



By Carl Verheyen - GJD Contributor

As I travel all over the world with my band or as a solo performer, I am constantly given CDs from my fans and fellow aspiring guitarists. Because of modern home studio technology, the CD has become a business card for many musicians. It seems everyone has a CD; I get at least 2 or 3 a night on the road, and quite a few in the mail at home. And I try to listen to as many as I can while traveling.

But there is something that is almost always missing in these tracks. People forget that in playing the guitar we actually avail ourselves to a whole family of stringed instruments. Most of the CDs I get from people consist of the following instrumentation:

- * Distorted electric lead guitar
- * Distorted electric rhythm guitar
- * Bass and drums

But, I believe the state of the art in guitar playing has more to do with layering and orchestrating and less to do with shredding and the blatant displaying one's chops.

You may not have a huge collection of guitars at your fingertips, but you can orchestrate the tones and colors of the ones you do have. Getting these elements "on tape" and into a musical tapestry can be a very creative process. Assuming you'll be using bass and drums, the rest of the instrumentation should showcase the main element of the song you are trying to get across. If this is your melody/solo lead guitar, remember it will sound more unique if other guitars that sound exactly like it do not surround it! I can name a dozen famous recordings where the guitar soloist sounds like a weenie because his tone can't get over the top of the backing guitars and be the central focus at that moment in the music.

Exploring the acoustic side of the stringed instrument family yields a lot of possibilities. Steel string acoustics with a Hammond B-3 organ makes a fat and juicy pad that compliments a crunchy guitar perfectly. Other combinations might be mandolin and high-string guitar (Nashville tuning) or a 12-string acoustic with a strummed Dobro resonator guitar. I use the 12-string with a crunchy Telecaster for beefing up a clean rhythm part because it adds a texture that is both interesting and complex. I also use the baritone electric with a nylon string guitar to create an "other-worldly" dark mood. My Fender Vibratone cabinet is another secret weapon that fills that space the organ with a Leslie usually dominates, but it can be great for arpeggio parts in the verses or chorus (think "Black Hole Sun" by Soundgarden). Layering sounds and textures can be the most musical and exciting part of the recording

process.

When I get ready to record a new song I spend a few days in my garage at home with all my amps and guitars. For me, preproduction involves imagining the various parts in my head and then looking for the sounds at home with my gear. I document each sound for each part in a notebook. When I get to the studio and actually hear these sounds in the context of the song everything can change. But at least I come to the studio with a direction and an idea of the way I want to layer the tones and build the track. Studio time is expensive! As producer I need a plan for each day.

First I decide whether to use keyboards or not. Since my band is a trio and we don't travel with a keyboard player I'm often tempted to realize the track without that sound. But remember, when you play live you can always rearrange the songs for the stage. When you're making a record it's for all time. It should be the definitive version of that song. If a piano, synthesizer, clavinet or B-3 organ serves that purpose then I will happily use it and worry about the stage production later.

Next I decide what instrument will "carry the song." Will it be a funky Telecaster or a clean Strat? Will it be an acoustic in drop D tuning or a Les Paul through a small overdriven amp? After that I decide what will be the big solo or melody sound or as I like to ask: who will be "Frank Sinatra" on this track? If you listen to the Capitol recordings of Frank, the big band or orchestra behind him sounds glorious when the song begins, but when Frank enters it's even more amazing. The engineer always saved a huge hole in the sonic tapestry for Frank, and the same concept should be applied to the main guitar on your track. Everything else should be supportive and complimentary to this guitar sound. I can't stress that point enough.

On the title track of my latest CD called Take One Step I did the obvious: Fenders for clean and crunchy rhythm and a Gibson Les Paul for the lead. But it was the seasoning or spice I added that orchestrated the song in a unique way and enabled every voice to speak clearly in the mix. There was no need for keyboards. Here is a "track list" of the song:

- 1) 1965 Strat through a TC chorus pedal for the verses. Chorus on very slightly for stereo imaging. Stereo out into a pair of 1964 Vox AC-30s close mic-ed.
- 2) 1996 Taylor 12-string acoustic in an open drone tuning at selected places.
- 3) 1960 Telecaster through a new THD Flexi-50 head and open back 2X12 cabinet for semi-distorted crunch tones at selected places.
- 4) A pair of Gibsons doubling the bass line in the chorus. Left: 1966 SG through a 1963 Gibson Falcon combo amp. Right: a 1969 Les Paul through a Pierson remake of a Fender Champ combo. Both amps were turned up to 10 for that wide open, small amp distortion sound you hear on early Led Zeppelin recordings.
- 5) 1959 Gretsch Chet Atkins through a '64 Fender Princeton reverb, but with the phasing reversed on the mic and board for that boingy spy sound. Used only for 4 bars in the 3rd verse.
- 6) 1969 Les Paul through a 1968 JMP 50 Marshall and matching 4X12 cabinet. Close mic-ed and room mic-ed for the big solo sound.

With these six guitars I was able to fill out the entire track and leave no part unrealized. The small amp distortion in my chorus perfectly compliments the huge solo tone: when it comes around there is no mistaking who's the boss! With the exception of the droning 12-string I recorded everything in standard tuning even though the song is in Eb minor. Chad Wackerman had the brilliant idea of playing 4/4 over the 6/8 part in the middle and end of the tune. And I give Cliff Hugo much credit for learning an impossible bass line! I hope you hear the song someday and bring to your own music the sheer joy and fine art of layering.

[About Carl Verheyen:](#) *In his 40 years of playing the instrument he has created a wildly successful multi-faceted career. Carl is a critically acclaimed musician with nine CD's released worldwide and is commonly regarded as a guitar virtuoso capable of playing any style of music with remarkable mastery and conviction. He has been one of LA's elite "first call" session players for the last 25 years, playing on hundreds of records, movie soundtracks and television shows. Carl has graced the pages of countless industry publications and been the subject of numerous articles. As a member of Supertramp since 1985, Carl has played to millions of enthusiastic fans in sold out arenas worldwide. On the educational front, Carl has produced an instructional video and various on-line lessons. He also has a book/CD detailing his unique "intervallic" style called Improvising without Scales.*