

EXPRESSIVE GUITAR PLAYING

Tapping Your Student's Inner Artist, *Part 2*

By Daniel Roest

Second in a new series of columns designed to unlock the expressive potential in your students' playing, as well as your own – bring new energy to your lessons with these ideas on transforming playing from ordinary to moving.

It is indeed an honor to follow John Wunsch's superb series inaugurating the Teaching the Guitar column for *Guitar Sessions*. My own series keys off John's January column, in the section titled "**Guide students to become involved with the music through presenting a level of expression beyond just playing the notes.**"

Take a moment to consider these **parameters of musical expression**:

Tempo, Dynamics, Rhythm, Tone, Legato, Vibrato, Rubato, Register, Harmony, Rests, Attack, Phrasing, Balance, Silence, Stage Presence and Heart.

Last month we explored the expressive potential in **dynamics**, and this month we will look in depth at **tempo**. As with the first column, we are looking to mine the "rich vein of gold" in terms of expressive potential and lift our students' playing well above the ordinary. John recommended increased focus on musical expression as a means of transcending self consciousness and performance anxiety. I agree, and the "win-win" for the student performer is a better experience for both performer *and* listener. Playing expressively elicits more enthusiastic compliments from the audience and better serves the music. I like to share this little scenario with students when describing a "moving" performance:

The composer has an experience – love lost, love found, nostalgia, celebration, serenity, and another one of many universal emotions. The feelings are put to music, picked up by musicians eager to perform it. They learn the locations of the notes, get them in the proper order and, in time, share them in a performance. This is the crucial moment – the moment when the composer's original experience can be tangibly felt in the hearts and minds of the audience.

To prepare your student in the area of musical expression, let's now look at what tempo can do to communicate emotion or imagery. Aside from the question of how fast a student is capable of playing a given piece, we need to look at what a tempo means emotionally – what emotion a tempo evokes. Let's go deeper than "the tempo is dragging," or "it's sounding too fast." We want to move the audience. We need to dial in the tempo that makes the composer's heart-felt inspiration come alive again in performance.

Walk Like a Giant

It has been helpful in my own exploration of this expressive parameter to leave the music temporarily. You can prepare for a **demonstration of the expressive effect of different tempos** with your student by doing the following: With a metronome and *no downbeat feature used*, start at 35 beats per minute (bpm.) Now try walking across the room at that tempo – without losing your balance!

The walking analogy is a great one to bring into a lesson. *Andante* is known as “walking speed,” and on my metronome, that range is 76-108 bpm. Below *Andante* is *Adagio* at 60-66. Try walking steps at 60 bpm, and it may already feel awkwardly slow. Above *Andante* is *Moderato* at 108-120 bpm. Now try walking the same area at 120 bpm. You will appear to be someone in a real hurry. Walking in the next tempo range, *Allegro*, 120-168 bpm, blends into jogging speed – try it!

Let’s look closer at what these different tempos express. Imagine observing someone - a stranger - walking at the various speeds you just did. What do you get purely from the speed of their steps? What impression of their mental/emotional state is evoked merely by seeing how fast they are walking? And what tempos are suggested when someone is agitated, upset, happily excited, depressed, young, athletic, old, infirm, determined, window shopping, catching a closing elevator, entering a party, walking up to take their wedding vows, climbing stairs, carrying a heavy load, hiking on a trail to get to the end, or hiking on a trail while trying to see every flower and every thing of beauty? How slow and lumbering are a giant’s steps? How fast do a hummingbird’s wings beat? In the heat of an argument, how fast are people talking? We need only to look at our world to find an unending supply of images that have an associated speed. At the same time, different speeds suggest images – and this is where a few words of imagery can provide the student with a handle for expressive playing.

By the Numbers

Some modern metronomes lack the associated musical terms for available settings. Here’s a quick summary of terms with generally accepted speeds:

Prestissimo — extremely fast (200 - 208 bpm)
Presto — very fast (168 - 200 bpm)
Allegrissimo — very fast
Vivo — lively and fast
Vivace — lively and fast (~140 bpm)
Allegro — fast and bright or “march tempo” (120 - 168 bpm)
Allegro moderato — moderately quick (112 - 124 bpm)
Allegretto — moderately fast (but less so than *allegro*)
Allegretto grazioso — moderately fast and with grace
Moderato — moderately (108 - 120 bpm)
Moderato con espressivo — moderately with expression
Andantino — alternatively faster or slower than *andante*
Andante — at a walking pace (76 - 108 bpm)
Tranquillamente — adverb of *tranquillo*, “tranquilly”
Tranquillo — *tranquil*
Adagietto — rather slow (70 - 80 bpm)
Adagio — slow and stately (literally, “at ease”) (66 - 76 bpm)
Larghetto — rather broadly (60 - 66 bpm)
Grave — slow and solemn
Lento — very slow (40 - 60 bpm)
Largo — “broadly”, very slow (40 bpm and below)
Larghissimo — very, very slow (20 bpm and below)

It’s All About Feeling

The second part of this column is about changing the tempo on the fly. In my studio I have a little prize – a rare edition of a small book by Frederick Franz, inventor of the electric metronome in 1938. Titled *Metronome Techniques*, the book is a wealth of advice on the use of the metronome and quoted wisdom from many teachers and performers. Here is a particularly relevant quote:

To be an artist one must be able to play in perfect time—slow, fast, or anywhere between. Then one must be able to leave the time at will. This is not the same as having the time leave the player, and that is the effect if one is not able to play with the metronome. M. L. Carr, *Violin World*, March 1896.

I can appreciate a good groove or absolutely steady pulse as much as anyone, but I am fortunate to have seen Segovia perform when I was just 11. He was in his prime as an artist and seduced a generation of listeners with his romantic playing. Through the use of **adjustments to the tempo**, romance happened. Our students need the tools for musical self expression, and this is a main one. An image bound to click with many students is the skateboarder at a skateboard park, charging down hills, using momentum to get up a hill, the coast of a level area, the excitement of entering a trick and the heart rates generated by each. A less intense image of acceleration (**accelerando**) or deceleration (**ritardando**) might be a bicycle riding over small inclines and descents. Whether you suggest a skateboarder, BMX trick biker, an older person hoping to not fall off the bicycle or something that works better for you, the goal is implanting an image that the student can relate to and tap into during performance.

A very important tool for expressive playing is wrapping up the final measures of the piece with a *ritardando* or **ritard** (same meaning.) Along with the harmonic cadence, this cues the audience to respond with applause. For the student to gain a sense of confidence in performing a *ritard*, have them play an ending with zero *ritard*, a little, and more each of several times to find and choose the one that feels right.

Within a phrase, teacher and student must also consider **rubato**, literally “robbed time.” If two players start and end the same piece at the same times, one could have played with a flexible tempo in places while the other adhered strictly to the metronome. Whether one or the other is preferred has to do with the piece and “what works” – is it romantic, contemporary classical, a dance, jazz, blues or what? The essential point is to give the student something to use as a guide, something that supports the expressive performance.

Stop, in the Name of Expression

A major sporting events in the U.S., *The Star Spangled Banner* almost always evokes deeply felt emotions of patriotism and pride. The climax arrives at a particular point when the phrase “*and the land of the free*” brings the tempo to a temporary stop – and here is where the **fermata** is at its most powerful. Think about it: what if the singer pushed through without any pause – that would just be *wrong*, and everybody in the park would know it. And what if the singer let the pause last way too long – that would just be unacceptable. Can you imagine? Not good! The success built to that point hinges on the fermata and the skillful management of tempo from there to the end.

From the Music Dictionary

To wrap up this month's in-depth look at one of the parameters of musical expression, I invite you to consider the following Italian musical directions and consider *what tempo* they each evoke. The beautiful thing about these terms, which I am only recently rediscovering, is that they are **expressive** and remind us that those who compose music were moved, and that we are drawn to music that moves us, whether we are in the audience or onstage.

affrettando – hurrying, pressing onwards; **agitato** – agitated; **amoroso** – loving; **appassionato** – passionately; **brillante** – brilliantly, with sparkle; **con amor** – with love, tenderly; **con brio** – with spirit, with vigor; **con (gran, molto) espressione** – with (great, much) expression; **con larghezza** – with broadness; broadly; **con moto** – with motion; **dolcissimo** – very sweetly; **doloroso** – sorrowfully, plaintively; **energico** – energetic, strong; **eroico** – heroically; **festivamente** – cheerfully, celebratory; **fieramente** – proudly; **flebile** – mournfully; **grandioso** – grandly; **grave** – slowly and seriously; **impetuoso** – impetuously; **incalzando** – getting faster and louder; **irato** – angrily; **lamentoso** – lamenting, mournfully; **maestoso** – majestically, in a stately fashion; **misterioso** – mysteriously; **nobilmente** – in a noble fashion; **passionato** – passionately; **pastorale** – in a pastoral style, peaceful and simple; **pesante** – heavy, ponderous; **rapido** – fast; **scherzando** – playfully; **serioso** – seriously; **soave** – smoothly, gently; **solenne** – solemn; **spiritoso** – spiritedly; **teneramente** – tenderly; **tranquillo** – calmly, peacefully; **vittorioso** – victoriously

We are learning in this series about the emotional impact of many parameters of musical expression. This month, inspire your students with new, rich experiences in tempo control. My next column will continue to explore the potential of our expression machine, the guitar.

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Daniel Roest (pronounced "roost") started playing guitar at the age of seven and never stopped. Today he has performed in countless solo and ensemble events in nearly every kind of venue. His *Great Guitars! 2004* CD has 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 prepared many successful grant applications for SBGS. He is recognized for presenting gifted guitarists such as Laurence Juber, Peppino D'Agostino, Muriel Anderson, Jeff Linsky, Franco Morone, Michael Chapdelaine, Richard Gilewitz, Chris Proctor, Sharon Isbin, Lily Afshar, Carlos Barbosa-Lima and many others.

In college Roest earned three degrees in music performance. He participated in dozens of masterclasses, including many he produced. He taught guitar and music fundamentals at California State University Stanislaus and De Anza, Foothill and San Jose City Colleges and now maintains a full-time teaching studio in Folsom, CA. He has adjudicated several multi-instrument competitions, presented music clinics and introduced many new audiences to the art of the classical guitar. His original solo composition, *February 4th*, was selected from hundreds of submissions by the ERMMedia "Masterworks of the New Era" CD series. This year he was selected to be a presenting artist in the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission's Artist Residency Institute. Previous columns for Guitar Sessions include "So You Want to Make a Living with the Guitar," Parts 1, 2 and 3, July-September 2007.