

The Guitar and its effect on my life

By Jeffrey Li

The time was Christmas morning 2003, the ambience was silent and tranquil; not a sound could be heard. All of a sudden, I was woken from my eternal slumber. With awareness of the significance of the time and event, I leaped out of bed and rushed into the living room where a Christmas tree stood tall. Beneath the tree there lay my precious presents. Rummaging through these random gifts that had been awarded to me, I was disappointed to see that there were few that specifically appealed to me. Yet being the foolish child I was, I had overlooked one of them. In the corner of the room was one unwrapped box; upon it labelled "Electric Guitar and Amplifier". Although it had not appeared to be something as momentous at first, little had I known that this object was something that would soon turn out to have a highly significant effect on my life...

From that point on, the guitar seemed to turn the tables for me. It was highly unlike any other musical instruments I have ever played before, it had seemed to be something that I had become completely attached and addicted to. In spite of all the offers my father had given to me about guitar lessons, I had intentionally turned them down. As puzzled as my father was to my decision, I explained to him that this was an instrument I wanted to play in the form of an enjoyable activity. Having a guitar teacher would give me consistent blocks of homework on specific set pieces, thus turning practice into a task. I wanted to learn to play this instrument at my own pace and I wanted to learn to play this instrument in a manner that I would regard it as something other than a burden.

Ever since the beginning of my teenage years, I had always possessed a very fond liking of loud and emotional rock music. Even before I had taken up the guitar, I had established many role models in the music industry who wrote many songs that I was able to relate to. Many of these role models I had also happened to be very skilled in the area of guitar playing. Since I had already developed a very strong sense of respect for these musicians, I had formed a new aspiration in my mind to become just like them in terms of being a performer, an entertainer and a guitarist.

As time passed, the guitar seemed to gradually grow on me and I had eventually reached the point where I was putting almost four hours a day into playing the guitar. The guitar had become something more than a musical instrument to me, it became something I was able to channel my emotions into. Being a typical teenager, growing up and getting to accept the world around me was a difficult experience. I was constantly stressed over all of the difficulties I seemed to be having with my life and before I had taken up playing the guitar, there were several times where I had found myself drowning in my own depression.

However, with my guitar by my side things had become a completely different story. Rather than having to bottle up my feelings, I was able to channel my angst and anguish into playing the guitar. The pains and agonies of living the life of teenager was no longer stuffed down inside me waiting to explode like a bomb. Instead, it was released slowly through the playing and singing of the music that I had loved listening to for many years. I found out that playing and singing a song itself had a far more powerful effect on me than I could ever imagine. It was completely different from merely listening and relating to the lyrics of a song. By reproducing my own version of it, I was able to become one with the song and really develop a far better understanding of the music. Mere words cannot describe just how emotionally satisfying this felt to me.

All of a sudden, I realised that all of the torrid feelings I used to hold inside of me were no longer existent. The stress of school and any other typical grievances a teenager drowning in his pseudo depression was prone to whining about. They were gone; gone with the wind and faded away as swiftly as a guitar riff.

Being a guitarist also seemed to have its social benefits. After a few months of playing, I joined up with a fellow guitarist, a bassist and a drummer. Together, we had formed a four piece band. These people appeared to share similar interests in terms of music and it had also turned out that the other members of our band had experienced similar obsessions with their instruments.

Spending time and practicing with the band is an activity I regard as very special. While we practice, we are all able to release our energies and frustrations into the music. It is one of the few opportunities we get to just simply let go and channel every emotion and every thought into the music without any barrier or restraints. Yet despite all the fun of our practices, it is nothing compared to the rush and adrenaline of a live performance.

Though we rarely get an opportunity to perform live – our band always tries to cherish the moment once we get the chance. Thinking back to our first live performance, it was a quite a fierce explosion of energy on stage. Both the physical and psychological feeling was indescribable. The entire audience just seemed to lift up as if we were passing the energy from us onto them. The vicious drumbeats, earthshaking baseline and spine-shattering guitar riffs seemed to just blend together into a huge outburst of force which had an effect not only on our spectators but also on us. After a dominating introduction, the intense vocals were added and the power of the song was further enhanced. The crowd rose to their feet and also began to let go with us.

Yet still, the introduction was nothing compared to the moment of truth; the guitar solo. As it approached, my heart seemed to skip a beat and time appeared to be slowing down; the pressure was on. But unlike any other type of pressure I had felt before, I was able to embrace it and enjoy the thrilling sense of being at centre stage. I stepped to the spotlight and started to play, the noise of the baseline and rhythm guitar still highly audible. My guitar screamed and wailed like a banshee and the shrill blasts of sound sent shivers up my spine. The force ripped through any other existing sounds; the energy level was immense. The adrenaline inside me was pumping and the blood was running through my veins at rapid speed.

The build-up had everyone exhilarated and as the guitar solo reached its end, we finished together with a tremendously devastating finale that sent the crowd into a burst of cheers and applause. We kindly thanked our audience for their encouragement walked off the stage while listening to the sound of the deafening ovation. The aim from the beginning was to bring the spectators to life with our performance and we had no doubt succeeded. After the show, I was given very kind compliments by one of the finest female pianists performing that day. Since then, she has become a very special permanent part of my life...

Of all the great guitarists in the world, my biggest idol is none other than Saul 'Slash' Hudson of the illustrious band Guns N' Roses. He was a true guitarist who managed to make the guitar sing in a way unlike any other. Slash was one who not only had the immaculate skills of a professional guitarist but also possessed impeccable showmanship. He is very unique he always has his own original feeling and attitude when on stage. While he is in the spotlight his presence is something that isn't so easy to ignore. Needless to say, Slash is without a doubt one of my biggest heroes. As a guitarist he is a genuine inspiration to me and I truly hope that I can possess similar guitar-playing skills in the near future.

Despite the positive effects my guitar has had upon me, I have to sadly admit that it has had one or two detrimental effects on me as well. The first thing is the fact that putting in hours after hours of guitar practice is far from beneficial towards my fingers. Even though I have only played for a short period of time, the effect my guitar has had on the fingers on my left hand is very noticeable. The tips of each finger have hardened and become calloused. Blisters also have a tendency to regularly form on the fingers I use to press the strings onto the fret board of the guitar. As enjoyable as the process of practice is, the after effects are very painful.

My parents have also made me highly aware of the idea that playing my guitar has reduced the amount of time I am able to dedicate to my academics. My obsession with practicing the guitar has almost reached the point that my parents have had no choice but to enforce a maximum practice time of 3 hours per day on the guitar. They have also warned me that should my grades drop, my guitar would be the first possession of mine that would be confiscated. This in one sense could also be a good thing considering the fact that it does give me more incentive to achieve higher academic grades.

After weighing out the pros and cons, I would definitely say that playing the guitar has had a favourably positive effect both psychologically and physically upon my life. With aid of my guitar I was able to release the stresses of everyday life, learn new ideas about music and make new friends. Of all the greatest gifts that anyone has ever bought me, my guitar is definitely among the top.