

## Guitar Hero leads children to pick up real instruments

New research shows up to 2.5 million children have picked up guitars and drums after playing music-themed video games

### **Murad Ahmed, Technology Reporter**

Video games have led many anxious parents to fear that their children could turn into addicted, uncultured sloths. But research by one of Britain's largest music charities suggests that the popularity of active music titles such as *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* have prompted up to 2.5 million children to learn the instruments for real.

The report conducted by Youth Music found that of the 12 million young people aged from 3 to 18, more than half played music games. A fifth of those gamers said that they now played an instrument after catching the musical bug from the games.

"We have long known that young people are encouraged to take an interest in music if it is presented to them in a compelling way," said Andrew Missingham, the music industry expert who wrote the report. "This research for the first time shows conclusively that young people are being inspired to make their own music by games that first piqued their interest."

*Guitar Hero*, where players strap on a plastic guitar and strum along to rock hits, has sold 5.5 million copies worldwide since its 2005 release and spawned several games including *Guitar Hero: World Tour*, which came out last month. *Rock Band*, which features a plastic drum kit, has sold 4 million and the karaoke game *SingStar* has sold 4 million copies globally.

Guitar manufacturers and instrument stores told *The Times* that sales of instruments featured in the games are on the rise and music teachers said that the games were encouraging the uptake of music lessons.

"In the last nine months to a year, youngsters keep coming to me asking to learn odd tunes," said Danny Lamb, 57, from High Wycombe, and who has been teaching guitar and bass to students for over 25 years. "You'll get an eight-year-old come in and want to learn *Paranoid* by Black Sabbath. I wonder, 'Where did they hear that from?' and of course its from *Guitar Hero*. The kids love it."

Mr Lamb said that playing the toy instruments from the games was a good stepping stone for children wanting to learn how to play as it helped to develop a child's hand-eye co-ordination and teaches them to follow a beat.

Crucially, it also encourages a general interest in music.

Nick Matthews, 13, from Buckinghamshire, said that he had started to learn playing tracks such as *School's Out* by Alice Cooper on a real guitar. He first heard the song while playing *Guitar Hero* with his 67-year-old grandfather.

"I like it because it's really fast," he said. "I probably wouldn't like the songs if it wasn't for game."

Adam Easton, from Music Ground, the parent company for the majority of the musical instrument shops in Denmark Street, in the West End of London, said: "Because getting a guitar is actually cheaper than buying a new computer at Christmas, when kids get influenced by *Guitar Hero* and think they really want to play an electric, mums and dads say, 'great, I've got him off the computer at last! Here's 200 quid, go buy yourself one!'"

The US guitar-maker Gibson said that it had seen sales on the rise, particularly those that are featured in the video games such as the iconic Les Paul guitar.