

TOP GEAR 2016: GUITARS, AMPS & MORE

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CAGE THE ELEPHANT
Ain't No Rest for the Wicked

MARTIN CARTHY
Scarborough Fair

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Wasn't That
a Mighty Storm

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DYLAN UNPLUGGED

LEARN THE SECRETS OF BOB'S ACOUSTIC TECHNIQUE

5 MINUTES WITH
SARA WATKINS

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LE COWBOY

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Acoustic Classic
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the Wicked'

PLAY

Learning to play guitar
later in life is a lot more
achievable than you think.

HERE'S HOW

Never 'Too Old'

5 tips for players who pick up the guitar later in life

BY PAULINE FRANCE

Overcoming the obstacles that kept you from playing guitar sooner—that Negative Nancy inside your head, time management, and so on—was the hard part. Now that you're past that phase, staying motivated and on track should be easy.

I talked to late-blooming guitarists to find out what keeps them focused, and found that sticking to it after learning to play guitar later in life is a lot more achievable than you think.

1 REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU'RE NOT TOO OLD

Guitars don't have an expiration date. They never will, and neither do players. If guitars and players had sell-by dates, Keith Richards would've retired decades ago. Unlike extreme sports athletes or runway model, there's no age cap for learning or continuing to play guitar. So stop telling yourself that!

"The old cliché, 'It's never too late to pick up a hobby or passion' is appropriate here," says Sirk Roh, a 52-year-old consulting CFO from San Jose, California. "Especially one that can last the rest of our lives." Roh adds that while he wouldn't want to learn to downhill ski or play basketball "at this stage of my life," learning guitar is another thing altogether.

In fact, learning later in life has its benefits, Roh says.

"I am more patient, have a deeper appreciation of the journey, and appreciate the meditative/therapeutic effect of learning to play," Roh says. "Also, you're more likely to financially afford a decent guitar."

Adrian Galysh, a guitar instructor and solo artist from Los Angeles, notes several advantages older students have over younger ones.

"Adults have heard so much music and are familiar with a lot of guitar music," Galysh says.

"Their ears are tuned to what correct intonation, timing, and classic songs should sound like. For kids, music can be a whole new world, being unfamiliar with the instrument as well as all the great guitarists adults take for granted."

If age-related insecurity starts to kick in, stop and think of the benefits of maturity. Also, think of Keith Richards.

2 ACCEPT THAT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE AN INSTANT VIRTUOSO

Those of us who picked up guitar in our childhood or teen years also struggled, so the best thing is to be OK with the fact that you're not going to be a guitar hall of famer right away. "Learn to be comfortable sucking," says Tom Linton, a 57-year-old software consultant from Sherman Oaks, California, who is one of Galysh's students. "With age, you get a lot of wisdom, but what gets diminished is your

'Learn to be comfortable sucking'

TOM LINTON

tolerance to allow failure. I found it helpful to relate back to things I'd become good at over the years, but only after struggling."

Linton lists golf, learning to drive, and learning to ride a unicycle as examples of activities he had initial difficulty with, but ended up grasping.

"There was a period of task saturation, seemingly lack of progress, and feeling overwhelmed," Linton says. "I was unqualified at the time to assess whether individual failures were good or bad for my eventual learning. The bottom line was that my practice was cumulative in effect, that even though an individual session didn't appear to get me closer to success, over time progress is happening."

3 PREPARE FOR POTENTIAL BREAKTHROUGH

Ofer Webman is a 53-year-old guitarist based in Phoenix, Arizona, who dabbled with guitar in his teens. After a decades-long hiatus, Webman picked up the guitar again, and it led to major breakthroughs—one of which was his changing the way acoustic guitarists amplify their sound and experience their instrument: Webman invented the ToneWoodAmp [reviewed in the October 2016 issue].

"I found out that I can compose, and I do that a lot now," Webman says. "This and the invention of the ToneWoodAmp wouldn't have happened if I hadn't gone back to learning the guitar."

Mike McRitchie, a career strategist from Elk Grove, California, says learning to play guitar in his mid-40s marked the beginning of a series of special events, such as performing an original song at this parents' 50th wedding anniversary.

"If you have the passion for learning, an interest in guitar, and a commitment to keep going, the sky's the limit," McRitchie says. "You never know where you'll end up, but the ride is awesome."

4 DON'T DO IT ALONE

If you have proper guidance, it's less likely that you'll become discouraged or fall off course. "Sometimes learning guitar feels like you're patting your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time," Linton says. "But if you have the right leadership, trust that you're on the right track."

A good teacher will know how to tailor lessons to your needs, helping you balance your adult obligations with your guitar practice.

"An adult's time is limited, considering the demands of a day job and family," Galysh says.

"Time-management for practicing during the week is paramount to making progress. I give students maybe just two or three things to work on each week, but try to always make it goal-oriented. The best thing they can do is keep the guitar out, and try to play a little every day.

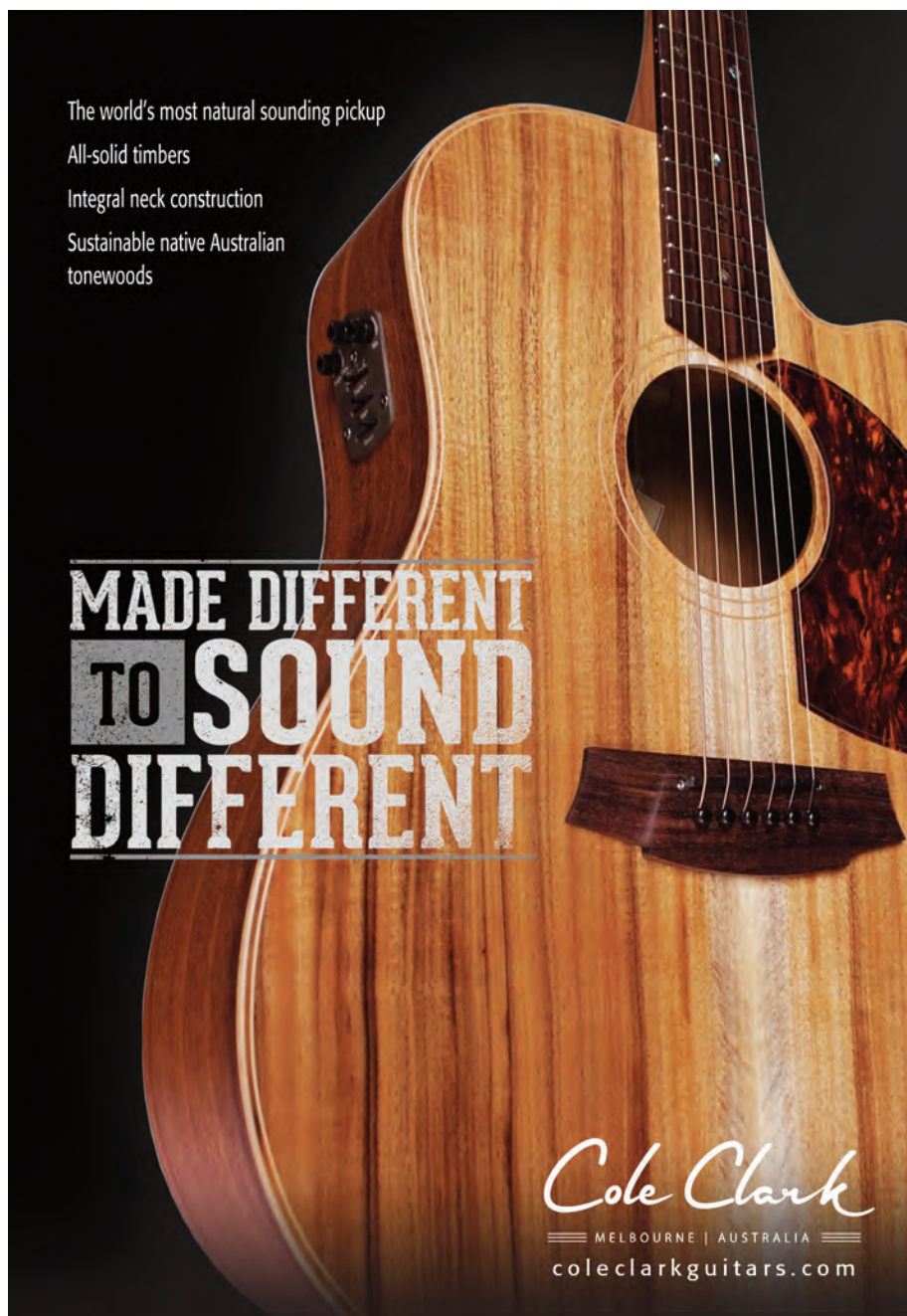
5 THINK OFTEN ABOUT THAT MOMENT YOU FELL IN LOVE WITH THE GUITAR

We all have an indelible memory of when we first fell in love with the guitar. For Roberta Lee, a 53-year-old PR executive from New

York, it was watching a guitar performance on TV as a child. "The moment I saw Roy Clark play 'Malagueña,' I was hooked," Lee says. "I was mesmerized by his technique and wondered if I could ever play like that."

The experience kept Lee motivated to keep going, to the point she's now actually tackling the song that initially inspired her. "I'm finally starting to learn how to play 'Malagueña,'" she says. "The song I first heard as a little girl all those years ago is bringing my musical journey full circle."

AG



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