

So You Want To Be A Studio Guitarist

by Vivian Clement

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Although being a studio guitarist can earn you huge cash and provide a more pleasant working environment than being on the road or playing in smoky rooms, it does require quite a bit of skill and diversification. Top session gigs seem to be reserved for the elite veterans who possess superior chops, sight-reading skills and years of experience. In big name studios where artists' careers are at stake, large overhead and big budgets don't allow for unknown newcomers. The same thing pertains to national jingles and movie soundtracks. Producers are not willing to take chances on the new kid on the block, and seasoned players are inclined to protect their positions in the business.

But there is no need to despair. There is still a lot of work available on a smaller scale for local jingles, songwriting demos, independent films as well as corporate videos. Thankfully the vast majority of session work is in this arena. Image, which is an important aspect of performance on a gig, is replaced by good sight-reading skills as well as access to a broad palette of sounds and styles. Having the appropriate gear, a good attitude and being a team player, are all important elements of being a successful and employable guitarist.

If you are considering becoming a studio guitarist there are a few things you will need to consider. The first is obvious and that is your gear. You will need to have a few good guitars at your disposal since studios require variety. A quality acoustic and electric (preferably with both single and double-coil pickups) are mandatory as well as a good amplifier. Many studios will supply amps but most guitarists like to be able to tweak their own amps in order to get the sounds

they are familiar with. You will also need to have some basic foot pedals or processors so you have access to a variety of modern and vintage sounds. As you build your reputation as a studio musician you can invest in more equipment, but to start with it's more important to have good sounding dependable equipment.

Another aspect of recording which is very important is your chops. You may be able to get away with sloppy licks drenched in effects while playing live, but you won't make the grade in the studio unless your playing is clean. It's much better to be a tasteful and clean player when it comes to recording, than the person with all the chops who has a messy execution. Studio mics are quite sophisticated and will pick up bad technique (remember once something is recorded it's permanent and can come to haunt you later on). Along with that is the ability to play all types of music. If you have the attitude that you only want to play alternative or punk, your recording career will be short lived. Aim for learning as many styles as you can, even if they are not your favourite. You'd be surprised at how many great guitarists have a lot of styles under their belts even though when they play their own material they focus on one particular genre. Also, don't be surprised if you go to a session and the producer hands you a chart of music to read. Although, some studios don't necessarily need you to read music, a large majority do, and the better sessions go to the guitarists who have good reading chops.

As always, being professional, courteous and on time are basic business chops that you must adopt. Being a studio musician is all about creating great music for someone else to enjoy, but it can be just as enjoyable as creating music for yourself.