

## CONCEPTS

TO READ OR NOT TO READ?

subtitle: Anyone For Tennis?

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THE IDEA GREW

Ever since I started my drum teaching business, which has grown to a point where I now regularly teach in schools, I've been asked that question many times."to read or not to read?"

A student comes to me for his or her first lesson, with the idea that maybe it's just like my tennis lesson; We will "hit" a few things around, talk about the "grip", and go home.

Sure , I agree, let's hit around the kit and have some fun, no problem. But the reality is it's only a 30 minute lesson in a week of seven days. How can I extend the learning process to cover the whole week?

Ok , so the lesson goes well, thoughts and ideas are passed on. At the end of the first lesson, I would generally end by saying: "Hope the lesson was fun. I think you've soaked up some groove. How about next week we start covering the concept of reading music for the drums?"

The student will then say something like: "I'm really busy at the moment, with school, sport, friends, my new favorite gadget ,a new song I love. Tell me why I should spend time learning to read and understand the concept of drum music?"

Well, I don't want to give the secret away too early, but you really answered your own question.

## EARLY DAYS

These days, with all the distractions and schedules, life is really busy, so a drummer's interest and will to read music and road maps becomes very important.

The idea of playing the drums hit me back in 1967, when I heard the song “Wipeout” and some Sandy Nelson drum solos, also Ringo’s solo on Abbey Road.

I could go to the lounge room and set up some kitchen chairs (my first kit) and watch Mickey Dolenz play the song “Randy Scouse Git” on a timpani and believe I was in LA gigging with a band.

However, if you want to eventually leave the house and travel the country, you must be able to sound confident, know the form of the song and blend with five or six other people in a band hoping to do the same thing.

The skill to read music helps achieve that. It shows others that you’re making every effort to make the song sound good on the first take. If we’re all using the same language, the band is dining at the same table.

#### CASE IN POINT: THE RODEO GIG

Recently I was hired to play at an annual rodeo near by with a “name” country artist who lived a good four-hour drive from the rest of the band.

I was given a COULD of songs to learn and we were allowed one rehearsal before the show, minus the “star”. The non-reader (if they have a memory like mine) would have to devote a lot more time (their time, not the act’s) to constantly listen and imagine intro, verse, chorus, solo, ending of twenty different songs in numerous tempos.

Back in 1968, when I was watching my first teacher, Mr Holland, patiently write quarter notes in my book, I didn’t really question it. But straight away, when I practiced

reading those quarter notes, time, space, and form appeared -- all this while listening to the kid next door do funny Tarzan calls.

## BACK TO THE DUST

Oh yes the rodeo.

So what I was able to do (thanks to my childhood understanding of reading and transcribing drum parts) was map or transcribe every song on to manuscript. In this way the “star” that I would meet ten minutes before the show would go on stage and hear her songs appear, as on her CD, with grooves and fills she was familiar hearing. “We don’t want to spook the horses!”.

The songs were then put safely in a folder in preparation for the show to come. This time-saving skill helped me go back to practicing and playing things I wanted to spend my time on, i.e. practicing “fifty ways” and walking around Central Park (in my imagination) rather than stressing over songs that would be performed once.

If you transcribe the songs, grooves appear, and stay. If you want to work and be called, the drummer’s role is to keep the “icing on the cake”, not let it melt into a mess in front of people who bought a ticket.

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE WELCOME...”

Ok, so the day of the gig arrives, and guess what happens? The bass player and keyboard player are also carrying their own folders of written music for the show.

Suddenly I feel we're all traveling in the same direction, by using that shared skill of being able to read and write musical parts

The act walks on, she counts the show in, and "play" begins. Pages are turned, looks are shared, and good music is played, without the luxury of many rehearsals.

## MATCH POINT

We all want to be smarter in this ever-expanding musical world. Reading musical parts is a skill that will help any gig. Believe me, your friends armed with plectrums and a song list will thank you for it!

Also, from a teaching perspective, I now own a folder of songs , which without too much practice can be incorporated into the "groove" part of my lessons.

Maybe the next lesson will start by me saying: "Today we're going to learn about the important style of Country drumming!"

P.S. Did anyone else out there want to own that lovely black Gretsch kit that Mickey used to play?

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with thanks to Abbey Road

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