

musi cth inks

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'Use Your Buzz To Play The Guitar'

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Tunings

The second thing to think about, apart from what tunings suit the singers voice, is how you will position the songs in relation to their tunings. This can be affected by whether or not you are using multiple guitars. Lets consider first that you are using one guitar for the entire set. Say that your songs are mixed with some in standard tuning (E) and some in Drop D. Rather than having two songs in E, than tuning on stage to Drop D for your next song, then tuning back up to E, then Drop D for the next two, then tuning to E while the audience is waiting again, keep the flow of the set by grouping your Drop D songs together first and then playing through your standard tuning songs. This means that you only have to tune on stage once, rather than making the audience sit through tuning 5 or 6 times. You can also purchase a stage tuner, which has a nice big display for seeing on a dark stage, and silent/bypass option so the audience doesn't have to hear you tuning up.

For those of you that have multiple guitars, you may like to have the guitars set to different tunings and simply switch guitars for the songs that match their tuning. If you are doing a solo show or clinic, this can actually be a feature to talk about during the set and an interesting part of the show for the audience.

Action step: Order your set to encourage minimal tunings between songs if you are using one guitar. Think about tunings and make sure that you are in the best tuning for the song (does it need to be down a half step, have you tried tuning higher etc)

Shape

Although this can be altered slightly by the two previous ideas, it is an idea to look at the general shape of the set list in terms of energy. Think of a graph depicting the rise and fall of a line.

How do you want your set list to be shaped? If you started slow and soft and each song steadily grew with energy or got a bit more lively, the line on the graph would rise diagonally from left to right. If you started very strong, went to some ballads in the middle and rose back up with your strongest songs at the end, it would resemble a 'U' or 'V' shape. There is no right or wrong with this, but it is a great way to mould the basic form of your set list to suit your intentions for the set.

Action step: Write out 3 separate shapes that your set list could take. Once you have done this, write 3 set lists, each with the songs in the order that each shape would need.

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PAPAS GOT A BRAND NEW BAG

Tools for writing stronger set lists

As we get well into work and start looking ahead, many of us will want to play shows during the year. For some it is a regular thing and for others, it will be the first open mic or full set of songs that we play in front of an audience. One of the best tips I can give you when you have an ambition to do something, is to draw out the picture first. An example is with albums. Just the simple act of coming up with an album cover idea, or writing down the set of songs you want on the album can start to get you feeling inspired and motivated to turn the fantasy into a reality.

Deciding which songs you want to play early on can free up more time to actually rehearse and feel comfortable with playing the tracks. There is an art to writing set lists, but just like painting, the artist can use skills acquired or can choose to abandon learned technique all together and be totally random.

In this column I will give you some ideas for constructing set lists that work well.

Impact using 'Bookends'

There are two major components to really affecting people with your music: Impact and Connection. We will look at both but I will touch on 'Impact' first.

It is ideal to have a big impact at the start of a set, and at the end. The start is the listeners' first impression of you at the show, and the end is what you leave the listener with. You really want to get both of these right. You might make a mistake in the middle; your song might lose energy during the ballad later in the set, but get the start and ending on target. Don't confuse making a big impact for meaning a certain tempo or Major/Minor tonality. For a lot of artists your more upbeat or 'big' songs will be good to start and finish with, but for some styles it may be best to finish acapella if the words are really important, or with a song that means something very personal to your story – which we will talk about in idea 4. Just remember – big impact start, big impact finish.

Action step: Assess your current set list, or create a new one. Focus first on having a big impact, and think about what songs you could shift or add for a stronger start and finish. Hear and picture it in your mind.

"Two major components to really affecting people with your music – Impact and Connection"

Connect using story

Along with Impact, connection is one of the most important things to establish if you are to really have people loving what you do. All aspects of music - and to be honest, life - involve connection. When people connect with something, they can relate, and when they feel like they can relate, they will listen. Marketing gurus use connection in their selling, promoters use it in their advertising and artists will inspire with it by being honest in their work. Whether you are a folk singer, a gangsta rapper or a teacher, we are all storytellers.

Giving people insight to either your songs or yourself as an artist will form a deeper bond between the listener and your music, and will also help that 'impact' that was mentioned earlier. You certainly don't have to talk about every song and songs are still able to be open to interpretation, but introducing a song with it's background or even why you wrote the song can give you confidence as a performer, and increase interaction between performer and audience. There has been many times where the audience has left feeling a bit let down because they didn't feel involved. A show takes the audience too. If they were not there you would just be playing to an empty room, so be brave enough to share the story and it will work wonders.

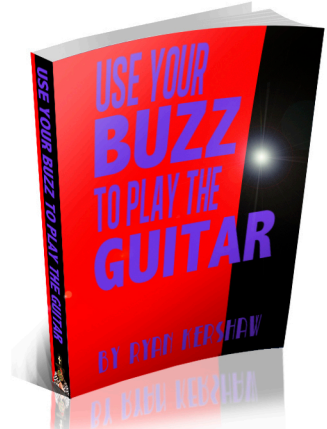
Action step: insert a back-story to two songs in your set. If they are covers, think about why that song resonates with you and share that in the description. If you wrote the song, you may share what the lyrics are about, or how you came up with a certain riff or progression.

Direct the audience

Usually there is a point to a show. If you are a beginner or are doing a random show casually, this step may not feel too important to you and you may just say 'thanks for listening' at the end of the performance. If you are, or desire to be a professional - this idea is essential. Direct your audience to support you. Hopefully you will have new listeners in the crowd, and they will most likely be unaware of your website or recorded material. If a song is from a certain album, you can let that be known before you start the song. You can direct concert go-ers to your merch (merchandise; clothing items, recorded material and promotional material available for sale at shows). It is also wise to announce any upcoming projects or shows, and having a microphone in front of you makes it easy to put your website - *which should act as your musical hub* - in the minds of listeners. The audience want to find out more about you - let them know where they can do this.

Action step: Go over your set list and make sure you have some parts where you direct the audience to your site etc (do not repeat the same message over and over). Check that facts are up to date (website hasn't changed and you haven't run out of merch at the show etc) and be sure to put the information out there at your show when the time comes!

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