

## How You Can Cut the High Cost of Cheap Guitar Lessons

by Dennis Winge

Yes, you read that correctly. It costs guitarists, in the long-run, huge amounts of money and time by taking cheap guitar lessons. When you shop for lessons by price and choose the teacher with the lowest rates, it can be highly detrimental to your playing for many years to come. Below are some reasons why.

1. **No training.** Most guitar teachers have never received training on how to teach. The problem here is twofold:

A. **A good player is not necessarily a good teacher.** There are some great guitarists who simply don't know how to break the complicated tasks down into easy, doable steps for the student. Either it was simply too long ago that the teacher acquired the skills that the student wants, and he/she can't remember how they learned them, or they don't have the analytical minds, patience, or communication skills adequate enough to convey the information to the student in a logical, step-by-step manner.

B. **They learned by trial-and-error.** Even guitarists who went to music school or who took many years of lessons can sometimes acquire skills through trial and error (and often the percentage of 'error' is sizeable.) Unfortunately, teachers often pass along bad habits to their students, which costs even more time and money on the part of the student to undo them all. (See my article called "The Truth About Trying to Get Better at Guitar Without a Good Teacher".)

2. **Knowledge is passed along incompletely.** We typically inherit students with a lot of gaps in their knowledge of music theory. Usually it is because their well-meaning teachers fell into one or more of the following scenarios.

A. **They taught things in isolation.** Music theory is not just a bunch of concepts that students 'should' know. Music theory is the attempt to explain why great music is great and why we like certain sounds more than others. Historically, music came first, then the music theory served as a tool to understand it.

A good teacher knows that a concept, in order to be fully understood, has to be implemented in many ways. In other words, the teacher must explain the theory concept and then show the student how to apply it in many different ways that the student can use right away. Otherwise, it just sits out in left-field and the student doesn't really learn it thoroughly because they don't know why it's useful.

B. **They tried to over-deliver.** The most common mistake among new teachers is that they give too much too quickly, and the student ends up feeling overwhelmed. To reiterate what was said earlier, the teacher must break down each step of the overall concepts they know, which they may have forgotten how they learned, into very small and easily digestible steps for the student. Otherwise, they will learn the 'big picture' but in a half-baked way.

You may have heard the tale of the two bicycles. One is \$100 and the other is \$500. You buy the cheaper one and in the first year you need to bring it in for repair twice, for \$75 per repair. In the second year, it breaks. You buy another cheap bicycle and a similar cycle happens all over again. By the time 5 years comes around, you have spent more than

\$500 while trying to save money. What's even more significant is that all during those years, you had nothing but headaches when it came to bicycle-riding. Whenever you were planning a good long ride, your bike was either not available or it couldn't keep up.

With cheap guitar lessons, this dynamic is even more poignant because not only do you end up spending even more time and money trying to unlearn bad habits and erroneous concepts, but you sacrifice years of musical enjoyment. If you had learned the right way the first time around, you could be almost infinitely further ahead of where you are now. This, to me, is the real tragedy because you can always earn more money but you can't make up for lost time.

When we hear students say things like "I've learned more in the last 6 months than I have in the last 6 years with my former teacher" we are glad for the student, and of course we take pride as well, but there is also an inkling of remorse that there are so many teachers who are inadvertently adversely impacting their students' musical lives. And, I should know, because I used to be one of them. I did not know that there are on-going training programs for guitar teachers (like the Elite Guitar Teachers' Inner Circle, an international teacher-training group that I belong to). I did not know what I know now, and I hope my former students from back then have recovered from it.

If you are interested, contact me for a copy of "How to Choose a Guitar Teacher" by Tom Hess. And if you live in the Ithaca area, you may contact me to schedule a free trial at our school known as Guitar Lessons Ithaca (website below). Best of luck to you.

About the author: Dennis Winge is a composer, freelance and jazz guitarist living Ithaca, NY. For more information, visit [www.GuitarLessonsIthaca.com](http://www.GuitarLessonsIthaca.com). (To distribute this article digitally, go to [www.GuitarLessonsIthaca.com/CostOfCheapLessons](http://www.GuitarLessonsIthaca.com/CostOfCheapLessons).)