2 Gear Acquisition Syndrome

This chapter introduces the Gear Acquisition Syndrome in more detail and gives an overview of views and related issues surrounding the phenomenon. Most of the content will be discussed further in the following chapters from perspectives of various disciplines and with stronger links to theoretical discourses and empirical research.

2.1 The 'GAS Attack'

GAS is a much-discussed phenomenon in online communities for musicians. Several blogs (Kwisses 2015; Leonhardt 2015; Power & Parker 2015; Robair 2015) demonstrate the range of views from joking acknowledgement to serious warnings. Leonhardt (2015), for example, takes a serious stance on his blog:

> Most of us guitarists suffer from an affliction called GAS—Gear Acquisition Syndrome. That means we are buying gear nearly compulsively—more and more often than we really need … We often spend more time shopping and searching for gear than playing guitar—it's like an addiction: difficult to stop and expensive.

This behaviour is characteristic of those affected by GAS. Thinking about gear and finding strategies to improve one's rig can take precedence over practising and playing, to a point when dealing with equipment becomes more important than making music. Much of a day's recreational time will then be spent researching equipment. One of the guitarists Wright (2006: 35) interviewed depicts how this compulsive urge to contemplate gear can become overwhelming: 'When my GAS kicks in, there is only one solution and that is to buy the gear that preoccupies my every waking moment. Scouring the internet, searching eBay, trolling for that special instrument, when will it end?'. The Internet seems to play a central role in sparking GAS because musicians quickly find information about new instruments or sales. Musicians who have an affinity for gear may not want to miss out on exclusive deals or limited instrument editions, hoping that new gear will improve their playing or at least allow them to get hold of rare equipment that few other musicians have.

Less serious than Leonhardt's (2015) statement is a blog post by Power and Parker (2015), which proposes a seven-phase model for the temporal development of a 'GAS attack'. 1) The players are *dissatisfied* with their instruments and believe that other musicians play better gear. 2) The subsequent search leads to the discovery of new instruments that arouse *desire* because they are believed to bring happiness. 3) The next step is *research*, a challenging task given the large number and diversity of opinions on the Internet, in print magazines and amongst local musicians. 4) Once an overview of the stocks within commuting distance has been obtained, the instruments are *tried out* in music stores, possibly followed by confirmation that the purchase meets the requirements. 5) After the relief that the new owner experiences

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from this achievement, they will probably feel *guilty*. 'For the next week, the guilt ruins your enjoyment of the lovely new guitar. You can barely even look at it for the shame'. 6) Finally, the guilt subsides, and the owner can *enjoy* their dream instrument. 7) When some time has passed, the musician affected by GAS *relapses*. The less money was spent on the last purchase, the sooner the urge to buy new gear will creep in again. It is not difficult to imagine that several of these cycles are taking place in close succession or even at the same time. Musicians know exactly when they last invested in a new instrument, amplifier, effect or other accessories. Once an instrument has been bought, the player may believe that a new and better-suited amplifier matching the piece of gear just bought will take their playing to the next level. This belief can trigger continuous investment in effects and other accessories. The budget determines how many cycles for instruments, amplifiers and other gadgets are taking place, and each one is potentially affecting another, which can lead to a complex psychological state in the form of an intense craving for one or more pieces of equipment at the same time.

Like Power and Parker (2015), Wright (2006: 22) describes the 'GAS attack' in a humorous way:

> GAS can strike you at any time, but onset normally occurs upon seeing, hearing, or touching a particular axe. The attack itself can range from mild to severe. Your eyes open wider as the pupils dilate; your breathing becomes more noticeable as your heart rate increases. You drool, you stare, you drool some more … Your mind races, as you imagine the rest of your life with this baby in it—how much more skilled, happy, and fulfilled you would be. Then you begin to imagine how incomplete and unfulfilled the rest of your life would be without it. A battle erupts inside you: heart vs. head. You're faced with two immediate problems: 1) how to find relief from this powerful force, and 2) how to manage a transfer of ownership. That, my friend, is a GAS attack.

This quote indicates that different stimuli trigger the desire for a new instrument, for example, by seeing someone play it live or in a video, listening to it on a record, or playing it at a music store, rehearsal room or friend's house (see also Hartmann 2016). Such experiences stimulate the imagination that the purchase will benefit musical development and bring happiness. Wright (2006: 50–59) does not divide the 'GAS attack' into discrete stages but identifies more than forty 'strains of GAS' based on interview statements from afflicted guitar players. He concludes that the 'GAS attack' can be of varying intensity and develop differently over time. A *continuous* GAS 'sufferer' is likely to spend a great deal of time contemplating their equipment, which triggers the urge to invest. Less drastic is the *episodic* type, which is occasionally triggered by the syndrome but repeatedly occurs due to various tempting stimuli. The least severe form of GAS is *single episodic*, as it allows partial or even full 'remission'. Similar to Power and Parker's (2015) model, Wright considers GAS to be cyclical. Hence it would not be a one-off phenomenon in most

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cases but a longstanding and recurrent disposition that varies in its ‘severity’ throughout a musician’s life due to changing musical interests, family responsibilities, social situation, professional career stages and available budgets.

The strong urge to acquire is not limited to musical equipment but also occurs in other collecting forms. Shuker (2010: 111), in his study of record collectors, observes that often ‘the acquisition of the desired item will be immediately followed by the creation of a new “need” and a return to the chase, in an ongoing cycle of desire-success-stasis-renewed desire, a related pattern of repetition’. Stebbins (2009: 21) explains this behaviour with *thrills*. Purchasing a leisure item such as a musical instrument or record is an exciting moment that serves as a personal reward and shows commitment to a hobby or profession. Since these are memorable events that evoke the hope of reliving them all over again, the musician feels urged to acquire new gear, possibly without actual need. All these concepts and theories highlight the probable gap between musical necessity and the psychological world, both of which contribute to the gradually growing desire to buy new equipment.

Of the few texts available, many reflect on strategies to mitigate or prevent GAS and therefore centre around the psychology of necessity. From a guitarist’s perspective, Kwisses (2015) argues that the beliefs players have about their setup must change if they wished to stop unnecessary buying habits. While he does not deny that some acquisitions are sensible, he stresses that a player’s circumstance and intention must be considered. Not the purchase and possession of gear should guide the music played, but the music should dictate what equipment is required. Based on this reasoning, he advocates a smaller gear collection because it improves tone quality. Technically, fewer devices in a signal chain would cause less signal degradation, noise and other unexpected problems, especially in a live situation where multiple sources of error could be potentially catastrophic to the show. Musically and stylistically, limited gear would encourage experimentation and thus mastery of every nuance it had to offer in terms of tone and playability. Having more equipment than necessary would lead to a ‘strong tendency to jump from one piece of gear to another which results in an average tone from gear to gear (and what guitar player wants and [sic!] average tone?)’.

In his editorial introduction to GAS, Walter Becker (1996) already proposed several strategies to counter a ‘GAS attack’, some of them concurring with Kwisses’ suggestions. Surely tongue-in-cheek, Becker recommends: ‘Consider for a moment the karmic implications of owning all those guitars. Picture yourself dragging your ass through eternity with all those guitars strapped to your back. In hardshell cases, not gig bags’. He further advises:

> Imagine that you are in whatever vintage guitar shop you visit frequently and are dealing with the owner of the shop. He is of course severely stricken with G.A.S. Now imagine that you are taking on his personality, with each new purchase you become more and more like him. This one exercise, done

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> properly, will do more to stem the tide of new G.A.S. sufferers than anything else I can think of right now. (Becker 1996)

Becker is also concerned about the effort it takes tuning the guitar strings on all instruments. However, he admits it might not pose a problem for those not keeping the instrument long enough to change the strings once while owning it. Other strategies seem to be related to social perceptions. Becker advises GAS-afflicted musicians to ask themselves whether they would rather be remembered as guitar players or guitar owners. He also warns about problems potentially arising when the musician's partner finds out how big the instrument collection truly is.[1] This concern accords with Wright's (2006: 102ff, 174) conclusion that although GAS was usually incurable, the only counterbalance was having a family or living with a partner.

2.2 The Indefinite Quest to Improve the Musical Setup

Besides Wright's (2006) substantial collection of interview statements from musicians, numerous blogs and a limited body of research on music technology provide a good starting point for exploring possible reasons as to why musicians feel compelled to invest in equipment. Referring to studio technology, Johnston (1987 as cited in Jones 1992: 91) notes:

> There [is] a desire always to get better equipment, but it's predicated on what you can really afford and what's absolutely necessary. As you get more and more into refining your system you want to make it better and better and as you use it you discover things about it that you're not totally satisfied with. A lot of this stuff does become obsolete.

Since the advent of recording technology in the late nineteenth century, technological development has had a major impact on music production practices (Cunningham 1996; Schmidt-Horning 2013). As per Johnston, recording equipment becomes obsolete sooner or later. Therefore, regular updating is a logical consequence or even an economic necessity for professional studios. Similar forces characterise the hi-fi sector. Analysing manuals and the wider discourse, Schröter and Volmar (2016) find that the search for the perfect audio system is endless for serious hi-fi enthusiasts. The status quo is apologetically 'justified' by the current budget, accompanied by an assurance of improving the system in the future. Constant investment is thus necessary for aspiring hi-fi audio connoisseurs. But unlike the recording sector, where gear can become obsolete when, for example, distribution formats change, or more modern digital units outperform older devices, hi-fi enthusiasts are driven by another

[1] Becker's editorial is written from a male perspective. He does not acknowledge the possibility that female musicians may also be affected by GAS. Therefore, he mentions the 'wife' as a factor limiting GAS, not just any partner. Wright (1996: 26) concurs with this view, believing that GAS is an exclusively male phenomenon.

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motivation. They generally prefer older analogue technology, so enhancing their system is about nuances of sound quality, with small improvements already requiring substantial investment.

Musicians affected by GAS are akin to music producers and hi-fi audio enthusiasts. Musical setups of all kinds of instruments can *always* be improved, if only for flexibility, made possible by a larger collection of instruments, amplifiers or other accessories. As Théberge (1997: 244) argues:

> musicians have found themselves increasingly drawn towards a particular mode of consumption in order to supply themselves with not only instruments and recording devices but with the very sounds they need to produce music … there has been an expansion in the range of technology deemed necessary for contemporary amateur and semi-professional practice. Many musicians no longer find it adequate to simply own a guitar or a keyboard and an amplifier.

Setups have become increasingly complex. Guitar and bass players may have a pedalboard, with some devices being routed into the amplifier's input and others into the effect's loop circuit—usually time-based effects that sound clearer after the preamplifier. The signal may further be routed to two cabinets for stereo effects or split to blend tones of different amplifiers. Some keyboard players stack a fortress of instruments on top of each other to blend various sounds by different synthesis and sampling technologies. Drummers also have numerous options to extend their basic kit: additional snares, toms and kick drums, an array of cymbals and percussion instruments from cowbells to triggers for blending in electronic sounds, or even trigger pads to replace the acoustic sound.

Apart from modifications and extensions of instrument setups, collections seem to have grown over time (Théberge 1997: 244). At present, little is known about the average size of gear collections for different types of instruments. Data is only available for electric guitar players. Wright (2006: 47) asked 200 guitarists about the ideal size of their instrument collection. The largest group (30%) stated 4 to 6 pieces, followed by the groups with 7–10 (21%), 11–15 (11%) and 16–20 (12%) instruments. The range between 21 and 50 pieces was less popular (12%), but 13% stated liking to possess more than 50 instruments. Only 5% were content with a small collection of 1 to 3 guitars. Hence more than half of the sample considered 4 to 10 guitars as the ideal size of an instrument collection. This result is consistent with an explorative study with 418 electric guitar players (Herbst 2017a), finding that guitarists own five instruments plus three amplifiers on average.

2.3 Reasons for Gear Acquisition

Musicians have many reasons to invest in equipment. In popular music, as in classical music, a performer's unique tone is what counts. Yet contrary to classical music,

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many popular music instruments such as electric guitar, bass, keyboards, synthesisers and electronic drums rely on numerous tone-shaping devices. The consequence is the widespread belief that the acquisition of new equipment helps performers reach new levels of expressiveness, improve their stylistic versatility and play other genres (Kwisses 2015; Leonhardt 2015). There is some merit in this belief. Musical genres have standard equipment, and the more one wishes to conform to genre-specific aesthetics, the more genre-specific gear may be necessary. Choosing the right instrument may even require separate equipment for individual songs. As Wright (2006: 158) suggests: 'Different guitars and basses have their very distinctive characteristics, and in choosing which guitar or bass to use to play a certain song, we have to choose the one that matches the song best in order to bring out the best feel of the song'. Various instrument models and types have distinct and sometimes more suitable characteristics for a song than others. Furthermore, some instruments afford specific playing styles; for example, a twangy Telecaster guitar may encourage country-inspired licks and riffs. The suitability of the equipment for certain genres or styles is usually noticeable to the performer but less so to the audience. That is the case when it comes to recognising an instrument's playability or how an amplifier reacts to phrasing. Such variations in gear may be subtle but have a considerable impact on the performer's playing feel. Every instrument, even if mass-produced, will be slightly different in playing and tone. Musicians likely perceive these small details differently, and some might purchase a similar or the same instrument model exactly for these differences. Not all musicians give thought to how observable musical details are to an audience. They are driven by the hope of becoming a better player through upgrading or expanding their gear. Another wish is to improve their tone as best as possible by reproducing phrasing truthfully or concealing flaws in their playing technique, which often is done by guitarists who rely on the facilitating effects of distortion (Herbst 2017c). What is more, buying new gear is a motivating factor that encourages musicians to practise, which in turn might add to their long-term development.

According to Wright (2006: 30f), musicians buy an instrument mainly for two qualities – special timbre and uniqueness. That particularly applies to gear in the middle and upper price ranges, where instruments are expected to be hand-crafted or their material carefully selected. Hence instruments of the same model can sound substantially different to the trained ear. They also vary in weight, which is a practical consideration for touring musicians. Those are likely to own more than one instrument of the same model, although this may vary between instrumentalists. What is sensible for a guitar player may not be so for a drummer or keyboardist. Also, instruments are probably different from other devices such as amplifiers and effects because their natural components, especially wood, vary in tone more than electronic and digital devices do. Nevertheless, each item offers the prospect of adding a new timbre to the instrument collection (Wright 2006: 29). It is up to the individual to

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decide how many different tonal colours they wish. Hence one's perception of an instrument collection size varies considerably, as is evident in a guitar player's statement: 'My collection really isn't big, somewhere around eighteen' (Wright 2006: 31). Other musicians would consider anything between one and five guitars sufficient for any purpose, as the previous discussion has indicated.

Where the instrument is played may also be decisive for buying a similar model or an exact copy. A guitar player justifies 'duplicate GAS purchases' by preserving an instrument's quality by playing it only at home, while the duplicate could be 'take[n] out to play in the clubs' (Wright 2006: 40). Moreover, buying cheaper instruments for the road might lessen the worry of theft, as another player explains (Wright 2006: 31).

From an aesthetic point of view, musical instruments are appealing for their tonal or visual attributes. Such attractiveness can spark GAS in the words of a guitar player: 'When I get GAS, I have an urge to taste a flavour that I've wanted to try, but haven't. It's because of a tonal, visual, or other aesthetic / artistic attraction' (Wright 2006: 31). An instrument's shape, colour or even wider associations with a genre or a revered player can have alluring qualities. Another guitarist highlights that he would not buy an instrument for its tonal quality if he were not visually drawn to it (Wright 2006: 28). There are even statements admitting that visual attraction could go as far as reaching a romantic or sexual level:

> It is a surreal feeling when GAS hits me. I get very focused on that instrument. Everything else turns black, and I develop tunnel vision. I can use the analogy of seeing a very attractive woman... my instinct is to take her, hold her, then look her over good and listen to her, get to know her, feel her weight, then give us some time together to check if there is compatibility. As with a female, the first attraction is physical, but after we're introduced, the next step is to see if love is really there. (Wright 2006: 36)

This quote indicates an intimate relationship between the instrument and its potential buyer, suggesting that GAS is like falling in love. It even may cause the same symptoms, such as 'butterflies' and 'ultimate craving' (Wright 2006: 36). What differentiates GAS from interpersonal, human relationships is that new equipment can be bought at any time and that several valued pieces can co-exist without having to choose one over the other.

In her ethnographic study of Liverpool's rock scene, Cohen (1991: 135) discovered that instruments are sometimes appreciated primarily for their visual qualities in the context of broader associations and the image a band wishes to convey. It can take different forms for different instruments. To match a genre aesthetic, drummers can, for example, adjust the size of their kit. A rock or metal drummer usually has more shells, cymbals and kick drums than a jazz or soul drummer. Similarly, a metal guitarist may prefer a wall of amplifiers over a small combo amplifier for tonal and visual reasons. Appearance can be part of a band concept, so guitar and bass players

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may wish to match their instruments' colours for a coherent impression. Aesthetic conventions also extend to instrument shapes, which can even differ between substyles within a genre. For example, a black metal guitarist might appreciate a spiky model such as a BC Rich Beast. In contrast, a progressive metal player might prefer the characteristic shape of a Strandberg Boden model that supports virtuoso solo performances due to the better accessibility of higher frets.

Motivations to buy and keep instruments for their visual qualities take different forms, some not even influenced by musical motives. For their study on the guitar's role for the baby boom generation in the USA, Ryan and Peterson (2001: 109) interviewed middle-aged people who, although not playing the guitar regularly anymore, 'just like having that Les Paul sitting in the corner. It's beautiful to look at, wonderful to hold, and *means* something'. The look of instruments seems to be motivation enough to keep them or buy new ones for home decoration.

A musician's financial situation dictates how much money can readily be spent on equipment. How they handle their budget determines their relationship with GAS. If the urge to buy new equipment exceeds their budget, the condition may become problematic if not clinical. People who intend to stay within their budget when upgrading their rig may need to sell or trade some gear. According to common sense, an instrument's price must match the value of the material, mechanical and electrical parts and craftsmanship. However, musical instruments are also valued for historical, symbolical, cultural and social reasons. Owning the same type as a revered role model can have ideological value for potential buyers, which prompts them to spend more money than the instrument's parts and craftsmanship are worth. Signature models of artists are a good example, as they are often modified versions of stock models that cost more. Another possibly related phenomenon is vintage gear. The price of an old instrument may well be a multitude of a new one, even if the specifications are identical. Recent trends go towards authentic replicas as well as heritage and relic models. These unique models are strategies utilised by the industry—possibly in response to popular demand—to satisfy the desire of many musicians for authentic instruments played by renowned musicians on records and at famous concerts in music history. A notable example is Jimi Hendrix's 1968 Olympic White Fender Stratocaster guitar with characteristic cigarette burns on which he played 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock. It was sold in the 1990s for $198,000 (Marten 2008). Replicas of adored instruments are often artificially aged and show visible signs of wear, such as worn lacquer and oxidised metal parts. Acquiring such gear may be motivated by the romantic notion of reliving music history and being closer to revered musicians. Of course, there could also be musical reasons for buying vintage models because they may provide a different playing feel and sound. Aged wood, for example, has a different resonance behaviour affecting the tone of an instrument. What is more, if the lacquer on the back of a guitar's neck is sticky, removing it makes it easier to move fast on the fretboard.

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Fandom is another strong incentive to buy gear. Many guitar players' statements point to it, for example: 'If I see a hot guitar player on TV ripping on a Tele, I start GASing for one' (Wright 2006: 41). Research in the field of music education emphasises the relevance of role models. Beginners learn an instrument by covering songs of their favoured artists and imitating their way of playing (Green 2002). As the previous quotes demonstrate, this influence of role models spreads to gear, which can be a powerful trigger for GAS. Revered artists sometimes change their equipment throughout their career, which can inspire their fans to follow suit. As a consequence of developing musical preferences and growing expertise on the instrument, aspiring musicians often find new role models. Therefore, both long-term changes in musical preferences and short-term moods influence the desired musical setup, encouraging musicians to adjust their gear or expanding their collection.

There is reason to believe that learning an instrument goes hand in hand with gaining experience in music equipment and finding the right rig that fits a musician's playing. One finding of Gay's (1998: 84f) ethnographic study of New York rock musicians is that a 'musician's rig—the assembled musical equipment—and the ability to make music with it … begins with listening to and imitating rock recordings, acquiring an initial repertory and a sense of what constitutes a good rock sound'. Pinch and Reinecke (2009: 158ff) studied the development of a rock guitarist who bought an instrument early on in his musical journey without much knowledge of equipment. As it turned out, the purchased guitar did not match his musical preferences, and a more experienced musician advised him on what he needed. The important role of mentoring by a more experienced peer is reflected in the reaction of the aspiring player: 'I was a little bit wary, but Johnny Dowd [one of the major rockers of the Ithaca scene] was like a hero to me, he was like real … the real deal. And if he said I should trade my guitar in then I should trade my guitar in' (Pinch & Reinecke 2009: 159). When he exchanged the Les Paul for a Stratocaster, the novice guitarist had to rely on the experience of his local icon: 'I knew like that Johnny knew what a guitar should sound like. Me myself couldn't really rig it up; like if I had to stand there and say "This is the good sound and this is the bad sound" it would be dicey, like I wouldn't really know' (Pinch & Reinecke 2009: 159f). By gaining more experience as a guitar player, the musician eventually learned how to recognise a 'good sound'. This case study highlights technology as part of musical development that benefits from mentoring by a more experienced musician or teacher.

Another effect of musical development regards physical strength and flexibility through regular practice, which influences what instrument models can or should ideally be played. For example, smaller necks are handier for novices of guitar and bass, but a wider range of musical instruments becomes available with more practice. The same is true for keyboards and drums, for which the number of keys, drums and cymbals that can be reached is initially determined by the size and capabilities of a player.

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Affordability is an important factor when acquiring gear. It cannot be measured objectively but is determined by sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, employment status and geographical location. The price of instruments also varies significantly, both within and between instrument groups. An analogue synthesiser can cost more than a grand piano and an electronic keyboard less than a drum cymbal. Little is known about how much money musicians are willing to spend on their instruments. For most of the guitar players interviewed by Wright (2006: 46f), the price was not decisive if the quality was right. Asked about the maximum amount they were ready to pay for the instrument of their dreams, the largest group (41%) chose the highest category of more than $3,000, followed by $1,000 to $2,000 (34%) and $2,000 to $3,000 (18%). Only 6% were not willing to spend more than $1,000. This finding indicates that many musicians are prepared to invest a significant amount of money if the instrument's specifications match their requirements. At the other end of the spectrum are special offers, promotions or sales that entice musicians to buy an instrument because it is temporarily sold below the regular street price: 'Price is always a deciding factor, because, if it's cheap enough, I can justify it as a great deal I just couldn't pass up. If it's too expensive for my budget, I can walk away' (Wright 2006: 40). The motives for buying are manifold and range from satisfying GAS out of pure acquisition interest, musical reasons such as expanding the collection with an instrument that was previously unavailable, to the intention of selling or trading for profit. The latter is nowhere as pronounced as in auction formats. Interviewed guitarists describe the process as 'hunting for prey', accompanied by an emotional state of 'suspense' (Wright 2006: 31, 39).

Besides the price, longevity is a factor in the purchase decision, which can take various forms. In the most direct sense, it concerns the physical durability of an instrument and its wearing parts. A sensible decision might be to spend more money on drumheads or bass strings if they sound fresh longer and are less likely to break soon. Instruments normally do not break easily, but individual parts can wear out. On a guitar, for example, the potentiometers begin to make noise or stop functioning, and the tuners loosen string tension, affecting pitch stability. In a wider sense, longevity can refer to aesthetic issues. This is neither a big problem for drummers nor for bassists and guitarists, who tend to have a tradition-conscious mentality that values vintage qualities (Herbst 2019b). Keyboards, on the other hand, rely on computing power and processing algorithms, and therefore newer devices offer their players improved functionality and powerful sounds that are better suited for contemporary music genres. Instrument sounds become obsolete, and those relying on preset libraries are the most affected (Théberge 1997: 245). Synthesisers that require manual patching or analogue programming are generally less impacted than other electronic keyboard instruments that rely on stock sounds. For the latter, Théberge (1997: 245) predicted that the top products would 'become obsolete within one or two brief

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product cycles', which would take less than five years. His reasoning still holds because it requires frequent and considerable investment to stay up to date with the latest keyboard technology. In contrast, purchases for other instrumentalists may have other motivations.

The purchase of an instrument can be justified as an investment or for reasons of prestige. Just as in the field of classical music, where a Stradivari violin is one of the most sought-after and valuable instruments, similar trophies exist in popular music. Such could be instruments produced during a specific time because they are believed to be of a better manufacture quality. For example, the Fender guitar models produced before CBS bought the company in 1965 are considered the 'holy grail' by many guitarists (Gilmer 2017). Sometimes it is the rarity that determines the value. That is the case with the Gibson Flying V of which only 98 were manufactured between 1958 and 1959. Production was then stopped because the guitars were considered too modern for the time. In 1967 production continued, but it is the rare early models that today have a high estimated market value of $200,000 to $250,000 (Greenwood & Hembree 2011). Yet other times, it is a combination of various elements. For example, Gibson's Les Paul Standard, produced between 1958 and 1960, is revered for the quality, rarity and symbolic value that iconic players like Eric Clapton or Jimmy Page have lent them (Gay 1998). These models are now worth about $225,000 to $375,000 (see also Dawe 2010: 28). Finally, there are specific instruments that were owned and played by famous players, which makes them much more valuable than the 'normal' versions that were produced at the same time and place. For example, Eric Clapton's 'Brownie Stratocaster' is estimated at $450,000, his 'Blackie Stratocaster' at $959,000 and Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock Stratocaster from 1968 at up to two million US dollars (GAKMusicBlog 2016). Within less than twenty years, the value of Hendrix's guitar increased tenfold.

Prestige is not limited to such expensive and selected instruments. Cohen (1991: 50) observed that for some rock musicians, the accumulation of gear was synonymous with status or success, which indicates that the size of one's instrument collection can also be a source of prestige. Moreover, the rarity of an otherwise non-expensive piece of equipment can be prestigious. GAS is sometimes triggered without any reason related to an instrument's characteristics, which is apparent in statements such as 'I'm in a constant state of "gear envy"' (Wright 2006: 41). The mere fact that a fellow musician owns another instrument is reason enough to buy that model as well, or something else may be acquired to satisfy gear envy.

The acoustic properties of venues where musicians with busy touring schedules perform could also justify extensive collections. Musicians interviewed by Bennett (2017: 175ff) emphasise the impact of room acoustics on their sound. Specific equipment choices are neither considered by the musicians nor Bennett, though a small bar or club gig will benefit from other gear than what is played outdoors or in large arenas. In this context, the sound system plays a considerable role because it can

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compensate for deficiencies in musicians' gear to some extent. Still, either of the unplugged and amplified show requires completely different equipment.

Finally, since music-making is a form of leisure activity for many musicians, buying gear can be motivated by the gratifying experience it promises. A guitarist interviewed by Wright (2006: 29) expressed to buy gear as a way of dealing with stress, but it may as well be a reward for accomplishments such as passing an exam or special efforts at work. Acquiring something unique or rare particularly strengthens the feeling of gratification.

2.4 Interest Groups

In his influential text, Becker (1996) encourages musicians to ask themselves whether they want to be remembered as 'guitar players' or 'guitar owners'. This is an important distinction that highlights the likelihood of different interest groups amongst musicians. Wright (2006: 63) comes to a similar conclusion. He considers the kind of motivation distinguishing a player from an owner. For a player, selling or trading gear would be provoked by the necessity to make space in the collection for new equipment. The motivation is likely of musical nature. Musicians change their preferences and role models over time; they develop as performers, and their equipment must reflect this development (Pinch & Reinecke 2009). Owners or collectors, on the other hand, would immediately ask themselves how the instrument could be financed. While they find many reasons for purchase—to complete their collection, get hold of a rare piece or a special edition, or buy as an investment—hardly any is musically motivated. Wright's (2006: 63) investigation suggests that most players prefer a smaller instrument collection, even if they could comfortably afford more items, and that they like to have just as many as they can regularly play. For collectors, the number of instruments is often a defining feature of their leisure identity.

A third group not addressed by Becker and Wright is the so-called 'gear head'. Collectors may also be players, but other motivations probably drive them. Gear heads are situated between players and collectors because they are active players with a keen interest in musical gear. They fit best with Théberge's (1997) theory about the commodification of music-making because their musical practice is overcommodified, possibly to the point of pathology. Cole (2018: 1061ff) gives an example in his analysis of consumption within virtual communities:

> I have more than enough pedals to do whatever I want to do. I have variations on all types of sounds/combinations. I have old, I have new—I have cheap, I have boutique. Whenever I think I am satisfied—another shiny box is produced, and I want to try it. I have so many options—it's kind of overwhelming. Amps and guitars and pedals and combinations … I have reached tone chasing fatigue.

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This GAS-afflicted guitar player resembles a collector, but the motives for buying items lie elsewhere. While a collector usually tries to acquire rare (historical) instruments that systematically fit into a collecting system, the 'gear head', irrespective of a particular need or system, is mainly after the latest product or any item momentarily desired. Falk (1994) describes such behaviour as 'neophilia', the fetish of constantly striving for or desiring something new. 'Here the collection is not the mark of an order but of an unending unease, and the revealing moment is not that in which the newly-acquired object takes its place within an intelligible series but, rather, the immediately subsequent moment in which desperate desire is born again' (Straw 2000: 166). This urge seems to dominate the joy of playing and developing as a performer, as is evident in the explanation of the message board user quoted above. It is the fascination with gear that takes precedence, as another statement by a guitar player underlines: 'Since I've been around guitars for so long I own all I will ever need in terms of playing. I will never encounter a piece of music that requires a guitar I don't have' (Wright 2006: 33). Although it is not necessary to buy another piece of gear, the player admits that he would continue buying out of 'pure admiration and a strong urge to own'.

Yet another group of musicians is focused on modifying or crafting instruments. These could be called 'crafters' and overlap with any group but collectors, who do not usually modify their instruments because it would reduce the value. For the other groups, modifying or crafting instruments is motivated differently, namely by the wish to support playing, to renew parts of the instrument collection at little cost, or to have individual gear nobody else has.

> The musical adoption of technologies rarely occurs as straightforwardly as manufacturers intend. Musicians routinely transform or circumvent the original design of an instrument or component to suit needs or preferred concepts of sound. Hotwired Marshall amps allow highly distorted guitar sound at lower volumes, something not envisioned by the manufacturer, but effective musically. (Gay 1998: 85)

Music history has a long tradition of players modifying their instruments to create unique gear that supports their playing or sets them apart from others. Edward Van Halen's *Frankenstrat*, a combination of Les Paul and Stratocaster guitars, is a famous example of modification (Waksman 2004). In his editorial, Walter Becker (1996) sees the 'Guitar *Modification* Syndrome' as a 'dangerous complication to the original syndrome, that seems in more advanced cases to be doing most of the damage', highlighting the afflicted person's (irrational) reaction to 'the latest space age … materials and techniques'. Regardless of whether such modifications make sense, cursory glances at musicians' boards suggest that some users are more preoccupied with modifying their instruments than playing them. There are many variations of this practice, ranging from minor adjustments such as exchanging pickups on a guitar to building an instrument from scratch. The growing market of replacement parts

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and the increasing number of assembly kits for stomp box effects pedals, instruments, speaker cabinets and amplifiers have made craft consumption more accessible because of the reduced handcraft skills required. This development has created the potential to customise a performer's equipment and to provide access to replicas of historical gear, but this may again tempt musicians to focus more on the materiality of music-making than on playing.

A final group that directly opposes the 'gear head' are purists. These 'claim that optimal tone, the elusive timbre players desire, is "in the hands" rather than in the gear' (Cole 2018: 1056f). At first glance, one might believe that purists are less interested in musical equipment than gear heads, but what distinguishes them is mainly the amount of gear used. Gear heads enjoy changing their setup by adding more pieces and varying them frequently, while purists keep it as simple as possible. It does not imply that purists are less affected by GAS because the less gear they own, the better the quality of each piece must be. In contrast to gear heads that evolve artistically by changing their equipment more often with potentially cheaper items, purists would likely acquire fewer but more expensive gear that they expect to improve their musical expression best possible. This belief is evident in a statement by a rock guitarist: 'too many knobs between the guitar and the amp's speaker … every electronic thing adds some muck to the sound and deteriorates the fidelity, hindering the directness of the "feel" of the guitar' (Gay 1998: 82). Purists consider playing with a simple rig more expressive because they believe that technology disconnects musicians from their instrument. Besides, less processing creates a more direct and potentially 'real' communication between musician and audience because the feeling is transmitted more authentically due to the shorter conduit (Gay 1998: 82, 85). Overall, purists potentially overlap with crafters, both convinced that customisation enhances playing, unlike stock gear designed for a wide range of players and purposes.

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