

SOUND ADVICE

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JMC
ACADEMY


EACH ISSUE JMC ACADEMY WEIGHS IN WITH SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR PLAYERS AND MUSIC PROFESSIONALS LOOKING TO TAKE THEIR CRAFT TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

MIDI BASICS IN MUSIC PRODUCTION

MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) is an extremely useful tool in the realm of music production. Virtual studio technology (VST) has made it quite easy to create musical ideas and express them without necessarily having to own a myriad of instruments that would normally take up space, not to mention drain your bank balance.

When using a MIDI controller (keyboard), you are not actually recording musical notes, but rather performance data is transmitted through the device, and captured. This data will not play back as music unless there is a virtual instrument (VSTi) assigned, therefore playing back the recorded data as a sound that has been selected by the user. With the data in place, a multitude of sounds can be auditioned until the right one that fits the music piece is selected. Depending on the amount of available sound options, this can further expand on creativity in the music making process. Virtual instruments come

in all shapes and sizes, from grand piano, to vintage synthesizers, to drum kits and drum machines.

Back to the data element for a moment, once the performance gestures have been recorded in by the user, they will appear visually on a time based grid with a predetermined note value. This grid can be viewed in various different note values (quarter note, half note, whole note) and once selected, the recorded data can then be moved to the nearest bar or grid value. This process is known as Quantisation, and if used correctly, can easily fix performance errors or incorrect notes played in by the user. Note lengths and timing imperfections can also be easily adjusted this way. Added to this, the ability to pencil (draw) in each note, or even move the notes to any position on the piano roll, making for creativity without having to learn to play a specific instrument. Another great factor about using MIDI is that any future tempo adjustments made to the music project will have no impact on the playback of the MIDI information; it will seamlessly play back at any desired tempo. An example of this is if you are creating music at 80bpm, and then decide to adjust the song session to 85bpm for a better feel. MIDI sequencing can add extra depth and dimension to any recording project, by providing various layers and textures, and combining these to further detail and intensify the music project being worked on. Adding extra piano chords to accompany a rock guitar, or by layering a string section to emphasise the chorus in a song are only some of the ways that MIDI can be used effectively in a music production. 

ROB CARE
JMC MELBOURNE

1300 411 310 www.jmccademy.edu.au
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BUDDING TASSIE GUITAR PLAYERS GET A SERIOUS LEG UP

A private collector has made a major investment in the future of Australian music, donating 130 rare and beautiful guitars to the University of Tasmania's Conservatorium of Music. The Tasmanian donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, has made it clear: the instruments should be played.

The Conservatorium's Deputy Head of Music and Head of Contemporary Guitar, Dr Glen Hodges, is overseeing the formal evaluation and cataloguing of the collection.

"This gift is unique in my experience and is extremely generous given the quality of the instruments and the fact that the donor had been accruing the collection for many years," Dr Hodges said.

"There are a number of items that are



quite unique, such as a 1920's Harmony Parlour guitar, a circa 1885 Reliance 5 string banjo, and Guild Finesses, two of only eleven made worldwide."

Dr Hodges said the large collection included a number of handmade guitars from well-known and respected Australian luthiers as well as famous brands including Guild, Lowden, Santa Cruz, Tacoma, Martin and Fylde.

GUITARIST TO WATCH

SAM VALLEN

CURRENTLY PLAYING WITH:

Caligula's Horse

USUALLY FOUND PLAYING:

The hardest bits of my band's music, or whatever section I fluffed at the last show! We tour a lot so I don't get much time to learn and play other people's music like I did when I was younger, instead my time is prioritized towards making sure I don't make a fool of myself at the next gig!

YEARS ON THE FRETBOARD:

I grew up surrounded by guitars and guitarists, and I'd always dabbled to some degree. I've been a "practicing" guitarist for perhaps 15 years.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PLAYING STYLE?

There's a fairly wide divide between my approach as a songwriter and as a lead guitarist. The former is all about harmony and coherency: I consider my guitar playing a vessel for the song's chord changes and melody in that capacity, although I always try to keep it interesting in terms of riffs, rhythms, and layers. The latter is practically the opposite: I like guitar solos to sound spontaneous and expressive. Depending on musical context everything should be exciting and unexpected, or emotional and meaningful. That's the rationale, and I get closer to it with every passing year.

FIRST AXE:

Washburn Mercury Series. I loved that guitar, and I still have the trashed body sitting in my cupboard somewhere.

CURRENT AXE:

Ernie Ball Musicman JP7. I've always found it difficult to get a seven-string guitar that doesn't feel overly "metal", but the JP7 manages to feel both classic and insanely slick at the same time. My JP7 has been all over Australia many times, as well as all over Europe and it's always in tune when I take it out of the case.

RIG/PEDALS:

Fractal Axe FX Ultra, Mesa Boogie 2:90 power amp, Electro Harmonix 44 Calibre (backup), Mesa Recto cabinets, Shure GLXD-16 wireless, Peak MIDI switcher, Klotz Cables, Ernie Ball strings (10-46 and a 60), Dunlop Black Jazz III's. I love amps, and when it comes to recording I use a ton of gear, but for touring the Fractal is convenient and brilliant sounding. It's never let me down.

SECRET WEAPON:

Simplicity and backups! Not carrying a large pedal board makes it much easier to fly with my gear, and carrying gear with backups at each point in the chain makes it so when stuff goes down, the show goes on. It sounds a bit boring I know, but touring reminds you quickly that it doesn't matter how great your tone or your chops are when your amp blows up at the second gig and there's nothing there to replace it! Other than that, the secret weapon is a ton of practice.

FAVOURITE GUITARIST OF ALL TIME:

Steve Vai. Not just his playing, his entire creative persona. I found his ruminations on guitar philosophy and practice as inspiring as his music when I was a teenager, and I recommend any young guitarist read his 10 and 30 hour workouts, if only to tap into that inspiration. *Passion and Warfare* was a profound early influence on me too, a catalyst to lock myself away for hours every day and devote myself to practice.

