

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

# 'Guitar Hero' Lessons

How many times since the grunge invasion of the 1990s have you heard, "We need a guitar hero to help guitar sales!" Guess what? Our industry prayers have been answered. A new hero has captured the excitement of millions: *Guitar Hero*, the hottest video game this past Christmas.

OK, so it's not the same as Clapton, Hendrix, Van Halen or Vai, but it's what we've got for this generation. In the 1960s, much of the music products industry catered to youthful fans of The Beatles and the garage bands that spawned at that time. Today, young people are reacting in a similar way to *Guitar Hero*. We can learn from history by looking at what the game offers and apply it to a music store's lesson program. Consider the following.

## THE GAME VS. THE MUSIC LESSON

**Guitar Hero:** It's fun because users can immediately play a big gig.  
**Lessons:** Traditionally, it takes months or years of paying your dues before you play a decent gig.

**Solution:** Teach an easy power groove at the first lesson in addition to the books you're starting students on, and tell them about the cool stuff they're going to learn. The teacher can play a slow, distorted groove as the student plays along. Tell the student, "This is just the first lesson. It gets better as we go."

**Guitar Hero:** It offers classic rock tunes that capture the fire and passion of playing rock.

**Lessons:** Students learn songs they would never even play for their friends.

**Solution:** Supplement your method books with EZ Play Today series books that come with play-along CDs. Hal Leonard publishes some of my favorites that work great with guitar methods. Incorporate *Guitar Hero* tunes into lessons, too.

**Guitar Hero:** The name matters. *Guitar Hero* sounds cool.

**Lessons:** What name does your store have for its lesson program? Bore & Snore? A name like

Academy of Music, Learning Center or School of Music doesn't cut it.

**Solution:** Separate what you do marketing- and curriculum-wise with guitar, bass and drums from your piano and clarinet programs. I saw one savvy retailer market guitar lessons with "Play Like a Hero," and the class was called "Real Guitar Hero." Band instrument students are more traditional, but be aware these kids play *Guitar Hero*, too, so crank up your approach for them, as well.

**Guitar Hero:** It's fun even if you suck the first time.

**Lessons:** They are boring even if you don't suck.

**Solution:** Change your program's teaching approach, or change your teachers.

**Guitar Hero:** Allows for jamming with others.

**Lessons:** Maybe students jam with the teacher, if they're cool.

**Solution:** Put students of the same level in a jam session once a month or more. Add drummers and singers. Have these rock bands play at student showcases. Record what they do, and give them a CD.

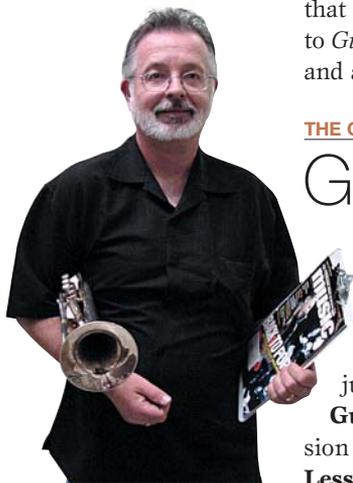
## 'GUITAR HERO' LESSON TEST

Ask yourself these questions to see if your lesson program is *Guitar Hero* compatible:

- At the first lesson, how quickly can your teachers teach a groove chord progression or guitar riff to students?
- Do your teachers make fun of *Guitar Hero* or play it?
- Do your teachers use books with CDs for lessons?
- Do you have student drum, guitar or bass contests?

You can teach students "serious" guitar skills using non-traditional approaches. It's the same with other instruments. I'm not talking about lessons that just show famous song intros and riffs — teach the whole song. It's amazing what students can learn about song form, structure and soloing while having fun. **MI**

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**Elements of the hit video game can be used to make a hipper, more drop-out-free music lesson program**