

Producing yourself-- WDYRSLA spinoff 2 - Stopped 3-28-10 at post #161

Started 12-28-09

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Quote:

Originally Posted by beingmf

...This makes it extremely difficult to find "different" or "outstanding" solutions for an otherwise cheesy arrangement..."

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I actually think that even fairly limited musicians can, should, and will benefit from putting some effort into arrangement.

Let's imagine a very crude garage-rock trio. They have a very "static" song which consists of two parts: a verse and a chorus. Each part consists of one guitar riff, doubled by the bass, and one vocal melody. They alternate verse and chorus three times. Let's stipulate that the vocalist might have very limited range and ability, and that the drummer is basically playing the same beat throughout, with a fill every eighth measure, or every transition. This is about as simple as a song gets.

So here is how we might approach arrangement, without requiring any lessons in theory, or any string sections, or any significant musical skill:

- Create an intro: the guitar plays the most memorable riff from the song, reinforced by the bass and big drum hits.

- First verse: guitar drops out, just bass and drums playing the verse riff. Singer whispers the the lyric instead of singing it.

- First Chorus: Guitar riff joins the other instruments, and singer switches to full-voice.

- Second verse: Band plays normally

- Second Chorus: Band plays normally, EXCEPT the guitar player, instead of playing the chords, plays only the high-E string (maybe at double-speed) AND the singer whispers the lyric

- REPEAT Second Chorus, as above, except with the singer singing full-voice AND the guitar player adding a second track of sustained power chords (not strumming the riff) to the high-E ringing.

- Third verse: Start drums and vocals only for two measures, then drums, bass, and vocals for two measures, then full band playing normally to finish the verse (you could change this to any breakdown/buildup, e.g. guitar only, then guitar+bass, then drums. Or whatever.)

- Third Chorus: Played normally, except guitar is playing sustained power chords (as above) instead of strumming the riff.

- Repeat third chorus normally or with high-E ringing or whatever.

Now you have turned a static, flat song into a dynamic arrangement where no section sounds the same as any other. Focus, attention, and energy is constantly moving, with ZERO improvement in musicianship. And I daresay this band would have no trouble at all

turning this into a live arrangement. Even the Ramones could do stuff like this.

If the band is capable of playing any caliber of fills, lead licks, substitutions, or harmonies, then the possibilities explode.

Captain Damage Quote for yep comment below...

I would take a hybrid approach: Record the guitar part once the way you want it and then put your drums/clicks in with tempo changes, ritards etc where they should fall when you play freely. Then replace the original guitar part - yes, delete or at least mute it. Play and sing all the parts following the drums. Every free performance is unique, so it may take a bit of practice to be able to nail it. But I think you'll be happier in the end.

That said, others on this board are more experienced than I with beat-and tempo mapping. There may be an easier or more precise way of approaching this."
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Captain Damage is exactly on the right track.

Starting a recording with anything other than the drums as the first track is always asking for trouble. Never say never, but it's **very** unusual for everything to fall into place if the drums are being recorded after the other instruments.

So the simple solution is to use everything recorded **before** the drums as a "scratch track". Once the song is knocked roughly into shape, record the drums. Then expect to go through and re-record all the other tracks. The obvious implication of this is not to waste too much time on anything until you have a real drum track.

There are also some very cool ways to tempo-map in REAPER so that you can line up measures and beats to match a "free"-time recording. Bevoss gives brilliant instructions here:

<http://forum.cockos.com/showthread.php?t=14737>

Quote:

Originally Posted by wall0159

Thanks to all who replied to my question -- that was a bit of an aha! for me :-)

Just an extra query: say you were recording a song where the drums only played sporadically, or only entered part-way through the song. Would you do a similar thing, but fill-in time-keeping drums in the other parts, re-cut the guitar/voc and then remove those drum bits? Is that the best way, do you think?..."
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First off, the more unusual your project, the harder it becomes to offer any "right way" to do it.

That said, the point of recording drums first is that the drums are generally the instrument that holds the rest of the timing together. If you think in terms of pitch instead of timing, the reason NOT to record vocals first is because it is typically a lot harder for the other instruments to follow the pitch of the vocals than vice-versa.

Just as a singer is generally singing to either a real or imagined pitch reference, so are all the instruments generally playing to either a real or imagined "beat". The hard part about trying to lay drums on top of a pre-existing instrument track is that the *real* beat now has to try and fit the unheard, imaginary beat that was in the player's head.

Quote:

Originally Posted by flatpickle

...Would you still recommend re-tracking guitar/bass tracks even if they were recorded to a click track? Or, to put it another way, does a click track count as a good-enough drum track?""

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Ordinarily I would say that tracks cut to a click are okay to exactly the degree that everything fits once you introduce the drum part.

It really all comes down to the "one" beat, and then to how everyone reacts to everything from there. Everyone, always, has to know where the "one" is. As long as everyone is playing the same tempo, and as long as everyone can land on the one, individual variations don't matter all that much.

The first and most common problem of timing is people introducing extra beats of leaving out beats in a measure. The most common source of this is a drummer who plays fills without clearly and cleanly leading up to and landing on the "one" beat. Maybe he throws in a couple of triplet rolls, or a half-time slowdown, or a fast alternate passage or whatever. Next thing you know, the main song riff doesn't "fit" and everyone (listener included) has to stop and regroup and figure out what's going on.

The second most common problem is players having a different feel for the "swing". Try this: say the word "culminating" over and over again, tapping your hand on the 1st and 3rd syllables ("cul" and "nat(e)"). Now, without stopping, change to saying the word "overbearing" and keep tapping on the 1st and 3rd syllables ("Ov-" and "bear-"). If you pronounce english the way that most people do, there will be a noticeable difference in how you accent and time the same four "beats".

Go ahead and swap between them, back and forth: "culminating overbearing culminating overbearing..." That itself almost changes the meter from 4/4 to 4/8 (or 2/4 to 4/4 or whatever).

If you have any doubts about whether there is really a difference in metric feel, try only clapping/tapping on the "upbeat" syllables (i.e. "min" and "ing" for culminating, and "er" and "ing" for overbearing). I think the distinction will be obvious for anyone used to English pronunciation.

It's not that recording drums first has some magic importance, it's that all the instruments should have a clear sense of whether they are supposed to be "culminating" or "overbearing" (so to speak) and when (since it may change through the course of a song).

In many cases, if you've been recording to a click, the revelatory moment happens when you try to fit a drum beat to a bass that is saying "culminating" while the lyrics are saying "overbearing", so to speak. And so on. Nothing's "wrong", per se, it just doesn't quite fit together. And you may find that the guitar is playing a line that hits the same four beats, but whose accents and note duration sounds more like "BURNING BACON BURNING BACON" while the organ sounds like "meadows and trees, meadows and trees"...

Each of the above phrases consists of four syllables, more or less evenly-spaced, and would typically be notated as even quarter-notes. But if you spoke them all to a click individually and then mixed them together, the accents and transients and tails would be all over the place, and it would sound quite sloppy and out-of-time, even though it wasn't.

Everyone needs to know where the accents are, where the beats fall (especially the one), and what the note duration "feels" like. They don't all need to play the exact same way, but they need to know what they're working with. The easiest way to do that is to have a great drum part, and then everyone play to the drums.

Quote:

Originally Posted by karbomusic

...In my humble experience that almost always results in bands that don't sound cohesive, they sound like several musicians playing at once to their own "perfect grid", none of which line up musically...""

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Great post all around.

Note that it's not strictly necessary for all the musicians to be playing with the exact same swing, nor that they are all "landing" on exactly the same microsecond (good bass players in particular will often anticipate or delay notes slightly to get a certain swell or emphasis in relation to the drum hits).

What matters is that everyone knows where the beat **IS**. Maybe the guitar player is playing funky up-beat chord stabs, and slightly dragging the beat to increase the sense of syncopated funk-accent. But if she's going to achieve that effectively, she needs to know where the up-beat is. Or maybe she's playing a pounding metal riff that rushes the best slightly to hype up the excitement. She still needs to know what kind of beat she's rushing.

Back in the olden days of the mid-90s, I and my college-rock cohorts used to call this kind of thing "tight", exemplified by jazz-influenced, artistically ambitious punk rock bands from the era such as NoMeansNo. This was in particular contrast to looser, "sloppier" hippie/blues rock.

Not everyone needs to play Nomeansno-style songs with difficult and shifting time signatures, long rests punctuated by sharp accents, and complex polyrythms, but there is a big difference between hearing a record that sounds "tight" and one that sounds sloppy, especially in these post-DAW days where radio records are ruthlessly corrected and tweaked. A real band actually playing the notes they mean to, when they mean to, always sounds better than studio-constructed timing.
