

Adam Perlmutter

Music Arranger / Transcriber

If you've ever perused the music section of your local newsstand, you've probably noticed the small cluster of guitar magazines. Some, such as *Guitar One*, feature transcriptions—written music for songs—in each issue. Reading and playing transcriptions is a great way to learn your favorite songs while developing your musical skills. In fact, many of your guitar heroes probably worked through transcriptions when they were beginners. But just how are those hundreds of chords and thousands of notes transcribed? Is it done by machine?

Nope. At *Guitar One*, Adam Perlmutter is responsible for transcribing each and every song. Adam spends the better part of his day with his headphones on and guitar at hand, making sure that guitar players across the globe get accurate transcriptions. Cool gig, huh? We managed to get Adam to put down his axe for a couple of minutes and tell us about his labor of love.

Q: How did you first get into transcribing?

A: I got my first electric guitar at the end of junior high school, but my parents wouldn't get me a teacher. I wasn't such a good student, and they thought that music lessons would be too distracting. They often confiscated my guitar. Once, my father put a padlock on its case—which I cut off with a wood saw!... I started learning by ear, listening to tapes and imitating the players. I'd learned to read music for piano and violin in grade school, so I knew how to write down what I heard.

Q: What is your educational background, and how has it helped you in your career?

A: I have a bachelor's degree from UNC—Greensboro and a master's degree from the New England

Conservatory. At both schools, I was required to listen deeply to and analyze music of all types, and that training helps me quickly identify what's going on in the pieces I transcribe.

Q: What sort of equipment do you use to transcribe?

A: To hear minute details, headphones are absolutely essential; I use a top-quality, comfortable pair. For writing things down, I always keep plenty of manuscript paper, pencils, and erasers around. Also, I use a software program called Transkriber to isolate and loop tricky phrases. Transkriber lets me slow down a song without affecting its pitch. You learn all kinds of new things when you listen to music at half speed.

Q: How does *Guitar One* select songs to transcribe each month?

A: Several factors are involved. We have to feature songs that are doing well on the charts, because people want to learn to play them. A lot of our readers like classic rock, so we usually throw in songs by groups like Aerosmith and AC/DC. For balance, we'll put in an important jazz or blues song. We're careful not to include too many transcriptions of a single artist within a year. Then

we have to consider licensing—certain songs are easier to get permission to use than others.

Q: Is it difficult to transcribe for instruments other than the guitar?

A: As an undergraduate, I studied orchestration, which requires a working knowledge of all Western instruments. Plus I have a natural advantage—perfect pitch—which

allows me to identify tones without referring to the guitar or piano. So transcribing for other instruments isn't too bad. What I especially like is to transcribe another instrument and then arrange the music for guitar. We've done that at *Guitar One* with the music of horn players like John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Sonny

Rollins. This sort of transcription helps guitarists go beyond what they're used to playing, and that makes them better musicians.

Q: What's the most rewarding part of your career?


A: Well, I get paid to sit with my guitar all day, so that's pretty cool! There are tons of inaccurate transcriptions out there, but I take great pride in doing a meticulous job on each song—whether or not I personally like the song—so that people can learn to play correctly. 



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