

The Magic of Computerized Guitar Instruction!

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Guitar and computers go together like apple pie and ice cream. One can learn how to play the guitar from both tutorial and drill and practice software instruction applications that are interactive with multimedia ingredients using text, graphics, audio and video applications of the software. While most instrumental music educators are not guitarist by trade, the video instruction is particularly important in guiding both students and their teachers to correct hand position for both right and left hands plus learning to read music, learn repertory and play in tune among other pedagogical aspirations. And in some instances, these software applications are methods that can keep the student occupied for an extended period of time. If you go to an Internet search engine such as Yahoo, Google, Altavista or Excite and search with “guitar,” “tutorial” and “software,” you will be surprised of how many Internet based guitar software applications are available and some of them are free. In this installment, I will focus in on instructional applications that incorporate tutorials and drill and practice features that teach one how to play and practice the guitar and electric bass.

Meet the Four Primo Manufacturers of Guitar Software Applications

In the January, 2001 issue of SBO magazine

<http://www.sbomagazine.com/sbomag/jan01/technology.html>) in this technology column, I reviewed some of the basic core of guitar software products that are important for music educators. In order to consolidate these products for you, here is a summary for your perusal in two areas of instruction: 1) guitar and electric bass method software applications and guitar specialty. Guitar software applications are more plentiful than electric bass applications. Both the Mac and PC

platforms are well represented in this article. Frequently, the software is on a hybrid CD-ROM that runs on both the Mac and PC platforms. If you are a PC user, be sure that the soundcard compatible with a SoundBaster since that is the standard soundcard for the PC platform. Not all products are equal in features or even applications. Some do not have video tutorial while most do. Some products even have electric tuners built in so you can tune your guitar and/or bass. There are four companies that have really put a lot of research and development into their products for guitarist and their products constitute the bulk of the guitar method software market. Generally, you should look at these products first because these products generally set the standards for other companies. These companies are listed in alphabetical order: Alfred Publications, Charanga, e-Media and PlayPro,. The best thing is that each manufacturer has their own niche in the guitar market and their products offer creative pedagogical alternatives to just studying out of a guitar book. PlayPro and eMedia Music also have established themselves in the electric bass market as well.

Guitar Software Applications of the Four Primo Manufacturers

eMedia Music is quite a company that specializes computerized instruction for guitar, bass and piano instructional software. What really appeals to me is that they offer entry and intermediate level instruction plus a wealth of repertory applications. You can download demos from their web site at: <<http://www.emediamusic.com>>. MIDI is not required with their software applications. What makes their methodically attractive is that their products work for both students who want to learn guitar on their own and for instructors looking for methods of keeping their students interested and excited about guitar. There is also a balance between popular and folk styles with awesome video and audio examples. You can monitor student's progress and make assignments and have them record themselves to see how they are doing.

eMedia Guitar Method 1 & 2, eMedia Guitar Songs and eMedia Blues Guitar Legends

represent one of the most ambitious method series of guitar software on the market. All eMedia products have a Windows/ Macintosh cross-platform CD-ROM. There is something for nearly any guitarist. Each product has an animated fret board that displays fingering positions as the music plays and shows the fingering for any chord or note you double-click on. In addition, there is an automated tuner that visually tunes your guitar by playing into your computer's microphone, a digital metronome that keeps a steady beat with audio and/or visual feedback and a recording studio that records and plays back. I like how the recording can be saved to assess your progress over time. What I like best about these programs is that each lesson maximizes multimedia with interactive instruction using audio, video and text instruction. This instruction represents a flexible approach for beginners.

There's a brand new version of the *eMedia Guitar Method*, Volume 1. This volume has 85 comprehensive lessons offering 70 songs with accompaniments by full-motion video and sound. Step-by-step lessons range from basics like stringing the guitar and playing simple chords to strumming styles, playing melodies and finger-picking. There are 250 chords in this volume while volume 2 offers 900 chords. You can choose either music notation or tablature.

In *eMedia Guitar Method 2*, there are 85 more video-enhanced lessons in which you can learn popular songs and licks with intermediate-level skills such as hammer-ons, pull-offs, bends, vibrato, and barre chords. The rhythm section illustrates different strumming styles and the finger style section teaches new playing techniques. This software does a good job teaching music reading skills, scales and modes.

eMedia Guitar Songs (Windows/-Macintosh) focuses on learning famous songs with more than 20 rock, blues, country, classical and folk songs, such as "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown," "Georgia On My Mind," and others. It features songs popularized by Eric Clapton, Elvis Presley, Santana,

The Who and others. An artist biography and photos are included for each song. eMedia's *Blues Guitar Legends* gets into classic blues songs, featuring 10 blues songs spanning six decades (1940s to 1990s). Simplified chord versions of the songs are ideal for beginners, while experienced players can learn note-for-note from the full transcriptions of both lead and rhythm parts. *Blues Guitar Legends* also has a very helpful tool for beginners with a multi-speed track for the guitar and performance tips before each song. The animated fret board brings the fret board alive with real-time display of notes, including bends, vibrato and slides. Web URL: <http://www.emediamusic.com>.

eMedia's *Intermediate Guitar Method* features learning to play lead guitar. Learn to play lead guitar and more! Everything you need to take your playing beyond basic chords and melodies. New techniques are demonstrated in over 175 lessons with full-motion video, variable-speed MIDI, recorded audio and an animated fretboard. You'll learn to play solos like the ones Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix made famous, using newly acquired lead guitar skills. You'll also find rhythm and fingerstyle chapters, plus lessons on the basics of improvisation. The new scale directory provides fingerings, recordings and variable-speed MIDI for over 200 scales. Additional accessories include an automatic tuner, digital metronome, recorder and 1000-chord dictionary with audio playback.

eMedia also has a "hot" bass method available. It is their *eMedia Bass Method*: \$59.95 Dual Windows/Mac CD-ROM.. Bass has never been so easy as with this beginning level CD-ROM. Features 114 step-by-step lessons by renowned bass instructor John Arbo. Learn to play using full motion video with multiple angles and close-ups. Over 200 songs and exercises teach all the skills you need to start playing, including triads, fills, syncopation, plus creating a bass line. Includes multi-track recorded audio, variable-speed MIDI, bass-only and no-bass options. Features songs by the Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan and others. Includes an animated fretboard, automatic tuner, recorder and metronome.

Alfred Publishing is a major resource for music educators in learning instruments, particularly in dealing with rhythm section instruments as well as unusual instruments, such as harmonica. For years', Alfred's guitar product lines were Guitropolis and Teach yourself to Play Guitar.

Guitropolis by Alfred Publishing (Macintosh and Windows 95/98) is an adventure in learning to play the guitar. It may be the most innovative multimedia-oriented guitar method on the market that works well with both acoustic and electric guitarists portrayed in a city environment. Check out the innovative instructional units, including "Mary's Guitar OiRama," "Dollar Records," "Seymour's Guitar Shack," "The High A Club," "Jerry's Java Jam," "K-GTR Television Studios," and "Waster-O-Space Storage and Record Studio." Courseware covers music reading, chord strumming, playing in popular musical styles and soloing with a band. The song player lets you adjust tempo, record yourself and visually show you exactly what to play. There are numerous fun games to reinforce music lessons. I like how the chord dictionary shows you how to finger chords and notes. Beyond the slick graphics and innovative teaching rooms, this method teaches both in standard music notation and in tablature. Songs incorporated in the lessons have full accompaniments in a variety of styles of popular songs such as rock, blues, jazz and country. It is possible to begin instruction at any lesson in the method. The built-in guitar tuner is very helpful for beginners. Web URL: www.alfred.com.

Teach Yourself To Play Guitar by Alfred Publishing (Windows/ Macintosh). Windows hardware prerequisites include: Pentium CPU, Windows 95/98NT 4 or later, 32 MB RAM, VGA video, CD-ROM, sound card and modem for additional optional lessons. Macintosh hardware prerequisites include Power PC or Power Macintosh, System 7.5.3 or later, and the same as stated for Windows. Everything you need to know to start playing is presented for acoustic and

electric guitars for beginners at all ages. It includes 60 popular songs in a variety of styles including rock, heavy metal, blues, country, jazz and folk. Concepts include playing chords, scales and licks. It offers the ability to download new lessons from the Internet with the Add-A-Lesson Course Customize. Lessons are clear and easy-to-follow. Techniques are reinforced with exercises. The best thing about this method is the interactive song player, which lets you see exactly how each song should be played and gives you the ability to adjust tempo, mix accompaniment audio and record your performance with a microphone. Priced at \$29.95 making this an attractive entry-level product. Web URL: www.alfred.com.

Alfred's computerized guitar product line has just had a significant change with the addition of a deluxe version of their *Teach Yourself to Play Guitar*. It is on a hybrid CD-ROM for both the Mac and PC platforms. This 2001 update marks the latest pedagogical contribution to the computerized guitar market. What is new and different in this new deluxe version? The instruction is remarkably attractive for one to learn at their own pace with an improved interactive song player which lets you see exactly how each son should be played as well as adjust the tempo to your needs, mix the accompaniment audio and even record your performances. There is over \$25 of free stuff, teaches everything in full video, and has lots of useful multimedia features. There's also a 336-page Essential Dictionary of Music from Alfred included with a coupon for a free set of strings and ½ price t-shirts from Ernie Ball. The CD-ROM which uses the same great teaching approach as the best-selling book, in a fun, interactive audio/visual format which makes for a dynamic combination if you use both the book and CD-ROM. Beginners of all ages can learn to read standard music notation and TAB, perform songs in a variety of styles, and play chords, scales and cool licks on either acoustic or electric guitar. Exercises reinforce your technique as you follow along with music right on your screen. Their interactive song player is the reason the software is so interactive

because it lets you change tempos, adjust audio levels, and record your performance. The lessons are in full-motion video which clearly demonstrating lessons help you start playing right away and in a step-by-step manner throughout the entire course of study. You'll like how the bonus games reinforce concepts taught in the method. I particularly like the customizable ear training program, *Play It by Ear* which gives you the tools to play any song you hear as well sharpen your musical senses. Over the years, *Play It by Ear* has been an outstanding ear training program so this addition is most welcomed pedagogically by me. There is even a brand-new, interactive guitar tuner with visual indications making tuning easy and help you to play in perfect tune. Upon completion of this method, you'll be able to play from popular guitar TAB folios and be ready to play in a band which is a good expectation for this courseware. Priced at \$49.95 making this quite a buy for all the features found in this product.

PlayPro is another primo manufacturer of guitar and electric bass instructional software. You will not be disappointed in either *Interactive Guitar and Interactive Bass* by PlayPro (only for PC platform; Windows 95/98/2000) which are two in-depth software products, which include impressive manuals of 201 and 166 pages, respectively, plus two audio CDs and two CD-ROMs. Hardware prerequisites: Windows 95/98/4, 16 RAM, 2x CD-ROM, SVGA video and 16-bit sound card. PlayPro's main claim to being the "Cadillac" in the computerized guitar/electric bass software is their Comp-U-Pare analyzing system which puts this system in a league of its own. After you cop with each lick, this device rates your accuracy and timing, alerting you to what needs practice. The manuals have over 250 fret board dot diagrams that clearly lay out the exercises. More than 100 photographs clarify guitar techniques that are explained in detail and supported with recorded examples. The instruction is appropriate for beginning through advanced levels. This highly desirable method encompasses a variety of contemporary rhythm styles and is easy to use. Simply

plug your electric bass or guitar into your PC with no MIDI hardware modifications required and you are ready for interactive playing experiences. The interaction is well designed with text, music TAB, audio and video. There is a chromatic tuner that makes it easy to tune your guitar or bass. There is also a recording studio so you can save your licks and be part of the band with controls like reverb, chorus, flanger, digital delay and compression. There are both "live" and MIDI versions of all band tracks. Lead the rhythm section in your own customized band. The MIDI Machine will let you loop all examples and progressions in any key and at any tempo. There are more than 50 high definition videos, which show you exactly what to play. All videos are shown from a player's perspective of what you see is what you play which is unique. For more info, go <to: <http://www.playprosoft.com>>.

Last by not least in my top four computerized manufacturers is Charanga. Their *Guitar Coach* and *Electric Guitar Coach* by Charanga (only for PC platform: Windows 3.1/95/98/2000) are very good "how to" tutorials for beginners and those who want to take up guitar. Prerequisites for installation include: Windows 3.1/95/98 with 486/66 MHZ or faster CPU, 8 RAM, 2X CD-ROM, and Sound Blaster compatible soundcard and SVGA video with 256 colors. Each course of instruction is organized into five levels, which have five individual lessons: technique, classical, chords, finger style and strumming. Included are more than 50 hours of video and audio instruction in which soloing, picking and strumming techniques essential for good all-around playing are presented. This is a particularly self-directed method, which has an extensive reference section on everything from holding the guitar to chord theory. There is a Guitar Coach tuner that helps you tune your guitar. I like the hours of guided practice where you choose the song and style you want to play while the *Guitar Coach* or *Electric Guitar Coach* accompanies you. Recommended for the age 10 to adult acoustic and classical guitar student. Each product contains more than 200 video clips.

All videos can be viewed on a normal size or full screen, and at full speed or in slow motion. Web URL: <http://www.charanga.com/support>.

Now there's a new product available by December 15th from Charanga: *Intermediate Guitar Coach*. This product is a collection of songs and solos that will give you many hours of guitar practicing to help you to build up an impressive repertoire at the same time you will increase your skill level and understanding in many new areas. Prerequisites: Pentium IBM compatible PC 233MHz or faster with 256-color monitor supporting 800 x 600 screen resolution in Windows™ 98/ME/2000/XP operating systems, 16-bit Sound Blaster™ compatible sound card, 8x CD-ROM Drive, and 64MB of RAM. It contains an incredible array of multimedia features, including over 100 video clips, real audio 'minus 1' backing tracks, variable speed practice tracks and Guitar Karaoke tracks, ensure that you'll enjoy every aspect of playing and learning and get all the help you need to progress smoothly. Music styles covered include Blues, Folk and Country along with playing impressive fingerstyle solos in American, Irish, English Folk and Classical styles. The videos are pedagogically superb with great camera angles, full-screen viewing, slow-motion and flexible looping options, speed up progress by showing you every detail of how songs are played. The interactive tuner is rather easy to see and use.

Alternative Manufacturers of Instructional Guitar Software Applications

There are many other computerized software packages to supplement ones computerized guitar method and/or electric bass instruction. For example, Hal Leonard has come up with their iSong series of 21 CD-ROM's featuring the music of many popular guitarists such as B.B. King, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, and others. iSong is the only teaching tool that actually syncs to the original recordings of legendary musicians and today's top stars! Each iSong pack includes arrangements ranging from very simple to note-accurate transcriptions, a performance video, and a

virtual fretboard or keyboard, all in one wholly interactive environment. No matter what your skill level, or whether or not you read music, iSong is a great way for you to learn songs you've always wanted to play! Each iSong CD-ROM features six innovative teaching tools in a state-of-the-art interactive environment with an animated score and TAB, plus synced instructor video, iLevel arrangements widely ranging in difficulty, Virtual live fretboard or keyboard, Tempo control, and looping with exact cueing. For example, their *Eric Clapton iSong* CD-ROM contains accurate transcriptions of guitar and bass parts from Eric Clapton's original recordings. Some of them include: "Needs His Woman," "Wonderful Tonight," "After Midnight" and "I'm Tore Down." *Eric Clapton* by Hal Leonard (Windows 95/98). Hardware prerequisites: Windows Pentium CPU, 4 MB application RAM, 1 MB video RAM, 8x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster soundcard compatibility and QuickTime 3.0 or greater. Macintosh includes Power Macintosh, 4 MB application RAM, 1 MB video RAM, 6X CD-ROM and QuickTime 2.5 or greater. All iSong products are priced attractively at \$24.95. For Mac users, please note that iSongs are not presently compatible with the MAC operating system 9 and higher.

Hal Leonard has some other instructional guitar CD-ROM's for your attention. Their *Play Rock Guitar* is a multimedia educational CD-ROM for Windows that teaches guitarists to play rock style guitar. This program uses, text, video, animation, an animated midi fretboard to illustrate how to play four classic rock tunes. Their *Play Guitar* offers an easy way to learn basic guitar playing skills. Play with the band or take a lesson to learn music theory and develop your chops using the animated fingerboard.

PG Music has long provided many guitar CD-ROM's for guitar instruction. Their *Jazz Guitar MasterClass* with Oliver Gannon by PG Music (Windows 95/98). Hardware prerequisites: Windows 3.1/95/98, 16 MB RAM, PC 16-bit sound card and a CD-ROM drive. There are 43

lessons on disc one and 18 lessons on disc two. It contains a wealth of instruction to playing jazz guitar. There are 50 jazz tunes included plus a lot of practice techniques, a study of great jazz guitarists (Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt, Barney Kessel, Wes Montgomery, and many others). This software is loaded with important and essential materials for the aspiring jazz guitarist. Appropriate for guitarists at all levels of instruction. Another one is *Master Jazz Guitar Solos* by PG Music (Windows 95/98). Hardware prerequisites: Windows 95/98/NT, 16MB RAM, PC soundcard or MIDI module and a CD-ROM Drive. This software application is a full-featured interactive music program with professional jazz quartet/quintet arrangements of 50 songs. Each song features a jazz guitar solo played by top studio musicians as well as accompanying piano, bass, drums and strings. There are almost five hours of jazz guitar soloing in this program. *The Blues Guitarist* by PG Music (Windows 3.1/95/98). Hardware prerequisites: Windows 95/98/NT, 16 MB RAM, PC Soundcard or MIDI module and a CD-ROM drive. It is a full-featured music program containing studio recordings of great Blues electric guitar music. On separate tracks, there is one instrument (guitar, keyboard, bass and drums) allowing you to listen to each part independently. There are powerful multimedia features that let you study the arrangements, hear the music, and play along with top studio musicians. In addition, there is nearly an hour of instruction on the Blues along with tips and techniques. Web URL: www.pgmusic.com.

AC Muzik is an exemplary manufacturer of interactive jazz education CD-ROM's. They also offer a good guitar instruction. Their *The Developing Jazz Guitarist* is by Tom Hynes (AC Muzik). Hardware prerequisites: Power Macintosh, 100 MHz or faster processor, 8x or faster CD, 16 MB of RAM, System 7.5.5 or newer, QuickTime. It is an interactive video in a CD-ROM format designed for use by music educators as well as beginning and intermediate level guitar students. By

using navigational "buttons" that appear on the computer screen along with the video, students or educators can, at their discretion, view the whole video or any individual section with just a click of the mouse. Topics covered: getting the right sound, chord shapes I and II, swing rhythm guitar, modern jazz, Latin/funk styles, scale shapes I and II, tips on technique, and thoughts on soloing. Web URL: www.acmuzik.com/index.html.

Closing Comments: More Instructional Materials?

I believe you will agree that the four major manufacturers of guitar/electric bass instructional software applications (eMedia, Alfred Publishing, PlayPro and Charanga) reviewed in this installment represent quite a distinguished library of excellent resources for music teachers to consider using. These manufacturers offer not only several products, but also instructional versatility for different needs for different students and teachers. Teachers will really appreciate their pedagogical diversity. That's why you really must try downloading their demos to see how they differ for your teaching needs. When evaluating these methods, first examine the pedagogy on the videos. For example, you'll quickly notice if the hand position matches your instruction since there are different schools of thought and ways to play and teach guitar. Some products video from the students view rather than the teacher's view. The particular software features are not really as important as the pedagogical considerations that you will observe. Good luck evaluating these methods as well as the alternative instructional CD-ROM's reviewed in this installment.

Are there more software applications that should be checked out? Try the supplemental software applications as there are many products to evaluate. Again, most manufacturers have demos that you can download from their web sites. Need more resources for computerized guitar instruction? Here's how to find even more computerized guitar instructional materials. Use your favorite Internet search engine (Yahoo, Altavista, Google, Excite, InfoSeek, etc.) with the following

search words: “guitar” or “electric bass,” “software” and “tutorial” and you will be amazed of how many appropriate instructional materials are available for both guitar and electric bass. You will also find additional resources in this search with not only tutorials and drill and practice software applications but also electronic tuners, on-line lessons, theory, side rules, and much more from many foreign countries such as Ireland and South Africa focusing in multi-culture guitar musical styles. Good luck in using computerized guitar instruction in your teaching.