language is dependent upon an established system of semiotics. When we read words we do not look at every letter, we are already familiar with shape of the entire word, its meaning as a symbol and its appearance within an expected context. It is our understanding through accumulated knowledge and not just our eyesight that enables us to read. Nicolas Cook, in his thought provoking book, *Music, Imagination and Culture* expresses this idea very eloquently when he relates it to the whole process of learning music:

...learning how to play a piece on the piano, and even sight-reading it, is in the first place an analytical activity: the pianist has to 'deconstruct' the musical text into its essential components so that he can then organise his motor actions round the resulting abstract scheme. And it is this analytical capacity, as much as the repertoire of motor sequences with which it has to be co-ordinated, that the novice pianist lacks; it is in this sense that a complete beginner who longs to play some particular piece has first to learn the piano, or to learn music, rather than simply trying to learn that piece as such.

Successful sight reading of chords must rely on this level of understanding and familiarity. Most guitar music that a pupil will play will have been written using the

conventions of diatonic tonal music. In order to read chords fluently it is essential that the student understands the precepts of that system. In practical terms this means developing a harmonic awareness very early on.

Much guitar music is written around fixed chord shapes and it is never too early to explain that certain finger patterns produce certain harmonies. Specific groupings of notes should become as familiar as chord symbols are to a rock or jazz player. The Guildhall Examination Board has gone some way to help develop this awareness by replacing arpeggios with arpeggiated chord progressions and ending dominant 7th arpeggios with their resolution on the tonic.

Rather than simply writing chord symbols onto music (which again confuses the notation) teachers should ask pupils questions like; “What chord shape is this?” and “How does it relate to the key that we are in?”. It does not take long to explain the basics of functional harmony and very few pupils have difficulty in grasping these concepts at a very early stage of technical development. In the words of the American composer John Cage (Dickinson 1992):

Musicians do not listen to sounds, they listen to the relationships between sounds.

Musicianship skills need to be integrated into every aspect of learning to play an instrument. By adopting a more holistic view of music education rather than an artificially compartmentalised one, aural, theory and, therefore, sight reading skills will flourish and feed instrumental performance.

The key to sight reading on the guitar is to develop the inner ear so that when reading the eye can look ahead and the ear can hear ahead. Looking ahead should be encouraged from the earliest stages. The easiest way to nurture this is to cut out a piece of card and as your pupil starts playing, cover the actual bar that he is playing with the card and as he plays move the card so that it always cover the music he is playing. This forces the pupil to look ahead. Start this exercise with a piece that the pupil is already familiar with and then introduce it into sight reading. When we read out aloud we are looking several words ahead, the same needs to happen when sight reading music. As Ricardo Iznaola (1992) says:

A common misconception is the belief that one plays from memory only when playing without reading the score. On the contrary, even sight reading depends on memory to be successful. Every good sight reader will reconfirm the fact that one is always ahead of the spot being played, even full phrases ahead.

4 Other Clefs and alternative notation systems

Although classical guitar music is usually written in treble clef (sounding an octave lower) it is important for the guitar student to be aware of other clefs and notation systems. Composers such as Kurt Weill, Webern and Mahler wrote for guitar in bass clef and to be able to read notation fluently in this clef has many advantages including: the ability to read straight from piano music or bass instrument parts and to help transposition and general musicianship skills. Other clefs are far less common and offer less general benefit, although an ability to read alto clef means that string quartets can be sight read by guitar quartets.

Tablature systems for plucked instruments have existed for hundreds of years and by the end of the Renaissance there were many diverse tablatures in use. Each line represents a string or course and the fret to be played is indicated by a letter or a number with '0' or 'a' representing an open string. Most systems had the highest string on the top line of tablature although some systems had the highest string on the bottom line. For a full discussion of early guitar tablature refer to James Tyler's book *The Early Guitar*, tablature is also discussed in *Unit 3i*. Indeed, without a working knowledge of tablature systems, the modern guitarist has no access at all at primary source to pre-classical music specifically written for plucked instruments. Tablature is used today by many rock or folk guitarists and despite a few drawbacks such as: unclear notation of polyphonic rhythms and the fact that the notation shows only location of notes not pitch names, its main advantages are that the fingering or position of the notes is built into the notation and that the notation itself is easy to learn.

The most useful additional system of notation to the classical guitarist is that of chord symbols. Sight reading chord symbols is relatively straight forward because the system allows for very complex information to be displayed in remarkably simple icons. As the guitarist learns more chords in isolation, he is able to incorporate these chords into a pattern containing other chords without much difficulty. Eventually, the guitarist gets used to certain recurring patterns of chords and quickly builds up familiarity with common harmonic progressions. This familiarity increases his aural awareness and ability to look and hear ahead. The following publications provide a simple introduction to chord symbols: Adrian Ingram *Modern Jazz Guitar Technique* (1980), Joe Pass *Guitar Style* (1970), Lance Bosman *Harmony for Guitar*

5 Survey of Available materials

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a shortage of good books on guitar sight reading. Most publications offer sample tests aimed at the 'pre exam panic' market without offering any practical guidance. However, I have singled out four very worthwhile publications.

Ricardo Iznaola's *On Practising* (1992) is a booklet that deals with all aspects of practising and his chapter on sight reading is very short. Nevertheless, it contains some excellent material on the role of visualisation in sight reading and some very practical advice. He suggests three 'experiments' which approach sight reading in an original and interesting way.

Paul Gregory's helpful book (1994) offers advice and guidance in a sympathetic way without being at all patronising. He clearly states the main problems that guitarists have with sightreading and then offers solutions to these problems. He makes many excellent points and a very convincing case for the central importance of sight reading. If you have any reluctant sight readers give them this book to read. The whole book can be read in 30 minutes.

The most comprehensive attempt at a book that systematically develops sight reading is the Dodgson and Quine book (1975). This book takes the student through the guitar fingerboard position by position giving helpful advice and a plentiful supply of reading exercises. The book is aimed at more advanced students. Some pupils may be put off by the angular nature of the music and to some extent it is a no pain

no gain publication. However, if a student can stick rigidly to the programme subscribed in the book then there is no doubt that it will greatly improve their sight reading.

The most logical and guitaristic sight reading method that starts at the very beginning is the series of books by Robert Benedict (1985). There is an abundance of carefully graded exercises that gradually introduce new topics one at a time, such as two part and chordal work. These wonderful and practical books have been very carefully researched and are designed to be used daily as part of regular practice. The written text is simple and sparing.

Personal Assignment 1

What are the skills required for becoming a competent sight reader in the guitar's various notational systems? Consider how the teacher might incorporate aural skills into the structured development of sight reading. Discuss the pitfalls which students might encounter. Evaluate and compare various sight reading publications and suggest some additional strategies of your own.

Part Two - Transcribing, Arranging and Editing

1 Introduction

The shortage of relevant, quality material for the early stages of solo or ensemble guitar playing is a serious problem for most guitar teachers. It is important that teachers generate their own repertoire which is specific to their needs. The guitar is a cross-cultural instrument and many diverse styles of music sound well on it, so the arranger has a huge range of possibilities that present many challenges.

The first and most important consideration is context. There needs to be a point of contact between the previous musical experience of the pupil and any new material that is presented to him. Choosing the most relevant material is the key to motivating a student. Aural gratification is another key factor. In the very early stages of learning, the impatience of a pupil to be constantly moving forward often means that important consolidation work is neglected. A large repertoire of interesting teacher/pupil duets is an effective way of overcoming this restlessness.

Examination boards (for example the Associated Board and the Guildhall) are now including accompanied pieces in the early grades. This has become a very important development area and an opportunity to revolutionise the way that music is taught through the guitar. Yehudi Menuhin once said:

I do not teach the violin, I teach music through the violin.

For example a simple pentatonic melody line could be transformed into different styles or feels by the use of imaginative accompaniments. The pupil could choose their favourite accompaniment for a melody. A large repertoire of simple melodies with imaginative accompaniments makes sight reading a great deal more interesting. However, the most important application of arranging is in making maximum use of your individual resources.

In the rest of part three I shall offer some practical help as regards choosing material, utilising the medium and presenting a well edited score.

2 *Choosing Material*

The most difficult part of arranging and particularly transcribing music is choosing the most appropriate material. If the music you want to arrange is well known, you need to ask yourself various questions:

- i Is the music associated with a specific sound world?
- ii Is the music already known in several arrangements?
- iii What does the music rely on for its effect?
- iv Would this music work within a very limited pitch range?
- v Could this music have been originally conceived as guitar music?
- vi Will this music exploit the strengths or expose the weaknesses of the guitar?
- vii Does this music suggest any idiomatic guitar textures or effects?

Questions i and ii are very much interlinked. Music that is inextricably associated with its timbral colour will always sound weak in arrangement (for example, Ravel's *Bolero*, Pachelbel's *Canon*, Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue in D minor*, Chopin or Liszt's Piano Music, String quartets, sonatas etc.). However, if music is known only as a melody line or in many different versions then people listening to the arrangement for guitars will not be comparing it with a specific original (for example folksongs, Ravel's *Pavane*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Carmen*, jazz standards etc.).

Questions iii and iv must be carefully considered. What makes a piece beautiful? Surprisingly often the answer is not the pitches involved, but some other parameter. Consider the spacing of the parts, the density and texture of the music, the dynamic range, elements of articulation (sustain, attack, intensity, silence etc.), rubato,

rhythmic impetus and timbre, then ask yourself if any of these elements will be lost in translation to the guitar. If they are lost, how much does it matter? The most gratifying thing that a listener can say after hearing an arrangement played on guitars is “I never realised it was originally written for guitar”. The arranger’s task is, therefore, to imagine how the composer would have written the piece as a guitar piece. The relative success of an arrangement is often down to how the arranger answers questions vi and vii.

3 *Transcription or Arrangement?*

What is the difference between a transcription and an arrangement? Busoni (1957) once said:

Notation itself is the transcription of an abstract idea.

Essentially a transcription is recreative and an arrangement is creative. A transcription tends to contain the same notes as its original, for example a transcription of a Bach lute suite or cello suite for guitar will be as close as possible to its original. The only parameters that may change in a transcription are octave transpositions or the transposition of the whole piece into a more suitable key (e.g. Bach's *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro BWV 998* works better in D on the guitar as opposed to the E flat of the original version). Conversely, arranging a piece is a much more involved process that will be outlined under the next heading. When composers arranged their own works for other media there was often much recomposition. Take some time to look at some or all of the following arrangements:

Frank Martin *Quatre Pieces Breves* - guitar, piano and orchestral versions

Walton *5 Bagatelles* for guitar / *Varii Capricci*

Bach Lute *Suite BWV995* / Cello *Suite BWV 1011*

Bach *Violin Partita BWV 1006* / Lute *Suite BWV 1006a*

Falla *Homenaje le tombeau de Claude Debussy* / No 3 of 4 *orchestral Homenajes*

Stravinsky *8 Pieces for Piano Duet* / *2 Little Suites for Orchestra*

Stravinsky *Pulcinella* / *Suite Italien*

Ravel *Alborada del Grazioso* Piano Version / *Orchestral Version*

Schubert *Die Forelle* / 4th Movement of the *Trout quintet*

Bernstein *West Side Story* / *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*

To summarise:

Will this piece work on the guitar ?

Transcription

Can I make this piece sound as if it were written for guitar?

Arrangement

4 Arranging for Guitar Ensembles and Utilising the Medium

a Timbre - The guitar is uniquely placed amongst instruments when it comes to the range of colours that can be easily produced. From a very early stage pupils can be introduced to the extremes of ponticello and tasto and various gradations inbetween. Natural harmonics, glissandi and Bartok Pizzicato are also easily available to the beginner. Lines played ponticello will always cut through accompaniments that are being played tasto. Any arrangement can be considerably enhanced by careful attention to timbre, particularly if it makes non-european cultural references. John Schneider (1985) has indicated that of:

the five musical parameters - pitch, loudness, duration, location and timbre - Western instrumental music has paid least attention to timbre. In many other cultures, however, timbre is of paramount importance.

b Dynamics - Although the guitar is a notoriously quiet instrument there is still a huge dynamic range at the lower end of the decibel scale. There is much scope for subtle dynamic effects between absolute silence and the usual *piano* level. The composer Hans Werner Henze (1977) once said of the guitar:

It possesses a richness of sound capable of embracing everything one might find in a gigantic contemporary orchestra; but one has to start from silence in order to notice this: one has to pause, and completely exclude noise.

c Special effects - To keep a large guitar ensemble happy it is wise not to give any one part too many bars of rests. Consider what else people could do apart from playing notes. Think about percussion effects; simple tapping or knocking the wood,

side drum effects, striking strings above the nut, rhythmic strumming on dampened strings, scratching the wound basses, picking up actual percussion instruments during a piece etc all add to the overall effect of an arrangement. Let your imagination run wild!

d Melody lines - In a fairly large guitar ensemble it is crucial that the melody line is not swamped by subordinate parts. Melodies in first position on the 2nd and 3rd strings are easily drowned out. Just about any note on the first string and higher positions on the 4th string will cut through most dense textures. Try having the melody in the Bass part or in the middle of the texture as well as having it as the top line. Consider writing one part exclusively in the 5th or 7th position as it will help slightly more advanced pupils get used to reading in specific positions. This part will be easier to play if it is doubled an octave lower in one of the other parts. Try to avoid position changes as it will encourage players to look at their hands. The part that carries the melody should be played as a single line. Share the melody around the different parts so that the role of any one part is sufficiently varied. Ask the ensemble which part has the melody for a specific phrase.

e Bass lines - The bass line is the most important part of an ensemble. The whole ensemble should be able to hear the bass clearly all the way through. Avoid clouding the bass by having other parts near to it in pitch. As a general guideline keep the next lowest part at least a 5th higher than the bass. Due to the extra resonance of this register, it is very easy to make guitar arrangements sound bottom heavy. If you are not sure what to do with guitar 3 in a certain section of a 4 part arrangement - let it double the melody. The bass line should be played more

ponticello than normal for clarity and focus. Notes on strings 4, 5 and 6 have a much greater sustaining quality than notes on the top 3 strings and this creates many problems in ensemble arrangements. Excessive use of open bass strings, particularly if they are not carefully dampened, can result in losing all sense of clarity and definition. Bass parts should be designed so that open basses do not get a chance to ring on. Staccato walking basses or rests on beats 2 and 4 in 4/4 time are ways of cleaning up the texture.

f Chordal accompaniments - The overall feel and atmosphere of an arrangement is usually generated by the figuration of the accompaniment. Think of Stanley Myers' *Cavatina*, the *Habanera* from *Carmen* or the Waltzes of Johann Strauss. When you arrange a piece for guitar ensemble, forget the original accompaniment and spend time trying various idiomatic possibilities. Think about unusual playing techniques, how to share figuration across two or three parts, how to conjure the illusion of sustain or how to employ interesting ostinati or simple polyrhythms. Do not be afraid to use sparse accompaniments, it is very easy to overwrite them. The right hand approach to subordinate material must be significantly different from the approach to line playing. This will help balance intricate textures. Chordal writing or gentle arpeggios work well in these less focussed parts. Consider reharmonising the melody altogether or being even more creative in your arrangement by developing the original material in a new direction. Have a look at Stravinsky's treatment of Pergolesi and Martini in *Pulcinella* or Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy*. You could have a go at writing a set of variations closely based on a set that you already know.

g Textures - So far I have dealt with homophonic or melody and accompaniment textures which are by far the most effective guitar textures. Superimposed ostinati can also work very well (for example Leo Brouwer's *Cuban Landscape with Rain* or Geoffrey Burgon's *Four Guitars*). Monophonic textures (everyone playing in octave unison) can be very effective in climactic passages although contrapuntal textures, such as fugues, can easily sound confused and muddy unless they have been carefully balanced and painstakingly rehearsed. Melodic lines can often sound very good in the middle of textures with arpeggiations or harmonics above. Consider leaving holes in the texture, for example removing all low pitches, middle range pitches or high pitches. You could focus all the parts into a very limited range of pitches. The principal objective is variety.

h The guitar with other instruments - The experience to be gained by guitarists when they play with other instrumentalists or singers is invaluable. A simple ensemble of pizzicato double bass, 3 or 4 guitars and two melody instruments can open up a whole new world to your pupils. In this context the guitar works best in a supporting, harmonic role. For a fuller discussion of the possibilities available in this area refer to Michael Burnett's article *Arranging for the guitar and other instruments* in OUP's book *The Guitar A Guide for Students and Teachers*

i Other considerations - After you finish writing an arrangement play through each part in its entirety. Are they all interesting and enjoyable to play? It is a very good idea to keep swapping roles within the ensemble so that each part gets the opportunity to play the melody, countermelody, accompaniment and the bass line in

the course of a single piece. It is also an invaluable aural exercise for the players to adjust to their new role within the ensemble and to experience the same piece from many different angles. In rehearsal make each part sit out a complete run through of the piece in turn so that they can really listen to what is going on around them. If the ensemble is large but playing from a 4 part arrangement make sure that players are not sitting next to someone playing the same part as them.

The real value of ensemble playing is to develop musicianship through playing with and responding to other musicians. Make the individual parts easy to play so that rehearsal time can be spent working on these important musicianship skills rather than wasting time note bashing. Devised, non-notated and partly improvised pieces are excellent for getting straight down to the important work if time is limited.

A good arrangement exploits the strengths of the guitar without exposing any of the inherent weaknesses.

5 *Editing and Presentation*

The look of a score is very important. For elementary students it is probably a good idea to space the notes out in proportion to their duration as this will make reading easier. Brian Fawcett (1995) discusses many interesting aspects of music reading and notation in his section of the Keyboard Skills unit. If possible, individual parts should have cues and players should have access to full scores during rehearsals, as this makes them much more aware of what the other parts are doing. Make the score as uncluttered as possible, avoid excessive editing and do not print unnecessary fingering. Ensure that page turns are carefully considered. *The Essentials of Music Copying* by Susan Homewood and Colin Matthews is the industry standard on musical notation. If you are making a transcription of a Renaissance or Baroque piece then it is very important to follow established editorial principles, *Editing Early Music* by John Caldwell is a good source of reference. If the piece that you have arranged is still in copyright (ie the composer is still alive or died in the last 70 years) then you should approach the publisher to ask for permission to make an arrangement.

Personal Assignment 2

Make an arrangement of a folksong or a popular melody for at least 4 guitars with or without other instruments. Try to utilise the medium to the full and be as creative and as inventive as possible. Design parts for specific students. The parts should reflect their current technical standard by incorporating material that will stretch some aspects and consolidate others. Rehearse, perform and record this arrangement.

Part Three - Improvisation and Composition

1 Introduction

As the nature of music education in schools evolves with the National Curriculum, so instrumental teachers are having to acquire new skills to meet the demands of the latest developments. The most fundamental changes that have occurred recently have been in the area of creative music making - composition and improvisation. In the UK these disciplines are now compulsory at GCSE as well as forming an important part of the music programme in schools at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Instrumental teachers are often relied upon to deliver important sections of these courses.

Apart from this curricular context, both composition and improvisation are crucial tools for developing inner hearing. A thorough understanding of basic compositional techniques will help develop sight reading, memorisation and aural perception. There is plenty of scope for incorporating improvisation and composition into weekly guitar lessons as well as more extended possibilities within the context of ensemble work.

2 *Composition and Improvisation*

The fundamental differences between composition and improvisation have been exhaustively considered in John A. Sloboda's book *The Musical Mind The Cognitive Psychology of Music* in which he states that;

what distinguishes improvisation from composition is primarily the pre-existence of a large set of formal constraints which comprise a 'blueprint' or 'skeleton' for the improvisation. The improviser can, therefore, dispense with much of the composer's habitual decision making concerning structure and direction. He uses a model which is, in most cases, externally supplied by the culture, and which he embellishes and 'fills in' in various ways. Such models frequently have a recursive sectional form, so that the performer becomes very familiar with the structure of the basic section, which can, to a large extent, be considered independently from other sections. This means that the improviser does not have to be constantly referring back to the detailed working out of earlier sections as, it may be argued, a composer must. He can rely on the given constraints of the form together with his own 'style' to give the music unity.

Below I will outline two contrasting approaches to composition and improvisation.

The first uses a set of clearly delineated parameters to set up a background for the kind of improvisation that jazz musicians employ. Whereas, the second one explores composition through free improvisation. The two approaches could be used alongside one another, perhaps even within the same piece.

3 *Working within Boundaries*

The most productive way that I have found to encourage guitarists to improvise or compose is through devised ensemble work. Fairly complicated sounding music can emerge from simple ideas. A good project to begin with is to create a minimalist piece built on gradually transforming ostinati which form a background for structured improvisation. Firstly, choose a simple mode with 4 or 5 notes in it, such as a gamelan scale, pentatonic major, pentatonic minor or Japanese soft scale.

Then ask your players to invent short patterns of various lengths and speeds in contrasting registers. When these figures are played together and repeated a gentle polyrhythm sets up an atmospheric background for improvisation. Using the same mode, two further players can improvise a question and answer dialogue over the top. The roles of each part can be changed as the piece progresses.

It is also possible to change the mode at various cued points in the piece. The piece should not be notated. Dynamics and other interpretative and structural details should be directed by a leader or conductor drawn from the ensemble. This type of piece can also be devised using more standard heptatonic scales such as aeolian, dorian and mixolydian modes. There are no rules of harmony, any one note of a mode will sound fine with any other note. The resultant static, modal harmony is used by composers such as Arvo Pärt, John Tavener and Gorecki. This approach to composition/improvisation can be extended to following a basic 12 bar blues pattern, where the harmony changes but the scale used to improvise a melody remains constant. Eventually, more elaborate harmonic structures and improvisation modes that change with the harmony lead to structured jazz improvisation. Similar projects can be found in Michael Stimpson and Michael Burnett's article *The Guitar as a Classroom Instrument*.

At first, efforts at improvisation will sound stifled and unnatural but after much practice things will gradually improve. As Paul Carroll (1996) puts it:

What will happen in time, and this is important, is that this starts training the ear to hear where the notes are on the guitar and through a process of osmosis, the subconscious learns automatically where each note that you hear in your head lies on the guitar. Heavy stuff. Read it again because this leading to the crux of what improvisation is really about, ie that ability to instantaneously play on the guitar what you hear in your head. "But I don't hear anything in my head!" Practise these scales regularly and you'll start hearing things you didn't know you had.

Composition and Improvisation through controlled procedures, with clearly defined parameters is a useful way into the creative sphere of music. There are many

variations available within this approach but the essential principle is summarised by the following paradox;

To ignite the creative process one needs clearly delineated boundaries.

Personal Assignment 3

Devise an ensemble piece in rehearsal using modes and ostinati. Try to involve the students in all the creative decisions. Choose a student to direct the ensemble, whilst you might like to play in it. Write the basic ideas down on manuscript paper but do not attempt to write out a full score. Record a version of the piece that the ensemble are happy with. Summarise what you think you and your students learnt from this project.

4 *Working without Boundaries*

Improvisation without a blueprint or skeleton is much more a compositional process. It is a good way to unleash musical imagination and allow the kind of freedom that is simply unavailable in more formalised contexts. One of the improvisation tests for GCSE music makes an ideal starting point for this kind of work. The student is given a descriptive title or a poem and asked to make up a piece lasting approximately one minute based on this title. The choice of titles might include; 'An underwater cave', 'Robots', 'Rush hour', 'Monday Mornings'. Any form of extra-musical stimulus can work as a catalyst for composition; a picture, a video, a building, a mood etc. The aim of the exercise is to make pupils imagine musical and non-musical sounds and to try and create them through their instrument.

Personal Assignment 4

Choose a play or a story (if you can get involved in a school play that would be ideal or you could use an excerpt from a film on video) and work out some incidental music with your pupils. You could work with them in groups or individually. Choose moments in the story when a certain mood needs to be suggested by music and get them to compose a series of short, contrasting pieces. Evaluate the results.

Final Assignment

In your own teaching methods how do you deal with the areas of Music Reading, Sight Reading, Arrangement, Improvisation and Composition?

Try to analyse your approaches and attempt to evaluate how logical, structured and integrated you are / have been with specific pupils.

You may have had particular success / problems with certain teaching strategies - examine them and try to identify reasons for your success / problems.

5 Conclusion

The benefit of incorporating these supporting skills into the experience of the pupil is to develop fluency, musicianship, aural sensitivity, and an understanding of the instrument's capacities which arise from self-motivated discovery and experiment. In addition, such self-motivation is likely to harness the powers of the imagination and develop in the pupil a sense of ownership of those elements which have been embraced into his world-view. If one wishes musicians to acquire such abilities with the freedom and self-identification with which they, as infants, learn to speak, then working with the sound and the means of controlling it will logically precede focusing on reading skills. Where notation is concerned, the perceptions and technical abilities which have already been developed will support the acquisition of an approach to sight reading which relates the written symbol to the heard sound.