

Why write about guitars when the world's falling apart?

Description

Thinking and writing about guitars may seem fatuous in the midst of an all-consuming pandemic, but music remains as important to the human soul as ever.

I'm writing this while the world is gripped by the greatest threat to humanity in a generation – the COVID-19 pandemic is ripping through countries around the globe, and governments are scrabbling to respond effectively.

In the midst of all this, I wondered why I should even bother start on this project. Spending time researching and writing about guitars seems oddly irrelevant and even at a time like this. I'm an ecologist by trade and have spent my life working on better understanding and managing the earth's ecosystems in the face of ongoing and relentless human alteration and destruction. So I'm used to dealing with the big issues like climate change, species extinction, ecosystem transformation and feeding an ever-growing human population.

I'm also close to retirement, and I wanted to be able to switch gears a bit and duck out of all the various controversies and arguments that beset both my academic field and implementing things in management and policy arenas. I also love guitars – that story is told in "About". I found an interesting niche that brought my ecological world together with the world of guitars – basically that is what this site is all about.

I'm writing from my home office in Fremantle, Western Australia. At this very moment I should be participating in a writing residency at the Rockefeller Institute Bellagio Centre. I was lucky enough to be invited to join the residency program for a month to work on the sustainability and social justice aspects of the book I've been planning on the topic of making guitars in a changing world. We were due to fly out to Italy just as it was becoming apparent that northern Italy was fast becoming a serious epicentre for the disease. We cancelled, Rockefeller postponed all residencies, and things have spiralled since then.

We're all being asked to stay at home to reduce the rate of spread of the disease. Instituting processes for keeping students supervised and projects running has made things busy, and there is the temptation to spend too much time reading the latest news and fretting that our governments are not doing enough fast enough.

There is also the temptation to spend too much time on social media. Fortunately, however, social media like Facebook provide moments of joy and hilarity as well as spreading news of how people in different countries are coping or not.

The thing that has spurred me to get my act together and actually start on this project is the observation that many of the moments of joy being spread around the world involve music.

People enjoying brief moments of [socially-distanced joy](#) through music and dance. People in Italy,

Spain, [Scotland](#) and elsewhere joining together in song from their apartments where everyone is stuck in their own space but can open their windows or be on their balconies and connect with others. Musicians setting up [regular timeslots](#) where they beam music out to bored and worried people largely confined to their own homes. Orchestras using technological wizardry to play symphonic music together, each in their own homes, and [virtual pub choirs](#) connect locked-down people. People altering the lyrics of well-known songs to hilariously reflect what people are feeling all over the world.

The Rotterdam Philharmonic teamed up with a Dutch healthcare provider to film the finale of Beethoven's 9th with all the musicians playing their parts by video from their homes.

At the same time, one of the pieces of advice for people who are now largely confined to their homes is to take up some sort of creative activity. Learning or practicing a musical instrument is one such activity. I've discovered, somewhat reluctantly, that learning to play guitar better actually requires a lot of practice (the same is true really for most things in life). Practice takes time, and time is what a lot of people now have.

The joy that music provides and the therapeutic nature of playing and learning instruments provide welcome antidotes to the scary and worrying things going on in the world, both in our own neighbourhoods and virtually everywhere else. This is what convinced me to press on and do this. Rather than beaver away over a protracted period to produce the book I'd planned, I'm setting up this website/blog so that individual pieces become immediately available – and hopefully build to a useful body of stuff. I hope in some small way I can contribute to entertaining, informing, distracting and amusing people in a world gone mad – while at the same time looking forward to a brighter and more sustainable future filled with lots of trees and music.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Date Created

March 2020

Author

the-nature-of-music