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Playing air guitar the way to being a rock star

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By Christine Kearney

NEW YORK (Reuters Life!) - Playing air guitar can fulfill the dreams of wanna-be rock stars eager to be on stage soaked in sweat in front of thousands of adoring fans, according to New York freelance writer and musician Dan Crane.

The 36-year-old is a leading air guitarist who goes by the stage name Bjorn Turoque and is featured in the new film "Air Guitar" about the first Americans to take part in the Air Guitar World Championships.

"When you are up there in front of 5,000 people who are crying out, desperate to be rocked, it's as close as you can get to being a rock star -- the feeling is the same," he said.

The secret to a gold medal-winning performance in which performers mime to their favorite guitarists is choosing the right song, editing down the performance to 60 seconds and most important -- attaining good "airness," according to Crane.

"In order to become a champion it takes more than a few beers, it takes airness," he said.

"Airness is that enigmatic quality when an air guitar performance becomes magical."

Practice and discipline also helps.

Crane said for his World Championship performance he practiced an hour a day in front of the mirror for several weeks leading into the competition.

"I usually strip down to my underwear to see if it is working, if the moves are working," he said.

"Some of the great guitarists out there, say Pete Townshend, Kurt Cobain or even Hendrix -- would they be great air guitarists? I am not so sure."

Picking a good song is also crucial, said Crane, noting Van Halen was very popular in the competitions but he preferred bands like early 80s hard-core punk band The Dead Kennedys.

Crane said air guitar gained exposure through the American animation series "Beavis and Butt-Head," and movies like "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure," and "Risky Business", in which Tom Cruise prances around singing and pretending to play guitar in his underpants.

Cruise's use of a fireplace shovel as a guitar in the scene would disqualify him from a real competition, which Crane described as "a crazy world."

But what about those who may not respect the pastime and think Crane, a former software producer who is university-educated, should not be taken seriously?

"There is the kind of stereotype with air guitarists that they are toothless dudes," he said. "But this is just not true."

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