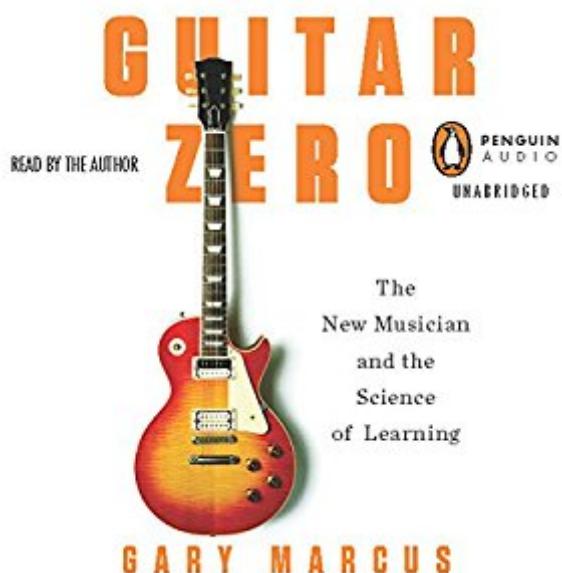


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# Guitar Zero: The New Musician And The Science Of Learning



## Synopsis

On the eve of his fortieth birthday, a professor of no discernible musical talent learns to play the guitar and investigates how anyone of any age might master a new skill. Just about every human being knows how to listen to music, but what does it take to make music? Is musicality something we are born with? Or a skill that anyone can develop at any time? If you don't start piano at the age of six, is there any hope? Is skill learning best left to children or can anyone reinvent him-or herself at any time? On the eve of his fortieth birthday, Gary Marcus, an internationally renowned scientist with no discernible musical talent, becomes his own guinea pig to look at how human beings become musical- and how anyone of any age can master something new. *Guitar Zero* traces his journey, what he learned, and how you can learn, too. In addition to being a groundbreaking look at the origins and allure of music, Marcus's journey is also an empowering tale of the mind's plasticity. In a quest that takes him from Suzuki classes to guitar gods, Marcus investigates the most effective ways to train your brain and body to learn to play an instrument. How can you make your practice more deliberate and effective? How can you find the best music teacher for you or your child? Does talent really exist? Or is hard work all you need? *Guitar Zero* stands the science of music on its head, debunking the popular theory of an innate musical instinct and many other commonly held fallacies. At the same time, it raises new questions about the science of human pleasure and brings new insight into humankind's most basic question: what counts as a life well lived? Does one have to become the next Jimi Hendrix to make a passionate pursuit worthwhile? Or can the journey itself bring the brain lasting satisfaction? For those who have ever set out to learn a musical instrument- or wishes that they could- *Guitar Zero* is an inspiring and fascinating look at music, learning, and the pursuit of a well-lived life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an interesting book. It's easy to read and tells a fairly compelling story about a 40 year old professor who always wanted to be a musician finally taking the plunge. This book is a story about human learning told through the perspective of music. The specifics are music and guitar, but that's really not what the book is about. The description includes this sentence: "Guitar Zero stands the science of music on its head, debunking the popular theory of an innate musical instinct and many other commonly held fallacies." Not so. The author specifically states he believes in innate musical talent and he counts himself as one who lacks even normal levels. Part of what makes the book interesting is his struggle against this lack and ultimately the degree of progress he makes despite this obstacle. I think this book will be of interest to those who are musically inclined but please be aware that this is most certainly not in any respect a how-to book. This book does not teach you how to play the guitar or any other musical instrument. Instead it is a rather inspiring story of someone who followed his heart fairly late in life and what he learned in the process.

I'm enjoying this book a lot. I've been teaching guitar to adult beginners for nearly 40 years which is a privilege, because it means I get to be in the presence of courage on a daily basis. Gary chronicles his personal journey as a adult beginner on guitar, but from the perspective of an expert on learning & language acquisition, with all the understandings his profession have given him. He encourages all learners to just KEEP GOING; keep trying. Guitar is complicated. So is music. Gary's understanding of the specifics of what's hard about it, and strategies for making the most of practice time, are well worth the time it takes to read. Practice doesn't make perfect; it makes permanent. If you can make each note beautiful, you can make a whole piece beautiful. On the other hand, you can't learn to ride a bicycle with it standing still. You've got to do a certain amount of falling down. And it's more fun with friends. And most of all, it's not too late! —p Breskinco-founder, Puget Sound Guitar Workshop

This book wasn't quite what I had expected, but I wasn't disappointed. Cognitive psychologist Gary Marcus, who clearly has a history of being "challenged" musically, decides as he approaches the

age of 40 to learn to play the guitar. A serendipitous sabbatical from his usual gig teaching at NYU gives him enough leisure that he takes on the project seriously. *Guitar Zero* (a pun on the popular video game *Guitar Hero*, for those like me who didn't get it) recounts his adventures, which include playing in a rock band with 11-year-olds at a music camp and MANY MANY hours of practice. I had expected a memoir of a middle-aged scientist observing himself learning a new skill, which I got, but Marcus also explores many facets of the science of music, such as whether talent or practice is more important, what kinds of music people like and do not like (I was pleased to have my own preferences supported by finding out that the "most unwanted song" would be sung by an operatic soprano.), and how experts and novices differ when they listen to music. No knowledge of music theory is necessary to enjoy this book. Marcus does a good job of explaining the theory needed along the way, but I do not believe he spends so much time on it that it would annoy a reader who does not need the explanation. As someone who is a contemporary of Marcus' father, I was a little at sea when it came to many of his references to musicians I genuinely had never heard of, and I would have appreciated definitions of pop music guitar terms like "riff" and "lick", but he does talk about Bob Dylan and even mentions the Andrews Sisters. I picked up a lot of fascinating information from *Guitar Hero* and was incredibly impressed with what Marcus accomplished as a guitarist. Maybe I should pull out that guitar that has been sitting in the closet for the past 30 years....

I am an experienced working professional musician. I am also a part-time music teacher. After almost every band performance someone comes up and says, "I would love to be able to play an instrument, but I don't have any musical talent". I am always amused that people think we were born with the natural ability to play *Palm Spring Stomp*. The reality is that we were exposed to the song for the first time in August 2011. We learned the *Palm Springs Stomp* during our weekly practices in September. My band mate arranged the song in October. We continued to practice *Palm Springs Stomp* and finally started playing it in public in December. The process of refining *Palm Springs Stomp* involved countless of hours of group and personal practice. Adults can learn music, if they work at it. Gary Marcus has hit the nail on the head with *Guitar Zero*. This is not a book on music theory. It is a study of skill how adults learn music. I have changed my primary instruments four times in my career. The last time was at the age of 45! My real world experiences confirms the theories expounded in *Guitar Zero*. Professor Marcus explains that it is possible to learn an instrument as an adult. He clearly explains the methodology that can be used. Dr. Marcus also gives us the permission to give it a try. This is the kind of encouragement the world needs. The fact that Gary Marcus plays the guitar like someone with only one years experience is not relevant to the

value of the book. The review that said so eloquently that "his guitar playing sucks" demonstrates a major block to anyone learning to play an instrument. The unwarranted criticism of beginning students is damaging. Its OK to be a beginner! Its OK for adults to struggle to learn to play an instrument. If they follow the advise of Gary Marcus, the journey will be less painful.

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