

Metronomes

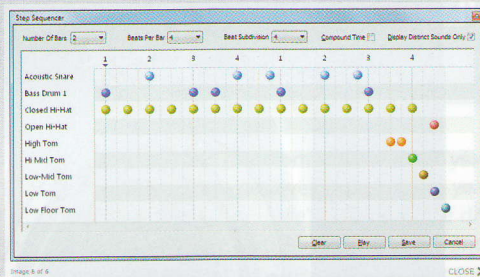
Every serious guitarist needs to have a very good sense of musical time. If you keep losing the beat when you are playing, you are like a rugby player who keeps dropping the ball. After a while the team will not want you there. It's the same when you play in a band or jamming with friends. The better the quality of musicians you play with, the better their sense of time will be, so you need to be ready for them. We are not born with a good sense of musical time, but can develop it with a little practice each day. This is where the metronome comes in. Only 10 minutes a day spent working with a metronome will do wonders to your sense of time.

A metronome is simply a device that produces regular repeated beats, that can be programmed faster or slower. If you haven't already got one, do so, they help all musicians play music at a constant tempo and keep accurate time. Drum machines are also good time-keeping devices, and some also have a bass or band accompaniment. The different rhythm presets are good for learning new styles as well. For any newly learnt music and sight-

reading practice I prefer the metronome, and for improvising practice - the drum machine.

There are, of course, plenty of opinions on how important metronomes are for guitarists' playing ability. Some just don't like them or use them, while others swear by them and use them all the time. I reckon there are times when you need to use one and times when you don't - the trick is in knowing when and how to use it.

There are three types of metronomes available for purchase today; mechanical, electronic and software-based. I think electronic and software models are best and not very expensive. If you practice near a computer there are many software programs you can access from the internet.



Andrew Klinkhamer, of Kiwi band The Fondue Party, has written a very handy software program especially for musicians. It includes a metronome and drum machine and comes with a comprehensive manual to learn how to work it. You can download it from here <http://www.thefondueparty.com/metronome.php>

There are many different ways of setting the metronome to get a good rhythmic feel. Here are a few to get you started:

- Rock, funk and Latin music - set your metronome to beats 1, 2, 3, 4.
- Jazz - set the metronome to beats 2 and 4 to get more of a swing feel.
- Classical and reggae - set the metronome to beat on 1 and 3.

Some other tips and ideas that may prove helpful:

When playing 6/8 or 12/8 time signatures I usually set the metronome to the eighth note or dotted quarter note.

It's always best to let the metronome go for 3-4 bars before beginning a piece. That is so you get a good feel for the tempo, otherwise you will have an unstable rhythm.

Make sure you tap your foot to the beat of the metronome and after a while you will develop an inner sense of metronomic time. If you sit to practise, the tapping leg should be

the one the guitar is not resting on otherwise the guitar will bounce up and down making it difficult to play.

When you can play a piece with no mistakes and without tensing up, move the metronome up by one beat. Even a one beat step up is a great improvement in your ability. The biggest mistake most players make is moving the tempo up too quickly.

45 - 60 beats per minute is a good tempo to begin any song or study if you are just beginning your study of the guitar. If you haven't yet got a metronome, use your watch or clock with a second timer on it - 60 bpm is one beat per second.

Once you know a tune very well it's a good idea to practice it at different tempos; slow, medium and fast. Slow is around 50 - 100 beats per minute, medium is approximately 100 - 160 bpm, while fast is 160 - 240 or more bpm. Remember to always keep within your abilities; there is nothing worse than listening to someone trying to play fast when they really can't do so properly. For advanced players, if you need to practice at quick tempos cut the metronome speed to half and then count in cut time.

If your music has a retard marking, time changes, or you are playing in near dark, it is best to use the light that many metronomes have. When the song retards you won't have the sound putting you off and you will get the tempo from the light when the song begins at normal tempo (a tempo) again.

Don't forget that you still need to count through the song as you play because the metronome only keeps you at a constant speed. Just in case you get lost you have to know what beat you are playing on.

The more advanced player can begin to experiment by playing slightly ahead of the metronome beat to give a more urgent effect. Playing slightly behind the beat gives a more laid back effect. Practice playing in the middle of the beat, slightly ahead of the beat and then slightly behind to feel the difference.

Always begin at a comfortable tempo, if you are making mistakes or tensing up, you are going too fast, so SLOW DOWN.

There are many other practice strategies for metronome usage, but you will need to see your teacher about those because they are beyond the scope of this article.

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