**HOLDING YOUR GUITAR**

The way you do this can make the difference between enjoyment & a stiff neck/shoulder after playing. At first wrapping your arms round this wooden object, especially a steel string acoustic guitar, can seem strange. The shiny nature of the instrument means it can slide off your legs easily & get damaged.

Below are some guidelines to help beginners find the most comfortable playing position, but the easiest solution is to buy a guitar strap (see below). Try the following to find the most comfortable position for you to hold your guitar:

* At right angle to your body means curve of body rests between legs, elbow is close perpendicular to neck/strings.
* TEST – place thumb on underside of neck & fingers flat on strings, hold for a minute, try not to tense your shoulders. NOW holding position of thumb & fingers, without twisting your body, very gently move your guitar to the 45 degree position with curve of guitar on your leg. NOTICE how the muscles in your arms & shoulders behave switching between these two positions, finding the most comfortable position for you.
* Health & Safety – Beginners often get neck ache from looking too much at where they are putting their fingers. This is where your sense of touch comes in & the feel for chord shapes.
* The shape/size/weight of your guitar will often influence how you hold & play it. Personally, I prefer at right angles because if it is at an angle to my right it makes playing above the 7th fret more of a squeeze for my left arm.

GUITAR STRAPS:

A strap is the easiest way to secure your guitar so you don’t drop it & can focus on playing. The strap should be at least 2ins wide for comfort. Plastic–backed straps over time can cut into your shoulder, unless thick clothing is worn. Best & most expensive is leather which stretches, but straps with maker’s names come at a price. Woven fabric or man-made fibre is an alternative, but needs to be wide & thick enough so after time it doesn’t become a ‘bootlace’ & cut into your shoulder.

FIXING STRAPS - Acoustic steel string guitars often have a strap button at the base of the guitar & sometimes another on the heel (where the neck joins the body), otherwise the strap has cords which tie around the neck, behind the nut, on the headstock by the tuning keys. Electric guitars, because much heavier, have strap buttons at the base & around the heel. Spanish guitars are designed to rest on & between the knees & often have no strap buttons. The solution here is to install a strap button at the base & tie the other end to the neck. This is not a DIY job because it means drilling a small hole in the base where there is a strut inside the cavity (guitar body). If the hole is too small & the strap button screw thread too tight, this can cause the body to crack; best done by a Luthier with insurance!

Mick Wilson – U3A Strummers Guitar Group – Group Leader Oct 2017