

HOW TO CHOOSE A GUITAR

Hint: It is a Lot Like Choosing a Husband or Wife

By Douglas Niedt

Copyright Douglas Niedt. All Rights Reserved. This article may be reprinted, but please be considerate and give credit to Douglas Niedt.

How to Do It

To find a guitar, here is what I recommend. First, listen to many recordings and live concerts to find the sound you would like to have. **It is crucial to have that ideal sound clearly in your head.**

Then, when you go to try out lots of guitars, you DO NOT do A-B comparisons of this guitar to that guitar. Instead, you hear that ideal sound in your head and then listen to the guitar you are testing out. You will immediately hear whether that guitar measures up to your standard and its deficiencies will be readily apparent.

Take your time. Take a few months or even years to listen to and play as many different guitars (in and *out of your price range*) as possible. **You must educate your ear. It takes time.**

I consider the action and feel of the guitar to be relatively unimportant. You get used to anything very quickly. Of course, this is assuming the guitar *is the right size for you in terms of scale length* and that the *action is within standard, accepted norms*. If you have small hands, arthritis or stiffness, or are prone to hand injury, you do NOT want a long-scale guitar like a Ramirez. But aside from that, when buying a guitar, THE SOUND OF THE GUITAR IS THE NUMBER ONE CHARACTERISTIC to examine!

The trebles are the most difficult thing for a maker to get right. The basses on almost any guitar are going to sound good. But I see very expensive guitars with no treble sound at all. They lack sustain, have dead or muffled notes, or have a thin bright tone with no body. To test out guitars, I play among other things, passages from page two of Villa-Lobos' Prelude No. 3. It really separates the good from the mediocre. I am looking for the singing, full, "straight-to-the-soul" sound of Segovia when he plays slow passages in the upper register (7th-12th fret) of the 1st and 2nd strings. That sound literally captured the ears and hearts of the world during his long career. You have to pay attention to that.

But if the Segovia sound is not your cup of tea, that's fine. Go with whatever that ideal sound is that you have burned into your mind and ears by listening to many recordings and concerts.

If you are a performer, don't be fooled by the volume of sound you hear when you are playing the instrument. This often has nothing to do with the amount of sound the audience is hearing out front. Have someone you trust listen to you play. It is of little value for you to listen to someone else play the instrument, because it will sound very different in their hands than yours. An instrument must be judged according to how it sounds under *your* fingers, *your* fingernails, and *your* touch.

To sum up, take your time in educating your ear and get that ideal sound firmly implanted in your mind, body, and soul. Then when you come across THE guitar, you will know it immediately. It is kind of like dating to find that special person to be your husband or wife! Take your time, think carefully about what you are looking for, and when you find the right one, you will know it immediately. THAT is how choosing a guitar is like choosing a husband or wife.