

## Arranging for solo guitar or two guitars

Our mission with this session is to work on different ways of bringing some of our compositional ideas to life in practice on guitar, enhancing your own first drafts and imagining how you would collaborate on something written by someone else. The intended end result of this process is a performance of the song for others or as a recording or both.

If the most fun part of songwriting for you is riding the wave of the initial idea, this part might feel different. When you start with nothing, and create a first draft, there is an emotionally satisfying sense of having created something. Whereas you might spend a period of time going through some of these variables and end up changing nothing (although it's very unlikely that there is nothing you can improve) - so that emotional satisfaction won't be present in the same way. But this part of it is what will help you communicate your ideas - and it can be very satisfying refining your musical setting so that it sets off your ideas to their best effect.

There are two main things to take into consideration:

1. **Intention/style:** what the mood is of the overall song, and how the dynamic of the song builds. The guitar parts or additional instrument parts need to blend with this and support it. It's an obvious point, but you probably wouldn't choose a chugging distorted power chord accompaniment to a folk song.
2. **Practical options:** What practical additions and subtractions you can make at different points in the song to create dynamic and contrast. At the highest points of the build, you may want quite full sounding chords and rhythm. There will be considerations here as to what guitar technique and vocab you have available to you, and that's an ever changing storehouse of possibility. Quite often, wanting to realise a certain thing in a song is the incentive for integrating a new technique into your playing. There is also great scope for creating interest and drama by removing parts.

And linked to these considerations, there is a third question of whether the structure of the song remains the same, or whether it's adjusted. Common adjustments to consider include:

- **Breathing space between sections.** You will struggle to come up with an example of any well loved song where the vocals come in, and continue with no spaces until the end of the song. It's a feature of how our ears and brains process music that we quickly get used to a combination of textures in the sound and if there are no changes we can be inclined to

stop paying attention. You don't give the listener any chance to refresh their attention if there are no points in the song when the vocals pause between sections. You also don't help them process what they're hearing. Typically this type of gap might happen after the chorus, and is an opportunity for additional musical material to come in, whether that's a different chord sequence, or a new melody, or both.

- **Repeated bars to build tension** - sometimes a bar right before the chorus may be repeated to build expectation.
- **Cutting bars or sections to create surprise** - subconsciously, we create patterns from what we hear. If the first time the verse happened, it was 16 bars, we'll expect the same thing the second time. A common arrangement tactic is to create interest by subverting this expectation so that the next time the verse comes in it's only 8 bars. This stops us getting bored with what we're hearing. Equally, sometimes a section stops one bar early and this propels us back with renewed energy into the next section. Examples of this - Jackson - Johnny Cash; Ring of Fire, June Carter, Starman - David Bowie.
- **Rhythmic stabs** - sometimes we're very successfully guided into a new section by a series of rhythmic hits that differ from the strumming pattern or picking pattern that characterised most of the section. Hitting the chord on beat 1 and then cutting the guitar part is a very effective way to highlight a vocal melody or lyric. Uptown Funk has many examples of this - and deploys a lot of production techniques in terms of bringing instruments in and out; adding melodies, using stabs, using instruments in different parts of the sonic spectrum. So you never notice or feel bored that the whole song is G and Dm.
- **New material** - you may find that it just needs something extra. A substituted chord somewhere, or a bit of new material. You can retain the melody but put different chords underneath and it will sound refreshed.

Don't worry about using ALL of these ideas in one song or one section, but don't be attached to the exact form your song has at the moment and be open to how some of these adjustments might improve it.

Take one or two of your favourite chord progressions or song sections, or a song section written by someone else.

Write them down.

For each chord, you have a choice of what kind of chord to use:

1. Open chord
2. Power chord
3. Triad on strings 1 2 3 any shape
4. Triad on strings 6 4 3
5. Power chord

## 6. Extended chord (7ths, 9ths, 13ths).

You also have a choice of how to play each chord:

1. Chordal picking - various patterns - option to vary patterns in different sections.
2. Chord fills
3. Outline chord using riff (a riff typically travels between notes in the chord with the odd connecting note).
4. Bass note strumming (split chords).
5. Strumming pattern over 1 bar or 2 bars.
6. Distinct strumming patterns for different sections
7. Octaves
8. Playing the chord progression on strings 1 2 3 with the note on string 1 higher each time, or lower each time.
9. Playing the chord progression with open chords or triads on strings 1 2 3 and using pedal notes in the bass or in the higher strings.
10. Fingerstyle, one pattern or various.
11. Pick and fingers - this is a VERY versatile combination as you can pick certain sections and strum others with ease.
12. Harp harmonics.
13. Arpeggios.

You can either swap one song section with someone else and tell them what the mood of the song is, or you can do it 'blind.' So you can write a melody over it (for an imagined transition section) and make some decisions about how the chords will be communicated.

Don't spend the time at this point practicing one element - if you do that, you may get one cool melody or nice picking part done, but you won't have gotten as much out of the activity as if you take the opportunity to think about the composition as a whole. Spend it thinking about how the elements could fit together, and adding some suggestions to the arranging table that you can try out.

The melody writing perspectives we explored are also helpful here. A nice melody over a couple of bars can be a lovely connection between sections.