products

Guitar resources

Guitar Academy Book 1
Academy Music Publications,
ISMN M-9002118-1-1, £10.99,
www.guitaracademy.co.uk

Richard Corr

Guitar Coach Deluxe
Charanga, www.musiccoach.com £39.99
(on six CD-ROM)

Craig Ogden

Guitar Academy Book 1

As Richard Corr is a seasoned teacher of the guitar in a classroom environment of some 20 years, it is unsurprising that *Guitar Academy Book 1* is as comprehensive and useful as it purports to be. The introductory notes outline with articulate clarity the difference between Corr's own book and others on the market. Supported by published aims of the Federation of Music Services that propose a more 'holistic approach to teaching and learning', and by other luminaries including John Williams, Corr has endeavoured to integrate aspects of guitarist's education often divided between the different styles of guitar playing. His tutor book includes the most significant elements of the classical and popular traditions, ranging from classical technique to strummed song accompaniments, ensemble pieces, ear training and improvisation. Harking back to my own earliest years of guitar tuition, I realise now how truly valuable such an integrated approach would have been. While it seems only logical to develop beginner guitarists' ears and rhythmic senses at the same time as building their ability to play the guitar itself, this is often overlooked.

In *Guitar Academy Book 1*, Corr suggests the nylon-strung classical guitar as the most appropriate instrument for beginners as it is in some ways the easiest to play. It's worth noting that this book won't really suit students only interested in thrash metal. It's really aimed at guitarists predominantly interested in classical or finger-style playing, but it will provide an educational breadth previously neglected in most other tutor books.

Fundamentally the book consists of three parts: 1) classical guitar tutor, 2) ensemble supplement – including improvisation, 3) song/chord tutor. The various elements of classical guitar technique are elucidated with admirable clarity and simplicity, as are the basic principles of reading music and finding notes on the guitar. The CD that comes with the book has examples of all the exercises, many of which have accompaniments for teachers to play in lessons. The teacher and pupil parts have been recorded on separate stereo channels so each part can be isolated by using the balance control. The ensemble portion of the book also includes opportunities for improvisation (with backing tracks on the CD), with suggested modes including pentatonic, ionian and blues, and has exercises to encourage playing well-known tunes by ear. The song/chord tutor uses a range of well-known and popular tunes to introduce basic chords and strumming patterns. Pull-out flashcards for testing note recognition along with some advice about internet resources complete a rigorously researched and road-tested resource.

The book is beautifully presented and is written in a relaxed and engaging style. It is simple yet comprehensive and is the best beginners tutor book I have come across. At £10.99 this book is a bargain and for many will be an inspiration.

Guitar Coach Deluxe

In the context of this classroom-orientated review, I must confess to not being quite sure how I would apply *Guitar Coach Deluxe* to a standard group-teaching format. It aims to provide a substitute for regular lessons and for the student to form a working relationship with the software itself. Unlike Corr's book, this software doesn't aim to teach you to read or understand music (all the notation is in tablature). What it does aim to do is to introduce beginner guitarists to the fundamentals of playing acoustic guitar in finger-picking and plectrum styles, using a variety of classical and popular music.

Coupled closely with internet-based resources, this software contains a substantial body of information. Each of the five discs (the sixth provides extensive information about chords and chord-voicings) runs methodically through the techniques required to play melodies and to strum chords, beginning with the very basics, moving to quite involved finger-picking and finishing with full versions of songs by artists including Robbie Williams and Radiohead. The level of interactivity is highly impressive. Extensive video footage clearly demonstrates the techniques while the 'mixer' enables lessons to be played with tempo variations and for the tune, click-track or accompaniment to be taken in or out to tailor to the individual. From the very beginning each lesson is dissected into steps so that skills can be built up and consolidated in a logical sequence.

This is an imaginative, ingenious technically accurate piece of software and if I have reservations they involve the omission of traditional music notation and aspects of technique important to classical guitarists (posture for instance). However, this is hugely useful software and will doubtless provide many people wishing to teach themselves at home with much inspiration, enjoyment and information.

Craig Ogden is an Australian-born guitarist and principal lecturer in guitar at the Royal Northern College of Music. He has recorded extensively for Chandos, Virgin, Hyperion, Nimbus and Sony, and has performed concertos with orchestras including the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Hallé, BBC Philharmonic and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras.