



JOSH FRIEDMAN

AIM TO INSPIRE

Learning an instrument is hard. Playing in front of a group of people is even harder. At the Mountain View Center of Performing Arts a line of guitarists nervously gather before a recital to have their instruments tuned and their equipment checked over by one person in particular before they play. However, almost of these musicians, their ages ranging 6 to 30, already know that they are in tune and their gear is working properly. Every single one is capable of tuning and setting up on their own. The real reason they are lined up is to talk to their instructor, Josh Friedman. Josh meets with his 30+ students one after another before the show starts despite their being no immediate reason for doing so. Their pieces are already arranged and the set list organized; the only thing left is for the performers to take the stage. Well aware that they are as prepared as they will ever be, Josh's students still seek counsel from him to quell their nerves. Josh can do little more than smile and reassure them that they will do great, but each student stands patiently in line to hear his pep talk anyways. They wait to meet with him, seeking the only thing he has left to give them, support. They know as well as he does that they are prepared to perform but still they wait to see him one last time to hear his support and his personal vote of confidence. Perhaps not a necessity, but crucial all the same.

Josh Friedman is a professional guitar performer and instructor in Mountain View, California who for the past 12 years has been teaching one-on-one lessons on everything from basic guitar techniques to advanced music theory to students of all ages. Rather than follow a set curriculum or style, Josh's method of mentoring revolves around the student's individual ambitions in order to address each student's unique strengths and weaknesses. Josh has set up a laid-back learning environment that suits each student and allows them to decide for themselves their own style of playing and goals for progressing. With a background in everything from classical guitar to rock to bossa, Josh adapts to the preferences of each student to aid them in learning more about what they are interested in while pushing them to seek deeper understanding of music and challenge their areas of comfort.



Josh's academic experience with music can be traced back many years, with his first musical encounter occurring when he was young:

“Formal education started when I played clarinet in the 5th grade with the idea that I was going to play saxophone.... And it wasn't until 9th grade that I started playing guitar... I started when I was 14 and it was my grandmother's old guitar that was hanging out at my house. This old Stella, steel reinforced neck short scale, and I enjoyed the sound of it. It was really fun. I don't exactly know why I started playing it, but it was fun. And a lot of things happened before I started to do it for a job. I just played because it was fun.”

While attending UC Santa Cruz, Josh began taking music more seriously. Taking classes on guitar performance, electronic music, music history and composition, he pushed himself to learn all he could during his time there. Josh branched out to challenge himself musically in every way possible:



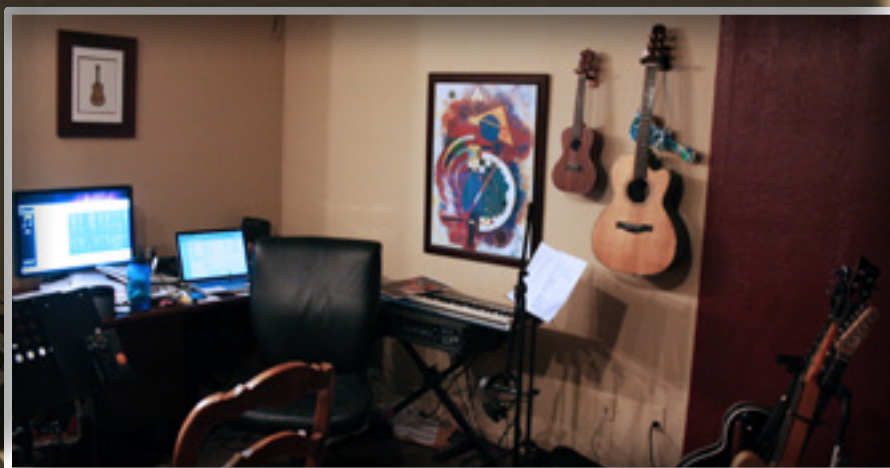
“I got my Masters in Music Composition and I got a lot of freedom to do what I wanted to do there. So I did a lot... I had a solo recital, classical guitar, major repertoire... I wrote song cycles for soprano, piano, marimba and carroad, trying to incorporate classical Indian music with art songs and setting poetry from Walter Delamere, an English poet from the 1950s...It was pretty far-out.”

Only after taking eight years of learning everything he could and completing his Masters did Josh face the problem of what to do next and started teaching as a job. With a specific and generally underused major, Josh had to consider his options: "As a musician you could be in the orchestra, but as a guitarist there aren't very many positions. What can you do? You can form a band, you can teach, you have to be creative about what career you are going to do." Soon Josh began to see his instructing career take-off and how effective his personal style of teaching was on students eager to learn to play.

I hesitate to call Josh a "teacher" because, the word "teacher" can invoke thoughts of lectures and strict learning along a certain curriculum with very little personal investment involved. It carries an impersonal connotation. In order to avoid creating a misleading parallel to that extent I opt to describe Josh as a "mentor". Josh's lessons carry an atmosphere more like that of a conversation than that of a tutoring. In his studio where he holds all his lessons (filled with instruments, a desk space, numerous music books, and a full performance stage), the centermost aspect of the room is two chairs where every

"The first guitar lessons I taught, I taught to a friend of mine and we both went out in a meadow and we set up a blanket, and I taught him some chords...It was fun. So I kept doing that and I kept getting more and more people interested in taking lessons from me and I was having fun. I'm still having fun."

His lessons, while guided through his suggestions, are not predetermined from the start. A major belief Josh holds true from his experience is the idea of instructing through inspiration by teaching students what they are excited to learn. When I asked Josh why he felt strongly about this strategy he told me, "I've talked to adults that played 12 years of piano lessons because they were forced to and so by the time they were 18 they were like 'I'm never doing that again'. Because it wasn't fun for them. So I try to make sure whoever I'm teaching is into it and they are doing it because they want to do it. Because that's how you're going to get them to keep on playing."



lesson Josh sits down with his student to brainstorm what to play for the day. On a person-to-person level his lessons feel more like a sitting down with a friend and a couple of guitars with the result being a sharing of musical knowledge.

Josh acknowledges that a desire to learn is not entirely essential to learning effectively, but argues it's useful and shouldn't be squandered. Whether you want to play jazz, classical, rock, Swedish death metal or everything in between, the first major step is wanting to learn.

The second step, Josh elaborates, is challenging yourself. Hence the stage in the back of the room.

The image of a stage commonly brings up ideas of grandeur, praise and excitement at witnessing a performance or spectacle - that is, until you are placed front-and-center on that stage to receive said attention. The aforementioned 30+ students at Josh's recital, no matter their skill or experience, all feel a degree of this pressure. Josh knows this as he watches from the side. Exposure to undesired attention can lead to anxiety, shyness and, as Josh argues, growth as a musician.

“Performing is so important...Even if you don't want to be a performer it's still an important checkpoint for the pieces that you play and it's fun to see other students...It's really a motivator. Some people want to perform, and that's great. Some people are terrified of performing, and that's great too. It means that they care...It's really a tool, like a landmark for people to motivate themselves.”

Psychologist and musician Dr. Noa Kageyama relates this idea of growth through performance as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Performers that observe themselves succeed begin to acknowledge their capabilities more and gain a boost to their confidence, which allows them to tackle more daunting challenges. If you see yourself getting better, you continue to try to grow. Exploring the unknown also go beyond live performances. With an art like music Josh feels it's important to study and understand patterns in what you play and listen to. To share this more technical side of music, Josh organizes Music Enrichment classes outside of private lessons for students to attend and push themselves further. He explains it as, “So you know how music works, so you know you're not just playing notes, you

know you're not just putting finger here and plucking...If you know some theory then it's not just a mystery.” Ryan Rosh, a long time student of Josh, noted some of the effects of Josh's enrichment class on his own habits saying: “After 2 to 3 years I did music theory and after and everything just started bumping up...When I was 10 I just wanted to rock, but after I realized that to be a good guitar player you have to be good at every part of it. And I enjoyed all of it.” Ryan describes his taste in music changing as a result as well after music theory saying: “Sometimes I'll just be driving in my car listening to just jazz piano. After music theory you start realizing what's going on beside just guitar solos.” Josh's methods of challenging his students helps both parties





When I leave, I look back over Josh's studio which has grown tidier since my last few visits. Wires straightened, books stacked and papers organized,

to see the extent of how far they have come and lays down a foundation for them to potentially teach themselves and pursue a higher level of understanding and accomplishment. Or, in his words: "The ability to learn music on their own, find music on their own and be able to just play."

So what does the future hold for Josh? He told me, "I have a lot on my plate. This last year I met a producer who's making dance music. I've never written pop songs so this last year I've been writing a bunch of pop songs and getting produced and seeing if I can place those." The band Josh is talking about is a band named "Bon James Bon", which consists of many talented individuals with Josh as their main songwriter and coordinator. Outside of mentoring students Josh's ability to work with people proves itself to be a valued trait, as Bon James Bon's producer

Marcus Barone describes: "[Josh] is very diversified. He's very open. He's very great at working with people...He's like 'This is good but it needs work, I need someone to come in' or 'I wrote this and I believe in this', and when he believes in something he believes in it... it's his openness. You have to be open today... It's better to be a little pocket of everything." However, Josh assured me he wasn't planning on giving up teaching anytime soon saying: "I want to keep teaching... I love having a wide variety of students... I teach classical, I teach jazz, I teach rock, songwriting, composition, music theory, I teach beginning, intermediate, advanced, it's fun."

the only items still in place are those two chairs centered in the room, facing each other. Josh's chair - simplistic, polished and worn from use - and a vacant chair - ornate and padded for comfort and relaxation - awaiting his next student.

"My style is to inspire...I make sure that they are making progress and inspired. Those are the two important facts of my teaching...That inspiration that I read from that student and the inspiration that I read from the practice and progress they make, that's my style."

