



## So You Want to Make a Living with the Guitar Survival Strategies for Classical Guitarists, Part 2 by Daniel Roest

*Are you ready to take the leap and make guitar your full time gig? Already working but barely making it? This month's column covers ways successful guitarists are paying the bills within music, not outside of it.*

### Get to Work!

Let's continue last month's theme of "get real". The point I want to stress, especially to younger artists, is that unless you are born with a silver spoon and/or a trust fund, you are going to have to figure out what works in your particular case. Older musicians have gone through this process and are supporting themselves and their families, and you can as well. The first piece of information you must be willing to use is that a portion of your time must go to "marketing" - that is, promoting your service or product. Before rushing off to print flyers and paint the town, give serious thought to what your product means to others, why and how you'll get paid for it and how you may improve it. The normal process of "hanging in there" yields answers to these questions, but you'll progress faster if you focus on it now.

When at one point in my early career my confidence faltered and family concerns about money increased the pressure to step it up, I tried non-music sales. Actually I did well, but not so much that I could retire early or anything close to it. Two important things happened during this short stint outside of music. First, a fellow sales associate helped me realize that simply applying business basics to a career in music made more sense than a non-music career. The money is there if you get organized like we were, selling something I didn't really care about. Second, I learned what goes into a sale - things like supply and demand, problem solutions, trust and rapport, overcoming objections and closing. And guess what, I also realized that talent is not something to give up on, because it is a blessing, a gift.

### Use the Web

Before the Internet, I made countless trips to the post office or office supply store, sending out cassettes and CDs and large envelopes to clients in an effort to get to more gigs. Since putting a website together, it is extremely rare that I send out a CD because clients are able to hear enough online to make a decision. Even if you don't know how to create an attractive website with images and sound clips, don't delay in putting up a rudimentary site with basic contact information. You can then set about learning to upload basic elements of photos and sound files.

Once you have a site you're willing to unleash upon the world, you'll face another challenge. No one can find you if you don't appear on the search engine they are

using. Submit your site to search engines and decide what "keywords" to list for the search engines to see. Earlier this evening I received a call from someone who typed in "guitar lessons" and the name of my town - and came up with my site first. We'll be starting lessons next week, and my income just went up over a hundred a month. The majority of my gigs are generated by Internet searches.

## Build Your Phone Skills

When someone calls you, you must be able to meet their expectations as someone they would hire, be it for lessons or for a wedding ceremony. I found out long ago that I wasn't a morning person, and yet the public didn't seem to know in advance that I functioned better later in the day. Clients can phone at any time, whether you're wide awake, fuzzy-headed, exhausted or just average.

In order to appear reasonably intelligent at all hours, I typed up and duplicated an **Incoming Calls** sheet. The sheet reminds me to ask a number of important questions, including the caller's name and all their contact information, the date, time and location of the event, whether it is for solo guitar or ensemble, and how they got my name. If you gather this information quickly without pushing, your caller will notice and appreciate your professionalism. Be confident and readily mention the services you can provide that appear to fit the caller's needs. Speak clearly, thank your client for calling and end the call.

Now follow up on the call, particularly if you offered to send out demo materials or other items. For teaching queries, it may be simpler, but you must still have ready answers for the usual questions about what openings you have and how much you charge, as well as what your policies and special skills are. Keep your calendar near the phone; don't make your client wait on hold while you go searching for it. I keep my calendar on an Excel spreadsheet, as well as on Outlook.

## Written Communications

As I pointed out last month, any business transaction involves the service or product, marketing and accounting/administration. You'll need to generate some routine, dependable forms for the marketing part of your work. Everything your client receives from you should affirm their impression of you as someone they can trust to be a professional and talented musician.

For weddings, I rely on two forms that I tailor to the gig - the "Contract Close Letter" and the "Contract" itself. The letter includes an area for quotes from previous clients who wrote glowing words of appreciation; this enhances the client's confidence in me.

The contract includes the date, time (actual clock hours inclusive), location and compensation for the event as well as specifics about the format, type of event and when payment is to be made. There are also places for each of us to sign. You can include demands for shade, electrical power, an armless chair, blue M&Ms or whatever you feel would enhance your performance.

Keep adjusting and improving your template. My templates always include my logo. "Logo?" you might ask. It may not be the first item in your marketing campaign, but early on, some kind of graphic that communicates what you're about adds clarity and

a degree of professionalism. Be prompt in your written communications to maintain momentum in the process leading to a returned, signed contract and deposit.

I keep a Contracts Binder for contracts and pending sales with tabbed dividers for each month. I also keep Incoming Calls Sheets with pending sales up front, and I monitor them to stay current with each client. If a contract has been sent and I'm waiting for its return with deposit, I put it in its place in the right month. That way, when someone calls to inquire about a particular date, I can flip quickly to that date to see if it's free. I'll let the caller know if there is a competing date and if it is pending, then I advise the previous client to act now or let go of the idea of procuring my services (tactfully, of course). Build a network of referrals so that if you are unavailable, you can refer the client to a friend.

## Teaching as an Income Base

For performers, teaching can be a base that really works wonders to support other ambitions. Combining teaching with performing provides a steady source of income while performing gigs come and go. Method books and related materials that you enjoy - and prove effective for students - can form the basis of your work in the studio and are structured to make life easier for the teacher. The promotion of your lessons outside teaching hours should steadily increase your load. A very important element in this strategy is a positive attitude, both in the lessons and outside the studio. This comes naturally if you adopt a "service" style in your relationships with students. Your attitude should also be reflected in the marketing of your service.

## Teaching Materials

As for teaching, in addition to the books you and your students use, consider producing your own written materials; you would find your teaching would become more routine as you use them. At the very beginning, I have all of my students purchase a binder I make up with eight dividers and dozens of original pages. The sections are: Studio, Practice, Scales, Chords, Reading, Theory, Technique and Supplements. The three-ring binder format makes it easy to place scale and chord sheets and the like in the appropriate section. The logo and consistent look of the original sheets build the studio identity. The students fill out a survey sheet which asks questions about what they wish to accomplish, how much time they plan to devote to practice, and their musical tastes. To maintain student interest, it's important to know what motivated them to come to you in the first place.

## CD Sales Add Up

I used to be disheartened at the classical guitar section of the giant music stores because it seemed like newcomers stood little chance in the ocean of CDs. One friend invested ten grand in self producing her debut CD. Hundreds of CD sales later, she recouped her investment and went on to make a profit.

My approach was different. I realized that I had been chasing an image of perfection cultivated by Julian Bream, John Williams, Christopher Parkening and others- artists who recorded in studios and had record companies handling artwork, distribution and promotion. I also realized that the normal non-audiophile listening environment for consumers included ambient noise - enough that the extra thousands spent on a studio with the very best mics, engineers and signal processing would not be evident

to most consumers. Furthermore, home recording kept becoming more and more economically viable and products and dropping prices encouraged this approach.

After recording my first CD at home and putting literally everything together by hand at home, I recouped my costs very quickly, and the rest was profit. You can do this as well, but take the time to attain the very highest quality of sound available in your home studio before putting it out for sale. You'll be glad you did! Every time you play out, have your CDs at the ready, and make them available online through distribution services such as CDBaby.

## Presenting Others

The owner of a chain of music stores in my area shared his approach to getting sweet gigs for his band, including opening for Jimi Hendrix. He achieved this by booking and arranging performances for name "marquee" acts and taking the opening spot for his band. I've used that idea many times, opening for someone I really liked, including great players like Laurence Juber, Peppino D'Agostino and Muriel Anderson. Because I put the show together, I make sure it works for everybody - the other artist, the audience, the venue owners and myself.

Event by event, you will build up a reputation for artistic quality and trust from the artists you present. It's also a nice perk to hear compliments on your own playing from these players. A great thing about presenting concerts, apart from the music and supporting artists you admire is the rich learning environment. You can see how they speak to the audience, what they play, how they exhibit products like CDs, videos and books - and what gear they use. It was after witnessing how many artists display their products at concerts to garner several hundred dollars over their artist fees that I finally made a CD of my own to sell at performances.

## The Law of Supply and Demand

Anytime you have paid to hear someone else perform, you got directly in touch with what makes our economy function. As you enjoyed the performance, you made mental notes of everything about the event and probably imagined yourself onstage. We're not all destined for the top-tier entertainment dollars, but there is a place for you if you wish to perform. The question is, will it generate enough income, or does it have the potential to?

A main point in Part 1 of this article series was that income is a function of supply and demand. So embrace the concept; don't resist it. Each of us is blessed with different skills, talents, circumstances and opportunities. What you can add to the cards you are dealt is an absolute determination to make it happen, and that requires only two elements: information and the willingness to use it.

Next month I'll get into more detail on what to do and how to do it in performance, including repertoire, gear, apparel, and how to adapt to the many situations you're likely to encounter.

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## **About the Author**

**Daniel Roest** (pronounced "roost") started playing the guitar at the age of seven and never stopped. He has performed in countless solo and ensemble events in nearly every type of venue. His CD Great Guitars! 2004 has consistently received 5-star reviews. His concerts are praised for being entertaining and informative. For ten years he served as President and Artistic Director of the South Bay Guitar Society based in San Jose, CA. He is recognized for supporting gifted guitarists such as Laurence Juber, Peppino D'Agostino, Muriel Anderson, Jeff Linsky, Franco Morone, Michael Chapdelaine, Richard Gilewitz, Chris Proctor, Sharon Isbin, Carlos Barbosa-Lima and many others.

Roest earned three degrees in music performance and has participated in dozens of masterclasses. He has taught guitar and music fundamentals at California State University Stanislaus and De Anza, Foothill and San Jose City Colleges and maintains a fulltime teaching studio. He has adjudicated several multi-instrument competitions, presented music clinics and introduced many new audiences to the art of the classical guitar.