

RECORD YOUR STUDENTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by Daniel Roest

Last month we looked in detail at teaching a number of [please link] **tips for barre chord success**. This month I want to share something that is new for me, a project to make CDs for most of my students in time for the holidays.

A Gift for Grandma

It occurred to me this summer that a common aspect of guitar lessons is the lack of a physical product that can be shared and viewed by friends and family like the visual arts produce. I thought a CD ready for December would be just the ticket. It could also help the students focus on excellence and step up their game.

I realized that this project didn't need to be a professional level CD – just a souvenir of the students' efforts during the year, something for kids to give their parents who are paying for lessons, something for Grandma who might have bought a guitar for a grandchild, something to replicate as much as they want. I would do everything in mp3s, make Slimline jewel case inserts and give all the files to the student.

The new generation of handheld digital recorders has made this more practical, and after earlier purchasing a Zoom H2 Handy Recorder, I upgraded to the new H4n. What I wanted was something that could easily record mp3s and accept the balanced outputs from a mixer, and the H4n fit the bill.

Recording started in September after getting set up in August. It continues this month (I'm writing in October) and November. We aim to have the finished product in mid-December after a couple weeks of production. Having never done this before, it remains to be seen how this will all come together, but so far it's going well. Here is the setup that's working really well for me now:



What you see here is the heart of the system – the H4n digital recorder and a Mackie mixer. Coming into the recorder is the output from the mixer. The recorder's two built-in microphones are not being used. Channels 1 and 2 are two condenser microphones – one in front of the amp in the lower right of the picture, and one in front of the student on a boom stand. The set of rack mount units behind the recorder include a power conditioner, tuner, stereo microphone preamp and compressor/limiter. On top of these is a stereo reverb unit. Two auxiliary sends from the mixer feed the reverb and the tuner.

A second mixer, not pictured, is sending a backing track from my laptop computer to the mixer pictured above. The advantage of a second mixer is the convenience of easily outputting the computer's signal to monitors that the student and I hear during the recording session. Also convenient is this second mixer taking the digital recorder's output for us to play back the track just recorded. The H4n records to SD cards – the postage stamp-sized marvels that can actually hold 32 gigabytes. It ships new with a 1GB card, and I'm using a 4GB – no worries about filling the card. The recorder has a USB output that the computer sees as an external hard drive – no issues at all in uploading the sound files.

The handy little H4n has ten numbered folders to record to, and I use Folder 1 for Monday students, Folder 2 for Tuesday students, and so on. The recordings are automatically named for the day of the month and number of the file, like this one recorded today: 091013-010. On my clipboard, after a successful take, I wrote "2, Allison, Norwegian Wood, 091013-010." That tells me that on Tuesday Allison recorded Norwegian Wood on October 13th, 2009, and to take the 010 file and put it in her folder on the laptop. At the end of the week, I back everything up and rename the files with the student's name and the track title. Then I put all the good takes into folders called Mondays, Tuesdays, etc.

Musical Chairs

This new project has made for really interesting lessons. Now I'm tweaking knobs and using headphones to monitor balance and levels, starting and stopping the recordings and finding the tunes in my media library. The students come to lessons psyched up to make their CD happen, one track at a time. Throughout the week between lessons, they're thinking about the upcoming session and trying to rise to a level they can offer for posterity. This provides a focus that transcends the previous mode, where I would say when they could go on to the next piece – now they are the ones who say, "Let's do that one over." They want it to be perfect. They're learning things about themselves and how they cope with pressure, and they're learning invaluable performing skills.

Another big change is the dramatic drop in how much talking I do in the lessons. I'm not coaching them through the any rough spots when the red light's on – I'm not saying a word. It's kind of nice to relax a bit and put more responsibility on the student. We try for two or three tunes per lesson, hoping for twelve to sixteen, total. If we don't succeed with a tune, we go for it next time. At the end of collecting their set of recordings, I plan to give them a preview copy to approve and "sign off" on everything. If there is time, we can re-record anything that isn't up to par.

I remind them that they should enjoy hearing these tracks a year or more from now, to practice well enough to eliminate anything that would detract from enjoying hearing it later, and play well enough to be proud to give it as a gift.

Proud Parents, Proud Students

When you think of some other activities parents pay to provide for their children – soccer, karate and scouting – they all come with tangible awards of achievement. Painters and photographers have products to show, reproduce and sell. I think the fact that the students can make a unique, self-made artistic product and give it to their families is a real bonus for their parents, and something that the student artist can be proud and happy to give.

I hope this column on recording your students has given you some new ideas to use in your studio. Until next month, happy teaching!

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Daniel Roest (pronounced "roost") started playing guitar at the age of seven and never stopped. Today he has performed in countless solo and ensemble events in nearly every kind of venue, and his concerts are praised for being entertaining and informative. For ten years he served as President and Artistic Director of the South Bay Guitar Society based in San Jose, CA, preparing many successful grant applications, and is now Director Emeritus. He also is recognized for presenting gifted guitarists such as Laurence Juber, Peppino D'Agostino, Muriel Anderson, Jeff Linsky, Franco Morone, Michael Chapdelaine, Richard Gilewitz, Chris Proctor, Mark Hanson, Duck Baker, Sharon Isbin, Lily Afshar, Carlos Barbosa-Lima and many others. His *Great Guitars! 2004* CD received 5-star reviews.

Roest majored in guitar and earned three degrees in music performance. He participated in dozens of masterclasses, including many he produced. He taught guitar and music fundamentals at California State University Stanislaus and De Anza, Foothill and San Jose City Colleges and now maintains a full-time teaching studio in Folsom, CA. He has adjudicated several multi-instrument competitions, presented music clinics and introduced many new audiences to the art of the classical guitar. His original solo composition, *February 4th*, was selected from hundreds of submissions by the *ERMMedia* "Masterworks of the New Era" CD series. Last year he was selected to be a teaching artist in the Sacramento

Metropolitan Arts Commission's Artist Residency Institute. Previous columns for **Guitar Sessions** include **So You Want to Make a Living with the Guitar**, Parts [1](#), [2](#) and [3](#), a ten part series, **Expressive Guitar Playing – Tapping Your Student's Inner Artist: Dynamics**, [Tempo](#), [The Big Picture](#), [Rhythm](#), [Balance](#), [Rubato](#), [Pitch Effects](#), [Tone](#), [Phrasing](#) and [Stage Presence and Heart](#), and **Teachers Who Can – Performing in Your Own Community**, Parts [1](#) and [2](#).