

Jim Zahra

Member since 2015

I first heard of the Guitar League as the sponsor for a Tommy Emmanuel concert at the Civic Center in September 2014. Loren and Mark opened. I checked out Guitar League online and attended the first meeting I could.

I started playing my dad's guitar in 1965. It was a Harmony Wartime Archback as best I can recall. Dad brought it back from Italy after WWII. I recall him playing a boogie woogie lick once. I never asked or learned his guitar story. There were 5 old strings with either strings # 1 or 2 missing. The neck was warped. I learned to tune it from a tattered *Mel Bay Method* manual.

My biggest motivation was singing and playing with friends. I started singing with friends in 1965. First was singing with an older friend I met through Boy Scouts who played guitar. He invited me to join him, a bass player, and drummer as a singer.

I listened to AM radio and started learning songs "by ear" after I had some experience singing popular songs out of a "Fake "book for the hits of 1965 my friend, Eric, had. Eric played a 1964 or 65 Fender Mustang in powder blue. I bought the red colored model of the red, white, and blue choices. Mine was built June 21 or 21 1966 according to a photo taken by Terry Vickery at Beat Street Music in Manlius when he replaced the old frets and did a set up. I learned on the Fender and played through a borrowed an old Ampeg amplifier which provided the speaker played though a Head that sat on top of the amplifier. The first chord I learned was a cheater G chord. The first song I learned was the Byrds version of Mr. Tambourine man. I stopped playing with friends until later in high school. I bought a Hoyer 12 string my friend Pat, a music major and instructor, recommended. It was the time of the 'Stones version of Wild Horses and Neil Young's After the Gold Rush albums. We played a paid house gig for a friend's birthday. I learned by singing and playing to recordings (vinyl or reel to reel), the fake book and the music sheets you could purchase for pennies at the time. I learned harmony and playing to complement the rhythm guitarist. I would play rhythm when Pat had a solo. Sometimes I played a fill or brief lead on my 6 or 12-string guitar. During college summer breaks I sang with my friends in a bluegrass band. Our exposure was the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's album "May the Circle be Unbroken" for songs. We also took a trip to Ralph Stanleys farm to see bluegrass legends live for a weekend. We took weekly trips to NYC to the South Street seaport in NYC to watch and listen to some bluegrass greats to come. We set up and played one gig before I returned to college. It was at an old high school haunt to test our set up and



sound. They went on to play many gigs locally and in competitions, winning one at the South Street Seaport and appeared in the NY Times article a long time ago.

I stopped practicing through college and my early work years. I dabbled occasionally until I joined the Guitar League.

I like playing fingerstyle Blues, Folk, Folk rock and Americana. I love all styles of guitar music including classical, Flamenco, Jazz, and string music from around the world. I want to improve my playing with a pick or thumb pick. I've also dabbled with playing slide guitar.

My guitars in order of acquisition

- Fender Mustang 1966/Fender Super Bullet Light gauge strings or Ernie ball Super Slinky custom gauge 2223
- Hoyer 12 string acoustic 1970/ Elixir 1253 light guitar strings
- Taylor 110-e Dreadnought 2014 /Elixir 1152 nanoweb strings/D'Addario XS 1253
- Gretsch G9200 Box car round-neck resonator2016/Martin bluegrass nickel standard M980
- D'Angelico DLX 175 LE electric hollow body 2018/D'Angelico Electrozonic 1046

I have not played out or jammed with anyone lately but would love to get into a regular routine.

I start practice with a tune up, 3 strengthening exercises then scales and triads using a metronome. I play a few songs I know and then check my list of new songs I want to learn. I use the Guitar tab app to keep the list of songs. The app also includes a tuner and metronome as well as play along and shots of members playing the selected song. I also use You tube for video instruction.

I look forward to the monthly GL meetings each month. GL meetings have exposed me to so much music and instruction as well as the fellowship of the group. I enjoy meeting other guitar players. I discovered Travis picking and Chet Atkins. The presenters and members who participate in each month always have help, hints, pearls of wisdom, instruction and encouragement. I also enjoy breakout sessions from the outstanding local, regional, national and international players we have been blessed to have as presenters. Recently I started keeping a list of songs played during each set at the meetings. During Covid I enjoyed remote instruction from a member of the North Boston chapter, Janet Feld who had 4 weekly sessions where we learned some songs by Tom Petty. I learned I needed to get used to using a pick and to practice strumming patterns.

I look forward to attending future GL meetings and just "doing it" as Kathy Brownjohn said many a time about getting up to experience playing for folks.