

# Aural Training

West Midlands based RGT tutor *Dan Thorpe* outlines a few suggestions to help encourage the development of aural skills amongst your students.

As teachers we all appreciate the benefit of strong aural skills. For many students practising the development of aural skills seems to be an afterthought and not something they are overly eager to do. I therefore make sure to spend at least a small chunk of time in each lesson with each student, helping them practice their aural skills and ensuring we do it in a fun and easy to apply way. The following are some of the techniques I use with my students regularly.

## Sing or hum everything you play on the guitar

This is a super useful thing that everyone should do, however, many guitarists either can't do this at all or can't do it very well. It is such an important skill as it ingrains the notes you play into your head allowing your 'inner ear' to develop to a high standard. You no doubt play lots of songs, riffs and scales on a daily basis but how many of those can you actually hum or sing out loud? You should be able to sing or hum all of them. If not, you are wasting a simple chance to instantly improve your aural skills.

Here is a simple example of a 2-bar blues lick played using the A minor pentatonic scale. I will advise the student to learn this lick and to sing along whilst they play it — I'll probably sing along as well to start with to help enforce the melody. It is also important not to wait until you have learnt to play the lick fully before you learn to sing it.

Learning to sing as you are learning to play on the guitar gets your ear in tune with the riff and is a great habit to get into.



## The scattergun note game

Joe Satriani came up with this scattergun note game which is really quick to do and fun to play. You simply pluck random notes on the fretboard and aim to sing and match the pitch right away — not moving on from one note until you can accurately hit the correct pitch.

You can then take this game further by choosing a random fret and placing your finger on this fret but not plucking yet. Instead, you will guess the pitch out loud and then pluck. Doing it this way is, of course, much tougher but will help you to be able to find notes on the fretboard quickly when you hear that pitch out loud in real songs and pieces of music.

## Splitting the chords game

This is a fun little game that I enjoy doing myself. Instead of strumming all the notes in a chord, try strumming the treble strings (G, B, and high E) only and then singing or humming the bass notes. Separating the two parts like this sounds cool, tests your ability to find a pitch that should be there but isn't and loosely replicates what a lot of soul and funk guitarists do — they leave the low end for someone else to play! As a by-product, this fun little game will allow you to experiment with different three-string chord voicings while singing or humming the same bassline underneath. It is a wonderful skill to be able to master.

In the example below, we first have a very simple strum pattern played on a G Major chord for one bar. In bar 2 we then take out the chord tones to leave just the bass notes in the chord. This is what you will be singing. In bar 3 we have the actual 'top end' of the chord which you will now strum while singing the bassline from bar 2. In bar 4 we have a different chord voicing for the G Major chord which sounds much brighter and higher in pitch. Play this bar while singing the simple bassline from bar 2. This gives the piece a little variety and because these higher tones are so far away from the bass notes it makes it a little trickier.



Obviously this is a really simple example and is just one bar taken from a piece of music. As you get better at this you can start using basslines that are more melodic rather than just basic root notes but this is a good place to start.