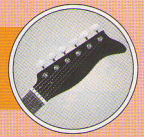




guitar cool



with Kevin Downing

Playing Guitar and Singing

Many guitarists have a lot of difficulty with playing guitar and singing together. Although it looks easy when you see a confident performer playing and singing at the same time, it is not all that easy to begin with. Sometimes it is not easy later on in your career either. If you are a singer/songwriter or guitarist/singer in your band, then what follows will be very valuable for you to understand.

Part of the problem comes down to a thing called multi-tasking or divided attention. These terms describe when you try to perform more than one thing at a time, like our example here of singing while playing guitar. This phenomenon has been researched by psychologists and many other disciplines for many years, and much of the research shows that when humans try to multi-task we never perform as well as we normally can, and often make more mistakes than we normally would on each individual task. Clearly it can take a lot of practice to get comfortable with dividing your attention.

Over the years I have performed this simple experiment with many people, often much to their amazement. Pick a song, play and sing the two parts together while recording yourself. Next, record yourself playing guitar first, then overdub your vocals separately, so you have two tracks. Then put your guitar down and listen to the difference between the two versions – most people are very surprised at the easily heard differences.

When performing the two together, the vocals and the guitar parts can sound rather ordinary, lacking dynamics, expression, emotion, etc. But when separated, the vocals normally have much more dynamics, expression and emotion – and the guitar parts can sound very different as well.

Here are a few exercise tips to help you have more success at playing guitar and singing at the same time.

1. Start with picking a song that is

within an easy playing ability and tempo for you. If you are a beginner you might want to stick to two-, three-, or maybe four-chord type songs that are reasonably slow. Some familiar examples might be America's chestnut, *Horse With No Name*, Paul McCartney's *Mull of Kintyre*, or *Wish You Were Here* by Pink Floyd.

2. Make sure you know your chords, fingerpicking, or whatever it is you are going to play really well. There is nothing worse than hearing someone struggle to change from one chord to another – actually there is, not even knowing some of the chords.

3. If the song has single note lines and chords together, you will need to be careful as many songs like this can be difficult. You might want to give one of the parts to another player.

4. It is best to separate the two parts. Practice your guitar part first with a metronome. Then practice the vocal part separately.

5. You might need to simplify the strum pattern if you need to. In my observations of many players I have found that guitar players tend to over-play quite a lot. By that I mean they tend to strum a pattern that is far too busy for the song concerned.

6. You need to memorise both the guitar part and vocals of the song before performing it in front of anyone.

7. If the song has a time signature you are not used to like 6/8, 12/8, 5/4 or similar, you might have to spend a lot of time getting used to that feel.

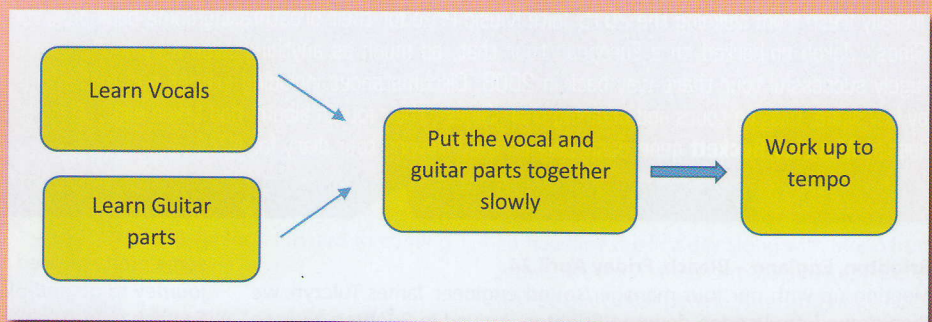
8. When attempting to play the song for the first time through it's best to have the tempo much slower than you are going to perform it.

9. Once you can perform both parts really well together at the slower tempo, then it is time to begin working it up to the required performance tempo. This is where most people go wrong – they try to play at the performance

tempo immediately.

Observing professional players you will find that when they sing and play at the same time, most are only playing very simple parts, while leaving the more difficult parts to someone else in the band. Of course, what a professional calls simple and what you call simple might vary considerably. Remember to be patient and that it might take more practice than you thought to be good at singing and playing guitar together, but it is always worthwhile practising.

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