



TOUCH-STYLE TERRITORY PRESENTS



The History of Touch-Style

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Introduction

Twenty years ago, Alvin Toffler's book "Future Shock", described a "demographic wave", which means a fundamental shift within a culture which changes the way we live.

For example, "personal" computers have changed the way we work and live and play, forever. Toffler also predicted that more of us would work at home. Some laughed, but now lots of us work from home.

I believe the musical community is witnessing a major demographic wave in the spontaneous evolution of "Touch-Style" music, meaning to play an amplified stringed instrument by tapping the strings with both hands, making two-handed play possible.

A demographic wave evolves due to underlying shifts in the culture. In our case, improvements in amplification and instrument construction, and also changes in popular music. Emergence of guitar and bass as primary instruments since the Big-Band era, with consequent diversity in guitar and bass music have caused a phenomenon:

The spontaneous discovery, by many different musicians, of the tapping approach — the spontaneous eruption and evolution of Touch-Style music within different genres and upon different instruments.

There have been pioneers, and this is the history of those pioneers and developments which led to the Touch-Style technique.

In 1952, Jimmy Webster described his new way to play guitar in a book called "Touch System". There was Merle Travis and Mark Laughlin, and then Dave Bunker, all playing with two-handed tapping.

Some years later, Emmett Chapman published "Free Hands", and popularized his particular version of two-handed tapping, and Chapman also developed a specialized instrument for this new technique, the Chapman Stick®, probably the best known specialty tapping instrument.

The Spanish guitar, a clever invention: The strings run along a board with raised frets. You press a string to a fret, thus determining its length. With the other hand you pick or strum the string, making it vibrate. One end of the string is attached to a hollow box, which then vibrates, making the sound louder.

Until electricity, the resonance chamber was needed to make sounds loud enough to hear ... so Spanish guitars have a sound box (as do pianos and harps).

But when you tap a string to a fret, it makes a tiny sound. And with an electric amplifier, this sound can be made as loud as needed. So you don't need to use your second hand to pick or strum.

You can now play an electric guitar or bass by tapping alone. That means ... you can play with both hands simultaneously! This is the revolution of the Touch-Style method.

And with two hands playing ... you're on the road to making twice as much music!

Simultaneously, guitarists and bass-players have discovered other systems of Touch-Style play. Touch-Style systems exist in speed-metal, rock and roll, funk bass, and even upon acoustic instruments. Notable guitarists include Stanley Jordan, Steve Vai, Allan Holdsworth, Eddie Van Halen, Victor Wooten, Michael Manring, Michael Hedges, and others.

Numerous specialty instruments have also been developed: Webster's split-pickup guitar, the Biaxe, the TrebleBass, the Hammatar, the Warr guitar, and others.

The word "TouchStyle" was coined by Frank Jolliffe, using variations as trademarks to describe his company, "TouchStyle Publications", and his products, such as the "TouchStyle Quarterly" newsletter. The word Touch-Style was adapted from the guitar term "fingerstyle" (which describes a method of finger picking). Jolliffe routinely grants permission for others to use variants, such as "Touch-Style" or "touchstyle", so that we may all have a generic label for the method of playing stringed instruments by two-handed tapping.

The 'Touch-Style' label then is an appellation for any and all methods of two-handed tapping, including those popularized by Webster, Bunker, Chapman, Van Halen, Jordan, Culbertson, Wooten and others, and including any two-handed tapping method yet to be discovered.

And when you play by tapping on your guitar (or Stick, or Warr guitar), you're part of an emerging community of players world-wide, part of a new method, a new approach, a new future. You have been picked up by a demographic wave.

I think it's the Wave of the Future.

And you're riding it.



Ride 'em, Cowboy!

Evolution of Electric Guitar

Hundreds of years ago, guitars evolved as one of the more generally-useful stringed instruments — more portable than a concert harp, easier to tune than a piano.

Popular music then wandered through the classical period and into the 20th century and in the war years the dance-band grew into the big-band, riding the popularity of that newly popular idiom called “Jazz”.



During the hardships of these years, popular entertainment focused primarily on propaganda movies and on movies showing elegant life. These movies tended to feature big-band music.

But as the US economy returned to normal, economics and popular taste began to downsize the bands. In the '50s, television began competing with live entertainment and with the movies, and during this same time, Mr. Les Paul's new electric amplifier for guitar was coming into greater use among combos. The rise of “rhythm & blues”, and its adoption by the mainstream white community as “rock & roll” was accelerated as radio abandoned drama as a lost cause and began to focus on musical programs.

And the result?

A singer, plus what was originally the “rhythm section” of the big band — bass, guitar (now amplified), & drums — became the whole band. The economics were right, the popular taste was right, and the radio desperately needed material. Big-bands disappeared; Elvis and then the Stones took over.

Electric guitar design adapted to amplification, dropping the (now unneeded) resonant sound-box, and acoustic basses adapted in the same way. Since a guitar-player could often sing while playing, the bands got very compact.

So in a way, as we will see, Touch-Style music evolved from the small combo, and in particular, the electric guitar of the rock band!



Early Pioneers

One pioneer of two-handed tapping is Dave Bunker. On his website, which can be found at <http://www.bunker-guitars.com>, he describes how two-handed tapping began. Since he was there, and saw it with his own eyes, this is probably the most accurate report we have.

Here's what he says:

"Lots of controversy exists over who did what and when on the Touch Method of play. Well, here it is. And this is right:

"Actually Merle Travis was one of the first artists to play using two hands [tapping] on the fingerboard. The first artist to really bring it out and do something with it was Jimmy Webster, who wrote the first Touch System method book for a single neck type electric guitar played with two hand tapping.

"I was the first to build and patent [a specialty tapping instrument] that you could tap on two necks, and also wrote and copyrighted the first double neck method book.

"One of the earlier great contributors has been Emmet Chapman and the Stick® design, which is probably the best known of the touch type instruments. Some great artists followed such as Eddie Van Halen and Stanley Jordan."

There you have it, straight from the source. Perhaps this will clear up some misunderstandings about the origin of touch-style and two-handed tapping! And now let's visit these pioneers of touch-style --

MERLE TRAVIS

According to the website of the Nashville Songwriter's Hall of Fame, which can be found at <http://songs.org/~nsf/frame-hof.html>, Merle Travis (1917-1983) is generally credited with designing the first solid-body electric guitar (electric Fender). He brought a banjo-style fingerpicking to guitar, using thumb to play accompaniment while the forefinger plays the melody on the



higher-pitched strings. Seven gold records and 12 BMI awards for top songs, including "Sixteen Tons" and "Smoke, Smoke, Smoke that Cigarette!"

According to Dave Bunker, Travis was the first to employ two-handed tapping on guitar.

JIMMY WEBSTER

And as Bunker describes, in the '50s, a pioneer named Jimmy Webster also noticed that, with an amplifier, you could turn up the volume and play notes just by tapping the string to a fret. It was no longer necessary to strum or pick a string. (Strumming or picking on acoustic guitars is necessary in order to vibrate the string strongly enough to set up sympathetic resonance within the sound-box, which then results in a sound loud enough to be heard by an audience.)

Webster developed and taught a complete system of two-handed tapping, and in 1952 he wrote a book about his technique, called "The Illustrated Touch Method."

In 1960, he obtained U.S. Patent # 2,964,985 on a pick-up design which separated out the "bass" and the "melody" strings. Both sets of strings were on one neck, but the magnetic pickup fed the bass strings out to one amplifier and the melody strings out to a separate amplifier. This patent was assigned to Gretsch guitars.

Webster had a sponsorship from Gretsch Guitars. He toured and visited music stores, selling the Gretsch line, and even had a signature instrument named after him. However, specialty guitars with his pickup and his new method only attracted a few visible players, and did not survive into the age of Rock & Roll.

Guitarist Chet Atkins produced some of Webster's recordings, which can still be occasionally found in specialty shops.

MARK LAUGHLIN

This musician was also popular, around the same time as Webster, and Laughlin also played with a two-handed tapping technique, but I have so far not located any information about Laughlin and his technique or recordings. I would welcome any information.



"Touch System' means playing the guitar like a piano ... both hands are employed ... The system can only be played on an electric guitar, because amplification is the secret of its success. Only through amplification will the guitar respond to the pressure of the fingers alone.

"By pressing down on chords with the left hand, you create a fine accompanying background for right hand solo work.

"The right hand will strike the strings, at the higher frets, with the fingertips as you would strike a piano key. By combining the results of the left and right hand, you can obtain the results of two and three guitars playing together with bass. "

-- excerpt from "The Touch System", New York, 1952

DAVE BUNKER

In the 50's guitarist and luthier Dave Bunker first began to experiment with the design of an instrument designed especially for the two-handed tapping technique. Unlike Webster's approach, which was to play with two hands on the neck of a single instrument, Bunker's designs led to his double-necked instrument "The Touch Guitar."™

The first Touch Guitar was called the 'Duo-Lectar'™ and was built by Dave and his father Joe Bunker in 1955, later receiving a U.S. Patent # 2,989,884 in 1961. On Bunker's website he describes how they lacked money to buy proper fret wire so they had to make the frets out of an old chain saw blade!

The Duo-Lectar was the first touch-style instrument to use a manual mute on the strings, such as a strip of felt or other soft and spongy material under the strings between the nut and the first fret. Most tapping instruments ever since have used the manual mute, although Bunker has gone on to engineer an electronic mute (U.S. Patent # 5,162,603) which improves upon the manual mute, providing equal muting for all strings.



Bunker has received several other patents for his Touch Guitar and other guitar models, including U.S. Patents # 5,431,079 (Improved Tremolo Guitar Mechanism), # 5,018,423 (Anti-Torque Neck Adjustment Device), and # 4,201,108 (The Wedge, an electric guitar design with removable body parts), and others! He designed the first headless guitars (with tuners at base of instrument), the first bodiless instruments (built in the 1950's), the first individual-string through-the-body bridge, the reflection shield (a metal connector transmitting highs from the bridge to the neck), early individual-string pickups, early fine-tuners applied to guitar, and more!

The Touch Guitar has an upper neck with a standard guitar scale of about 24 inches but with a super-wide neck so that the strings can be played with the fingers parallel or perpendicular to the strings, and in Bunker's method of two-handed tapping the guitar hand can be used in either orientation.

The upper neck (melody) can be played as a two-handed instrument, though the instrument has a second, lower neck normally used for bass, which is tuned as a standard 4-string bass. The bass neck is a 32-inch scale bass neck, played in a traditional position, but by tapping with the left hand. Bunker's 'Touch Guitar' method book shows much more detail about the method of playing the instrument.

Bunker's Touch Guitar contains his patented "Electro-Mute" electronic system that silences the sound from open (unfretted) strings during tapping play. The Touch Guitar contains a large number of pickups and electronic filtering, so that it can emulate almost any known guitar sound.

Bunker resides in Washington state and still builds some of the finest guitars in the world.

Later Contributors

In the '70s, a guitarist named Emmett Chapman discovered a two-handed tapping technique, when one day he realized that if he raised the tuners high, so that the fretboard was nearly vertical, then both hands could more easily approach the fretboard with fingers reaching across the strings. This minor-sounding change makes playing more fluent, and this playing position has become popular.

Chapman made a specialty instrument for himself, with five melody and four bass strings. Musicians were intrigued with the unusual-looking instrument and the method of play. Chapman began manufacturing and selling his instrument, now called The Stick®, and bearing ten strings.

In the 1970's, Chapman filed patents for: (a) the method of play [two-handed tapping on the strings]; (b) his instrument construction including the split-pickup design; and (c) his system of tuning the strings [melody in fourths, & bass strings tuned in inverted fifths]. The Patent and Trademark Office granted the patents, and Chapman "owned" not only his particular instrument and his particular tuning, but two-handed tapping in general!



However, a few years later the Patent Office threw out Chapman's claim to have invented two-handed tapping as invalid, because they became aware of the similarity to the two-handed tapping method shown in Dave Bunker's earlier patent (June 1961), which reveals a stringed musical instrument in which the "frets are essentially horizontal and the fingers of each of the performer's hands are disposed essentially parallel to the individual frets during tapping" [Stanley J. Witkowski, Primary Examiner, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office]; and also because the Patent Office became aware of Jimmy Webster's method book 'Illustrated Touch System for Electric and Amplified Spanish Guitar.' [Copyright in 1952 by the William J. Smith Music Company in New York].

Chapman appealed, but lost the battle. But even though Chapman wasn't the first in the world to invent a method of 'two-handed tapping', there is no question that the unique tapping method which he devised has been popular ever since, and the result is that Chapman has probably done more to popularize the two-handed method of play than any other individual.

Chapman's Stick instrument was a unique synthesis and a creative re-thinking of the guitar. His instrument made unusual use of the belt-hook, along with new fret-markings, minimalist design, two string-groupings on one fretboard, and a new design of upper strap to maintain correct vertical positioning. All were radical departures from standard guitar practice, producing an instrument with great playability, and unique visual appeal. Further, many tappers worldwide have discovered that his unusual 'inverted fifths' tuning of the bass strings provides



access to a new set of chording possibilities and ways of thinking about string relationships.

His method book ('Free Hands') is quite good. It grew from typed pages with penciled graphs to a compact encyclopedia of two-handed tapping technique. This book was normally included with instruments that he sold, and as he steadily sold instruments all over the world, this excellent book has helped propagate Chapman's two-handed tapping techniques to the world of music.

Chapman's contributions -- often overlooked in arguments about 'who was first to tap' -- are extensive, and he has surely earned a unique position of respect in the Touch-Style Hall of Fame.

CHARLES SOUPIOS

In the early 80's, Charles ("Churchman") Souprios in New York designed a dual instrument called the "Biaxe," on which he obtained patent #5,315,910. The instrument was a combination of a normal guitar and a stick-like instrument joined together, designed so that the musician could play upon one or the other, or both, using a two-handed tapping technique which Souprios called "String Percussion."

However, the Biaxe is no longer in commercial production.

SERGIO SANTUCCI

Sergio Santucci was a musician working on cruise ships. In this job, the musician must often double on different musical instruments, which for Santucci meant guitar and bass. In order to make the transition easier, he developed an instrument called the "TrebleBass," which combined the strings of a 4-string bass and a 6-string guitar on one neck, with separate pickups for each set of strings. The TrebleBass was awarded U.S. Patent # 4,377,101 in 1983.

The TrebleBass was sold from Santucci's offices in New York and Rome, and has been endorsed by internationally famous tapper Stanley Jordan (who can be seen demonstrating his tapping technique in the MGM movie "Blind Date," starring Bruce Willis).

Although the TrebleBass was originally intended as a 'do-all' instrument to be played with traditional fingerstyle and picking methods, it has since been popularized as a tapping instrument by political street-musician Robert Turley. Turley, known as R.O.B. (Robb on Bass) has demonstrated his amazing two-handed funk tapping technique in New York and in Japan, and on television shows such as Donahue.

Pictures of the TrebleBass will be seen below in the 'Notable Artists' section, or you can visit the Instrument Museum at Touch-Style Territory at <http://www.traktortopaz.com>.

Instrumental Developments

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Rock & Roll flourished and splintered into sub-genres, and with the explosive increase in electric guitarists, it was inevitable that other guitarists re-discovered Webster's "creep-along" right-hand touch technique, and others re-discovered how to elevate the fretboard into a vertical position to play with "two-handed tapping" (Chapman's name for his *fingers perpendicular to strings* approach). Even bass-players and some acoustic guitarists (playing into microphones) have developed touch-play or tapping techniques.

In recent years there seems to have been a dramatic increase of "tapping" in popular music.

There have also been a number of specialty instruments designed especially for tapping. Here is a sampling of specialty tapping instruments. To see others, visit the Instrument Museum at Touch-Style Territory at <http://www.traktortopaz.com> --

BOX GUITAR

Stuart Box, originally living in the USA, migrated to Australia, taking his Box Guitar designs along with him. He still designs and sells his specialty tapping instruments. Unlike some of the other tapping instruments which have scale lengths similar to electric bass instruments, Box Guitars are generally constructed to guitar scale lengths. Which makes sense because they're generally advertised as 'Two Guitars on One Instrument.'

The model shown here is Box's 'S.R. Series' which boasts headless design with Steinberger (or Bunker) -style tuners at the base of the instrument. The instrument contains dual truss rods and a slim neck. Popular Seymour Duncan pickups and lotso selector switches make different simultaneous sounds possible.



Box also manufactures the 'L.M. Series,' a touch-style guitar with a traditional tuning head, and the 'J.C. Series,' which has a stratocaster-type body.



MOBIUS MEGATAR

Henri DuPont's brainchild is an evolutionary design that began with a desire to create a refinement over previous tapping instruments in a modular, expandable design, so that modification becomes easier. His theory was that as the instrument spread, its mutation would be accelerated, producing by his 'Theory of Musical Evolution' other variants and instruments which would continue to change and evolve, and so expand two-handed tapping around the planet.

Be that as it may, for the musician the Mobius Megatar bass has surface similarity to other tapping instruments containing a set of bass strings and a set of melody strings upon one neck. There exist, however, many differences in the details. In this photo from a Buenos Aires nightclub performance, Henri can be seen playing an early prototype, but production instruments are similar.

The Mobius 'TrueTapper' model boasts a modular pickup-array system so that pickups (and therefore the instrument's sound) can be easily customized, plus a new design of guitar strap which supports the instrument in correct upright playing position. Normally the instrument is tuned like a standard 6-string bass in fourths, with melody strings also in fourths.

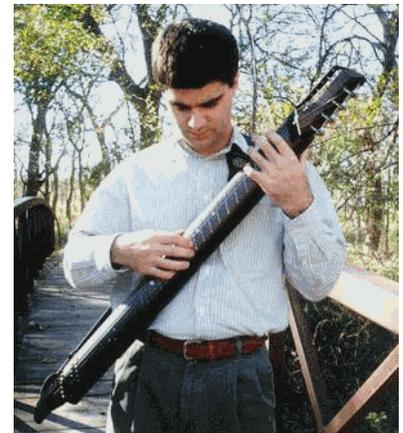
Mobius has licensed the patented Buzz Feiten Intonation System, which is a system of precise adjustments to string lengths – completely different from normal practice – which slightly alters the pitch of strings across the fretboard, with the claimed effect that to the ear the instrument sounds noticeably more 'in-tune' as you play with both hands, or as the Feiten patents say, the string adjustments produce 'exceptionally pleasing intonation.'

The Mobius Megatar website at <http://www.megatar.com> contains a detailed analysis of design features and instrument photographs.

SOLENE

Richard Eberlen's unusual stringed musical instrument, tuned as a standard 7-string guitar. 'Solene' is the Greek word meaning pipe, which is the shape of the instrument. The cylindrical body and fretboard provide a new playing surface for tapping technique.

Since it's tuned like a guitar, guitarists can visualize and think about intervals in a familiar way. The Solene was granted US patent number D363,946.



WARR GUITAR

Mark Warr's instruments are called 'guitars,' but their scale length is more akin to a bass. These are large instruments, built with world-class components, quality tonewoods, and heavy-duty construction. Warr's stated intention is to produce the best tone possible.

The instruments have the novel feature that they can be played with full two-handed tapping technique (in the popular near-vertical position), or they can be played using standard guitar picking and strumming techniques (in the normal guitar near-horizontal position). Warr's innovative counter-balanced strap locations permit the instrument to remain in either position.

The electrics consist of high-end Bartolini pickups along with a custom 18-volt active system also designed by Bill Bartolini. Many professional touch-style players have embraced the Warr guitar, citing it's powerful tone and quality construction.



Notable Artists

Although Touch-Style play has not yet seized center stage on MTV, a number of artists have become known to music fans around the world. Here are a few of the better-known artists in the 90's music scene:

• STANLEY JORDAN

In 1983, 23-year old Princeton graduate Jordan was performing New York's streets, dazzling all with amazing two-handed touch-style technique, often blending walking bass, accompaniment and soaring lead at once.

Hard to categorize, Jordan plays jazz, reworks pop songs, and rocks classical music. Check out "Bolero" on Arista records. Plays various guitars, shown here with Santucci TrebleBass.



• MICHAEL MANRING

"My mission in life is to show that the bass is a vital and expressive instrument which has a great deal to say." Bass-Player magazine's Bassist of the Year twice, Manring evokes haunting timbres from Zon basses, sometimes playing two basses simultaneously. New-age, jazz, even thrash, he keeps opening new doors. Picking, touch-style, or using the eBow, it's always lyrical.

Check out "Drastic Measures" or any 'Montreux' CD on Windam Hill.



• EDDY VAN HALEN

After 20 years of recording, Van Halen says he still wants to rock because he's still 16 inside. And he has transformed rock with whammy-bar dives, false harmonics, and especially with tapping, using two hand alternations to get rapid flurries of notes.

He likes to jam and creates most tunes that way. His music evolved over his career, producing many pop hits. His start? "Smoking, drinking, and playing guitar at age 12."



• DANIEL SCHELL

Schell is the inventor of 'C-Dots,' used world over by tapping musicians. (Note: the Megatar Bass dot-markers shown here are different from Schell's 'C-Dot' system.) Shell is also known for his 'Mirror Fourths' tuning, as detailed in his method book "My Space," (available from Clic Music in Belgium, and from Touch-Style Publications in New Jersey). Daniel Schell is also a prolific European composer and recording artist. He has written operas and compositions within the tradition of Indian music.

Schell is the guiding light for the 'Seminar du Tape' which takes place in Europe each summer.



• VICTOR WOOTEN

Victor Wooten first came to the notice of the world as a member of the Bella Fleck and the Flecktones band. Bella Fleck is a banjo player and in a startling move for popular music, has hit the top of the charts with such tunes as "The Sinister Minister."

Viewers of the Flecktones and concert visitors have been startled to see bass sensation Wooten at work. (The third member of the Flecktones is Wooten's brother, 'Future Man,' who plays drums electronically upon a SynthAxe!)

Wooten's astounding ability to pick, slap, pop, tap and generally rip up the atmosphere has led to two solo albums appearing to rave reviews, and



he's currently hosting a column in Bass Player Magazine, sharing with the world his surprising methods.

• **ROB ON BASS (R.O.B.)**

Currently touring Japan, Robert Turley plays touch-style funk on Santucci TrebleBass, and is fighting a running battle with NYPD's refusal to issue a performing license to street musicians, although NYPD busts them for 'performing without a license.' R.O.B. wowed the Donahue show, as he does on the New York streets, with funky funky music!

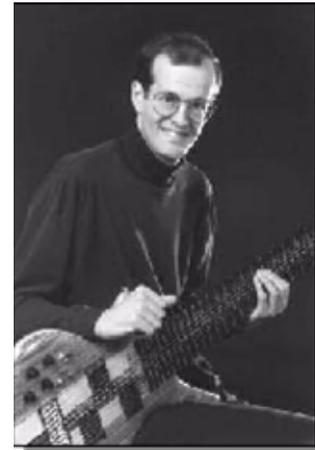
Check out "Lock & ROB" CD \$20 from POB 73, Times Square, New York 10108.



• **FRANK JOLLIFFE**

A touch-style pioneer, New Jersey guitarist Jolliffe was among the first to accept Chapman's Stick, and has been a constant touch-style performer and educator for 20 years.

Jolliffe has been called "a Chapman Stick maestro" by Guitar Player and "the best ... straight-ahead jazz ... player on the New York club scene" by the New York Post. Now plays Warr Guitar (shown here). Check out "Solo Stick" \$12 from 24 Mill Street #403, Paterson NJ 07501.



• **TONY LEVIN**

Widely known for Chapman Stick work, Levin played upright bass at 10, tuba in high school, and Fender Precision at Eastman School of Music. Has played and recorded with the best, and toured with Peter Gabriel who says Levin is probably the best bass player in the world.

Currently on the road again with King Crimson. Check out "World Diary" CD \$15 from Papa Bear, POB 498, Woodstock NY 12498.



Whither Touch-Style?

Tapping is starting to be big and getting bigger; and with your interest in learning this innovative style, you're riding an expanding demographic shift in our popular-music culture.

My own experience was not untypical. In my youth, I'd played songs on guitar but did not pursue music until many years later, until one day I heard a synthesizer and decided to learn to play keyboards. Reading music magazines, I stumbled across an advertisement for Emmet Chapman's Stick instrument, and searched around to find one used. The search was lengthy, but I found one and began learning to play it.

The two-handed tapping method seemed to have several features I liked. It allowed me to use two-handed technique much like playing a keyboard, but with fingers directly on strings, it felt more like playing guitar. It seemed to be a logical approach, affording more opportunity to my interest than had either guitar (which uses both hands to play a single melody line and upon which chords and melody simultaneously is complicated) or keyboards (tied to a lot of synthesizer equipment).

In other words, for me it felt like a natural and logical way to make music. It felt like * my * instrument!

Maybe it will feel like that for you too, no matter whether you're tapping on a standard bass or a guitar, or on one of the specialty tapping instruments. For a survey of specialty tapping instruments, feel free to visit my website at <http://www.traktortopaz.com/> and visit the 'Instrument Museum' in the Resource Center. There you'll find descriptions of the main specialty instruments along with pictures and contact information for the manufacturers who are bringing these instruments to the world.

I believe there will come a day in the near future when tapping will be as common as picking and strumming, and instruments like Warr guitar or Mobius Megatar will be as common as bass or guitar. Fender and Gibson will jump on the bandwagon and you'll see specialty tapping instruments on the wall of any music store in the world. MTV will have tappers inventing wild gyrations while tapping out new and interesting pop rhythms.

And you're part of it.

Thanks for your contribution. See you tapping down the road!

The History of Touch-Style is brought to you
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