



*By Phil Keaggy - GJD Contributor*

Hi Readers and Friends,

This is my first of hopefully many columns I wish to contribute to GJD.com. I am excited to share some of my experiences and insight as a guitar player of over 40 years. I appreciate the invitation to do so. For a lot of these topics I will take two approaches. First, giving advice to folks that are new in the world of guitar. Second, I will talk about my own personal experiences.

What to look for in an instrument: Let us look at acoustic guitars first...My very first acoustic guitar was an inexpensive Sears Silvertone. I was 10 at the time, so my hands were pretty small. I actually couldn't quite get my left hand around the neck. Years later, as a teenager, I found a nice Gibson acoustic. That was a good match especially since I had grown a bit. So one of things you need to have is playability. You may have a guitar that lacks tone but if it plays with ease, you're further ahead than a great sounding box that is difficult to play. Playability is your foremost concern as a developing guitarist. You want to make sure the neck fits your hand and that you can manage to be able to play your thumb on the back of the neck, while at the same time able to place your 1st finger on the fretboard for the use of barre chords and other more challenging items. My son plays guitar and in his early stages wasn't interested in barre chords, he said "it's too hard to press down the strings." I said, one day you'll be able to make these chords so... here's how! Today, he's a fine player and he plays barre chords that really impress me!

Of course, tone is of great importance as well, especially for live performance and for studio work. For live, many guitars are equipped with pickup systems. These pickups are very good for projecting your guitar through a sound system. Many have a combination of both pickup and microphone. That's how my acoustic guitars are set up. In the studio you may want to record the guitar with a high quality microphone and or go directly in via a direct box or pre-amp. I've utilized various combinations in the studio. The nice thing about a mic/pickup combo is that you can achieve more tonality from your instrument. When I recorded my Beyond Nature in 1990, my engineer JB used both a stereo mic set up as well as my internal pickup system. The results were stunning!

Lastly, cosmetics are the least of importance, although everyone appreciates the beauty of fine craftsmanship and great wood. I know I do. I once heard a guitarist play at an event and his tone was amazing through the PA. I asked him about his guitar, and he told me how inexpensive it was. It played very easy and had a LR Baggs pickup system in it, similar to mine.

It looked like a neglected guitar from a pawn shop, but really had a great sound. The guitar player was good too-that was Roscoe Meeks.

Finally, find an acoustic that is within your budget. There are many fine guitars that sound good, play good and look good within a decent price range. Next time, I'll talk a bit more about electric guitars, quick set-ups, and I'll give you some detail about my own personal hand built acoustic guitars.

All the best to you pickers---

Phil Keaggy