

## AREA 1.

5/ The quality of the sound you are producing is a primary element of fundamental importance for communicating in the language of music. Every aspect of the instrument (including the amplifier); design, materials, string, plectrum, pickups, speakers, speaker box, processing, amplification components and so on, plays a significant part in creating your tone. There is an opinion that any deviation from the accepted guitar set up for a particular idiom is not going to produce an authentic music/sound for that idiom. For country music you need to play a Gretsch guitar through a Fender amp with a twangy treble tone. There is no doubt these elements are common to country music, but I'm not sure they are the essence of that music. I am suggesting to those concerned with individuality and it's development, that decisions made in the production of a tone, should be pursued with a natural intrigue and curiosity. This will help the individuals voice to be more defined, to grow in its own way and to bring freshness and vitality to the genre. This notion can be applied to harmony, melody and rhythm also. Basic concepts are learned from teachers and books. Then there is the opportunity to investigate these fundamentals, exercising your choice and intellect in interpreting, applying and expanding the concepts, in practice. Yes, there is a lot of trial and error, but learning is not all systematic and stumbling has its rewards. Every aspect of acquiring and applying knowledge, the *way* in which it is done, is an opportunity for an individuals *choice* to function. Thereby strengthening identity, ownership and the individual.

6/ It may be obvious, but listening (and there are different ways of listening) could well be an under-explored aspect of your development. It is the fundamental skill required for performing or appreciating music. Recording your music and listening to the outcome is a highly recommended, edifying procedure. Listening to that recording at a later date can help you hear your work as if you were listening to someone else, encouraging a more *removed* view, allowing time for the experience to fade and for your ears to be refreshed for the next listening. It is inevitable when reviewing a recording that you will focus on your performance before anyone else's, and indeed the music as a whole. A good musician integrates with the whole, the context, and is responsive to the immediate sonic environment. It is helpful to remind yourself of this when listening back to your own performance. That what, why and how you were playing was influenced by the other players who were in turn influenced by you. In short, it was the music you were making that was the point and the *musical quality* as a whole that finally deserves your ears attention.

7/ Keep a notebook or a record of any discoveries or insights you have into your practice material. Things such as different ways of using a scale or arpeggio against a chord, or different ways to use a triad. Or a reminder to be watchful of an ineffective hand technique that has become a restrictive habit.

Alongside this is the idea of keeping a *compendium* of your own 'licks'. There is so much information available now on becoming a proficient guitarist. The same information is available to everybody, with the accompanying danger that we all end up sounding the same (US music colleges churning out clones of....!?). Fortunately we all have variations from each other in perception, physicality, artistic vision and so on and it is these innate differences from one individual to the next that provide our musical character. It is how you use the material that reinforces your individuality. Even when learning material from a book, play the examples given backwards or devise a different way of negotiating the information so your decision-making, your choice is exercised more thoroughly.

There is always another way of tackling the problem of assembling information, of thinking about an issue.

We will always repeat movements/patterns on the instrument, as it gives us a sense of accomplishment. So, instead of letting our *fingers* decide on what becomes habitual, or mindlessly imitating our heroes licks, why not make conscious choices to inculcate ourselves with material that comes from us just playing the guitar and in the process discovering things that we really like. Those things maybe just out of reach but close enough to imagine how good it would be when we finally have it under our fingers. This is not to say don't take ideas or be inspired by others. Pillage and appropriate to your hearts content, much will be learned. But somehow that material must be made your own!

We all play Pentatonic scales, so come up with alternative approaches that create more interesting sounding results than just playing the usual patterns. It maybe rhythmic; groups of 5 note sequences or 3 + 4 note patterns. It maybe melodic where you incorporate large intervals or jump across two or three strings. See it as composing *yourself*, writing the material that will eventually be your '*bread and butter*! This is reinforcing your character the thing that ultimately makes music interesting.