

## **When You Wonder If You're Not Cut Out to Be a Good Musician**

by Dennis Winge

This article is about you, not me. However, I'm going to use my 'story' to help show you that you are never too old, too 'untalented,' too (you fill in the blank) to become a good musician. In fact, I am going to prove it to you. But first, bear with me while I set the stage a little.

At the time of this writing, I am 50 years old and have just finished recording my next album "What are the Odds?" which will be out sometime in 2021. It took me many months to write the music and many more months to practice it. The band I hired played one gig in March 2020, right before all gigs were halted due to COVID-19, and we were to record in April. Because of the pandemic, we postponed the recording until early October 2020, which we just concluded.

We did 18 tunes in two and a half days, which is absolutely breakneck speed. The reason we were able to get through it all so quickly is that not only had I rehearsed the band once before the March gig, but we rehearsed two 6-hour days immediately before going in the studio.

I need to also tell you that the reason the album is called "What are the Odds?" is that many of the tunes are in odd time signatures. There are tunes in 13, 11, 15, 9, 7, etc. beats per bar. I also want to point out that because the recording date got postponed, I got another 5 months or so to practice the material, which I did. Meanwhile, the band only had the 3 rehearsals and the 1 gig to prepare.

When we got to the studio, it went along fine for the most part, but boy was I glad that my amp was isolated, meaning that I was able to fix up any mistakes after the band recorded together live. The bass player had a few 'fixes' here and there, and the drummer had none; but I had 80% of them.

One factor that could have caused me to have the lion's share of mistakes could be that I'm simply more perfectionistic than the others; i.e. that since it is my album, I was listening to my part more closely than any others. But the fact is those other musicians had spent a lot less time than I had in preparing, and they seemed like the music was a lot less challenging than I did. Also, I feel that I should mention that they are in their 20s, i.e. half my age.

If you think all those factors didn't make me question my abilities as a musician, think again. Recording sessions can sometimes be tough on musicians because they can reveal his or her limitations. It can be embarrassing to be the one with all the mistakes that need repairing, while everyone else waits around with nothing to do until you're finished, especially when you have been hired and the client is paying for all the musicians and the studio time by the hour. It can also be humiliating that you are twice the age of the others and yet you apparently have half the experience, expertise or skill-level.

The only difference between me and people who feel like they don't have what it takes to be a good musician is that I'm used to thoughts that result in this kind of negative self-talk, and I don't take it seriously.

One of the best signs I ever saw, which just happened to be above the doorway in a recording studio, read: "You don't have to believe everything you think." This is classic! We sometimes forget that our thoughts are like any other ideas in that we have a choice whether to subscribe to them or not.

So you want to know how I can prove to you that you can be a good musician, despite whatever limitation(s) you think you have? Here are 3 points:

### **1. Only you define what 'good' is.**

I'm sure I will be proud of my new album when it comes out, just as I've been proud of all the others that have come before it. I know I will sell copies and have a successful album release party, because I've done these things many times before. In fact, I have been doing this for several decades, and I am a full-time musician and head of a guitar school.

To many, this is evidence that I am a successful musician, but it all comes down to me. I am successful simply because I choose to believe that I am. I am successful because I am grateful to have the skills I do have, and that I do what I do, with what I have, from where I am. This is not based on any external results; I only brought them up to show that it's all a matter of perspective. I could have chosen to believe those thoughts that I am an inferior musician, but I chose not to.

### **2. There will always be musicians better than you.**

No matter how advanced you may become, there will always be people better than you, or, at the very least, better than you in certain areas related to what you do. Think about the fact that professional musicians and athletes alike commonly have coaches, teachers, mentors, etc. Just because they know there are areas they need to work on doesn't mean anything about them as a musician or athlete. With pros, there is no stigma associated with taking lessons, only with amateurs. Similarly, pros have learned never to compare themselves to others, except in ways that will enhance their own growth. Anything else is simply a waste of energy.

### **3. Expansion is necessary.**

Have you ever heard the phrase, "When you stop growing you start dying?" This quote is attributed to William S. Burroughs. We live in an expanding universe, and if you're not expanding, you will be left behind. Said in a positive way, learning and growing is a natural part of life. If you decide that you're too \_\_\_\_\_ to continue to play music, you're choosing not to expand in this area, and potentially killing off this area of

enjoyment for the rest of your life. Learning music is fun. If you're not having fun learning, you're simply not learning the right way, or with the right teacher.

So the proof that you can be a good musician comes in the fact that:

- a) You make the rules and decide what to believe; the rest of your life follows suit.
- b) You can compare yourself to others all you want, but none of it matters one iota.
- c) You'll never feel like you've arrived. There will always be more to learn, so why kill the progress you've made so far?

I know you've heard these things before, but just another reminder for you. :)