# FROM THE COUCH TO SPOTIFY

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**From the Couch to Spotify**

*A book for the home rock musician about how a guitar riff, born on a cozy couch, can find its way to playlists on the world's leading streaming services. And how the journey is much easier than it seems.*

**Dedicated to my friend Alex.**

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**Introduction**

Hi there. I'm just like you — a couch guitarist. Or, as you prefer, one of *us*. For over 30 years, I've been gripping guitar necks of every shape and brand, plucking strings of all gauges with fingers or picks of every imaginable material and form. Swapping pickups and cables, running them through pedals, processors, amps, and audio interfaces. Basically, doing all the same stuff we all do.

Oh, and yes — I collect all this stuff. And no, I don't judge it. On the contrary — it's part of what sets us apart from people who aren't into music. This gear makes us feel connected — to the artists who shaped our taste (and sometimes our entire lives), and to the makers of instruments that became legends in their own right. Guitars, in particular, have an aesthetic, almost magical beauty.

I've got friends who can barely strum two chords, but they own some insanely expensive guitars. One of them, showing off his custom Les Paul Black Beauty, once said:

"This is perfection. Just looking at it gives you a kind of visual euphoria. And you *literally* hear those magical notes in your head — even if no one's touching it."

It's hard not to agree. If a wealthy guy who treats music as a fleeting breeze or fancy office décor can feel that — then what about us? The ones for whom music means something way deeper?

Oh, and one thing I forgot to mention: I'm not a musician. Or at least, I *used to be*. Years ago, I was frontman of a pretty wild band — a bunch of kids whose lives revolved around thrash metal, beer, and having a laugh.

It was a great time: gigs, festivals, parties, girls...

But who would've thought that even for a relatively well-known provincial band, the ending would be just like those of the rock legends we admired?

My closest friend — the bassist and vocalist of our band — passed away. Sadly, but predictably... an overdose. What he left behind was just a handful of recordings we kept postponing, and a couple of TV clips. A funeral. A tribute gig. And that was it.

That was my road from the stage to the couch.

I don't see it as a tragedy, to be honest. Quite the opposite — it was a life lesson, one that forever turned me away from destructive paths. After that, I watched more friends spiral down similar roads, but they no longer scared me. I was already on the couch.

Maybe I'm oversharing. But that was *my* path. Everyone has their own.

What I discovered was this: the couch is not the end of music. It's just a change in scenery.

Of course, the stage is amazing. Back in the day, the entry barrier was huge — most people couldn't even afford instruments, let alone gear. And you had to actually know how to play. But where would you even *learn*?

Can you imagine — I thought I invented palm muting? I figured it out myself at fifteen. There was no one to explain even something as simple as that. What a time it was.

And there were so many "inventors" like me back then. And the more of us there were, the broader the couch grew.

Then came *Headbangers Ball*, then the Internet, then YouTube — and suddenly our idols were right there in front of us.

It took me years to play through every riff that had shaped my musical path. What a strange but fascinating moment it was — to finally see the real fingerings for riffs I'd learned by ear 10–15 years earlier… and realize I'd been playing them wrong all that time.

For years, I jammed on killer riffs. Memorized solos. Played with friends. It was awesome.

But it was *all someone else's* music. Year after year. Not mine.

To be fair, my musical taste has always been diverse. Despite a heavy focus on metal, I've listened to a lot — even stuff that had nothing to do with guitars. But that's a story for later.

Anyway, there was this one guy in my life. A kid I took under my wing when he was just starting out. Over time, he grew into a great musician — a composer, a performer. But more than that — he became a musical director. A talented, charismatic one.

He was probably the only one among my musician friends who didn't just *stick with music*, but actually figured out how to *make a living* from it. He was one of my best friends. And he's the one who pushed me onto a path I still value deeply.

One day, during a jam session — where we were, for the hundredth time, playing the same setlist of twenty beloved thrash songs — he asked:

"Aren't you guys tired of this?"

Soon after, we started throwing in our own riffs. Then one day, he said:

"Why don't we just write our own stuff?"

And from that moment on, my whole approach shifted again.

That was ten years ago.

Music is my hobby. My favorite one, and one of the most important. But still — a hobby. I live off something else. I earn money doing something else. But without music — I'm no longer myself.

Why did I decide to write this book? Because I owe a debt. My friend gave me the chance to stop being just a listener — and start *creating* something of my own.

Maybe this book will help someone else take that same step — to cross that invisible line from listener to creator. Maybe it'll help someone who's on the fence, or someone who's

already decided but doesn't know where to begin. And if it does — that would be the best reward I could ask for.

I respect the work of people in the music industry. I know how hard it is to give yourself fully in a world where pleasure is cheap and creativity is just another product. Where the value of talent has shifted — replaced by the size of a promo budget.

But the internet gave us a chance. Yes, it devalued music as a phenomenon. But at the same time — it gave each of us, even a couch guitarist, the shortest possible path from the couch to Spotify.

In this book, I'll show you how I do it. How I — from my working couch — send my music out into the world.

And I'll show you how you can do it too — in a way that makes you proud, not ashamed.

## Chapter 1. I Play Great. That's Wonderful. But For Whom?

Friends and acquaintances who have nothing to do with music or guitars often lump the term *"couch guitarist"* in with things like *"armchair expert"* or *"keyboard warrior"* — with the same condescending tone. I completely disagree. It's just unfair.

Putting half-baked opinions out into the world, born of overripe or undercooked imagination, isn't something a decent person should do. But that's exactly what these "keyboard warriors" do — dumping thoughtless takes onto the internet. Fortunately, those opinions vanish quickly, and five minutes later, no one even remembers they existed.

But a couch guitarist? He might have something more.

For example, when you pick up the guitar for the hundredth time and play someone else's riff — you're returning to a real statement. Something that *holds you*. Something you *keep coming back to*. And if it still grabs you — it means it was said by a master.

But let's be honest — it gets old.

It definitely got old for me. Yeah, I still play other people's licks. My fingers do it automatically. It's soothing. I always have a guitar nearby — at home, on the road, even at the office. Years ago I quit smoking, but I kept the ritual of a break: now, instead of lighting up, I grab the guitar for 5–10 minutes to clear my head. Back in college, I used to do both at once.

But picking up the guitar every day just to play someone else's lines? Is that why we fell in love with the instrument?

Sure, that's how it works in classical music. People spend their whole lives mastering works written by others. But even there — even when they hit every note exactly as written — a real musician still adds their own character to it.

I went through this myself when I was younger. I was playing a heavy riff again — one I'd played a million times. Just for fun, I shifted the rhythm a bit, moved some chords around. Then did it again. And suddenly, I heard something completely new. Still heavy, still badass — but now it was *mine*.

Sounds like a cheap movie scene, I know. But that's exactly how it was.

I brought it to rehearsal with full dramatic flair. We jammed on that seven-chord riff for half an hour. And then we knew: it wasn't enough. So by the next rehearsal, I showed up with ten more new riffs. And for the first time ever, we didn't play a single cover.

I can't remember those riffs anymore. Maybe one or two. And even then — who knows if they were the ones? But I remember one thing clearly: they sounded no worse than what was coming out on albums at the time. And to me — they sounded better.

Back then, recording music was a *big deal*. Especially for heavy stuff. In my small town, even the basics of recording were discoveries waiting to happen.

Years passed.

My friend — the one I mentioned earlier — was the first among us to figure out how to connect a guitar to a computer. And the irony? I was already working professionally with computers at the time. But in music, my head was stuck in the past: 8-track tape machines, rack processors, 16-channel mixers, and live recordings from start to finish.

Alex — my dear friend — was the first to show me that these two worlds, guitar and computer, could be one seamless process.

Back then, the idea stayed somewhere deep in my brain, not yet ready to become action. But something *did* stick:

- My riffs might mean more to me than most others.
- And music can be recorded *at home*, on a computer.

It took another five to seven years before those two thoughts finally connected.

In the meantime, I recorded a few tracks at Alex's studio — live drums, rack gear, an analog 64-channel mixer. The only difference from the old-school setup? A computer instead of a tape machine.

That's a story in itself. Maybe I'll tell it another time — but not in this book.

The main problem was this: I lived in the capital, and he lived back in our hometown. I'd visit now and then when I came to see my parents, but I couldn't record music regularly.

Meanwhile, my material kept piling up. Mostly as voice memos on my phone. But eventually, there was so much that a phone just wasn't cutting it anymore. So — again on Alex's advice — I asked myself: why am I still using a phone? Why not just record straight into the computer?

Boom. It was way easier than I expected.

Later in the book, I'll talk more about how gear and computers have evolved. For now, the takeaway is simple: I realized my ideas were worth recording.

So:

- I play well.
- I like my riffs.
- I'm tired of repeating other people's music.

So why not hear my own riffs as full-fledged songs? So what if I'm sitting on the couch? I gave it a shot — and it worked.

Now — one more important thing.

Like most of us, I've got a built-in inner critic. Pretty harsh, too. For a long time, it held me back. Because as soon as I hit *record*, my hands would go rogue. If you've experienced this — you know what I mean. If not — you will. It's called *recording syndrome*. But trust me — it's beatable. And it shouldn't stand in your way.

No matter how well you play in a relaxed setting — you're not a trained performer. And you don't have to be. You didn't spend 15 years in a conservatory learning how to place every note with textbook technique.

You're moved by *inspiration*. And that's often more powerful than pure craft.

How to bring your imperfect but inspired playing up to a pro level — I'll explain later.
The truth is, with today's tech, *inspiration* can sound just as strong as *skill*.

*(Disclaimer: I have nothing but the deepest respect for professional musicians and audio engineers. Their work deserves the highest recognition — and I strongly encourage you to respect it, too.)*

## Chapter 2. The Muse Is Real. Mission: Collaboration

Let me repeat the title of this chapter: **The Muse is real!** This isn't just a figure of speech. Everyone has heard of inspiration. It's a wonderful thing. It can strike anyone, in all kinds of activities — and not only in the arts. Inspiration can come suddenly, whether you're playing sports, working, arguing, or even cleaning. You're doing some repetitive task, mechanically going through the motions, when suddenly a sense of ease takes over and gives you extra energy to solve the task at hand.

I'm into cycling, and we have a saying: *"The leg has come."* It means that even though nothing changed — your pace, your diet — all of a sudden, you're filled with unexpected strength. Or windsurfing, which is also an important part of my life: yesterday you were floundering like a beginner, and today you're blasting like a slalom racer. Nothing changed — not the conditions, not the equipment. And even in my work — which I love and have been doing for years — one day I was stuck in one place, and next day my thoughts are flying so fast I can barely collect all the bonuses they bring. It's a beautiful feeling.

But that's not the Muse. Don't confuse the two.

The Muse is the goddess of creativity. Yes, I'm exaggerating a bit — I'd even like to find a better word than "Muse" — but nothing else quite fits. It's not just an emotional high, not a fleeting touch like inspiration. It's a steady connection to something deeper and more coherent, something with its own logic.

I'm a very non-superstitious person. It would take a lot to convince me that "otherworldly forces" exist. But anyone who spends enough time creating something — they've encountered this phenomenon. I can't speak for people in other creative professions — painters, architects, writers... Although actually, maybe I can.

I travel a lot. I love painting and have visited most major European art galleries. I've always paid attention to literature as well. And I'm convinced: the works of Michelangelo, Bernini, Bosch, Dostoevsky — and many, many others — simply couldn't have been made without the Muse.

And as a musician, I can confirm that she visits us, too.

I personally recognize the Muse like this: a phrase, a riff, or a line of lyrics comes to me fully formed. It arrives complete. There's no urge to tweak or improve anything — you just know everything's already in its place.
Usually, for me, it shows up as two or three riffs that immediately form the foundation of a new song. Or sometimes a full set of lyrics that spills onto the page in ten minutes, start to finish.

To my friend Alex, the Muse used to come with entire songs — harmony, melody, and lyrics included.

I'm sure most of you know exactly what I'm talking about.

And if you're only just starting out and not quite sure what I mean — the only advice I can give is: spend more time with your instrument. Play around. Try to shape your own musical ideas. Trust me — one day you'll feel that moment for yourself.

So how does it happen for me? As cliché as it might sound, the vast majority of my encounters with the Muse... happen on the couch. Yes, of course, sometimes it's happened out in nature, at parties, even during rehearsals — but the couch is where most of the magic happens.

*In the photo: the exact spot where I wrote almost my entire last album — and about half of the previous one.*

I always keep two guitars within arm's reach. But I'll talk about my choice of guitars later. The next most important tools in my creative setup are my home amp and looper. They form a sort of safety net that helps me hold on to the Muse before she slips away.

I'm incredibly lucky with my wife. She's a wonderful person with many great qualities. But in the context of this story, I'll mention one in particular — she doesn't get annoyed by the sound of me noodling on the guitar while we're watching movies or shows in the evenings. Or even while we're just talking.

We can be watching a series, discussing it, and at the same time my fingers are running along the fretboard, quietly feeding a gentle hum through the amp. That's my story. I hope you also have someone you don't annoy — or at least a place where you won't annoy anyone while refusing to let go of the guitar.

Speaking of which, thanks to modern tech, you don't even need an amp anymore. You don't even need a physical rig. Some manufacturers came up with portable processors long ago — I own one — that let you route an entire universe of tone and effects straight to your headphones.

Play. Explore. Chase new ideas. It's like bait for the Muse. And once she bites — trust me, you'll know your life has changed.

Now, here's another important point: don't rely on the Muse alone. You can write a great piece even without her.

Many years ago — long before the internet took over — I read an interview with one of the world's biggest RnB producers. He said they had stopped relying on pure creativity when crafting songs. Instead, they used statistics to determine which sounds or sound combinations lit up dance floors around the world — and assembled tracks from those ingredients. And they crushed it. That's how some of the most controversial hits by a certain Grammy-winning singer (who also happened to be married to a no less titled producer and RnB artist) came to life. You'll figure out who I mean.

Unfortunately, that approach has become the mainstream norm.

But this book — it's an attempt to stand against that kind of digital chaos. A little rebellion from us couch-bound guitarists.

That said, here's what I actually encounter most often: the Muse (or just inspiration) gives me 2–3 solid riffs out of the 4–5 I need. The verses are written — and then I hit a wall on the chorus. In those moments, I stop waiting for inspiration and switch to worker mode, like I'm on commission. I'm the client myself — but still, the mindset shift helps.

Moreover, if an album needs a few more songs, I don't wait for the Muse — I roll up my sleeves and write. There's nothing wrong with that. As long as I enjoy the result.

So, there are basically three modes:

a) 100% Muse,
b) Muse + effort,
c) pure effort (at the end of the tunnel).

If you're only writing one track, the first or second might be enough. But when you're building an entire album — all three come into play. I'll talk more about songwriting and album creation later. For now, let's stay with the Muse and inspiration.

Years ago, before portable recorders were widely available, the only place to store your musical ideas was in your head. I understand musical notation and chords, but not enough to write them out freely. So even when the Muse struck, holding onto those ideas was a struggle. If I could just carry them all the way to rehearsal without losing anything, that was already a win. I probably lost a lot of great ideas back then.

Today, the situation is totally different. For a songwriter, it's paradise.

My phone and cloud storage hold hundreds of riffs and fragments I've collected over the years. I go back to them from time to time — some even make it into new projects. It's incredibly convenient.

But there's one tool I'm 100% sure has shaped the majority of today's instrumental music. And for amateur guitarists — probably all of it.

Of course, I'm talking about the looper.

Maybe I overestimate its importance for others, but for me — it's the single most useful and loyal companion in my work with the Muse and inspiration.

Let me briefly explain what a looper is, in case someone here's new to the idea. It's a device or software that records a phrase and plays it back in a continuous loop.

For us guitarists, loopers usually come as foot pedals — allowing us to trigger them without taking our hands off the instrument. But they come in all shapes and sizes. There are mobile apps for phones and tablets, plugins for computers, and of course, any DAW can function as a looper too. But I want to focus on pedal-style loopers.

I've owned a lot of them since I first tried one. I started with that tiny, legendary one-button model that sold in the thousands. I even remember how the brand name of that pedal became shorthand for all loopers for a while.

Since then, time has flown. As soon as a new model came out with better features — I'd grab it. And then came the boom. Companies started rolling out loopers left and right — entire product lines, even. So here we are in 2025, and the options are endless.

From legacy brands to fresh Asian startups, from simple one-button pedals to mini-stage rigs with multi-track layers and effects. And every serious guitar processor maker now includes looping as a built-in feature.

After much trials, I've settled on a pedal with 99 storage slots — each of which can hold two separate loops — plus a built-in drum machine that syncs with the loop.


For me, as a couch guitarist and songwriter, that's more than enough to prepare an idea before moving it into a DAW.

I'll go into more detail about the recording process later. But for now, I'll just mention that beyond the main riffs, I also use the looper to work out second guitar parts, little "flavor" bits

(more on that later), and sometimes a bassline. And one very important detail — the tempo and a rough drum groove.

Of course, I've tried more advanced models. You know how it is — we always want more options, even if we never actually use them. But for my needs, this model hits the sweet spot. Now, if you're planning to not only write but also perform solo, I strongly recommend looking into loopers with extended functionality: more tracks, built-in effects, mic inputs, external audio support, etc.

Recently, a new signature series dropped from a certain wildly popular red-haired artist who rose to fame by looping with a tiny acoustic guitar — long before he became a global pop star.

Each model in the line offers something different, and the top-tier version is essentially a full-blown portable studio with a backing band in a box. I had the pleasure of spending a few evenings with it on my couch. It was pure joy. I don't remember writing any new songs during that time, but if I were a full-time solo act — that'd be my go-to.

My favorite manufacturer — the one whose looper (and other gear) I've been using all along — also makes amazing models. Not only do they max out looper functionality, they pack in a ton of onboard effects: compression, overdrive, reverb, and more. In a way, it's a loop station crossed with a multi-effects processor.

And for the truly lazy, there's a pedal (maybe more than one by now) that mimics a full band based on the loop you feed it. It analyzes your chord progression and generates bass and drums to match — in a variety of genres.

When I first tried the most popular version of that pedal — or processor, really — the backing tracks it created weren't especially sophisticated for my taste. And if your progression strayed from familiar formulas, the results were pretty hit or miss. But for simple arrangements or a young guitarist just beginning to learn the structure of a song — it's an awesome tool. And I'm sure the software has evolved significantly since I last played with it.

*A quick disclaimer: I'd love to name all the gear I've tested and tell you what I think of each one. But to avoid legal tangles, I won't include brand names or anything that might be protected intellectual property. That said, we all live in this same music world, and I think my subtle hints will make it easy for you to figure out what I'm referring to.*

Now let's step away from the gear and back into the creative process. I've shared my thoughts on why I think the looper is the single most powerful tool for working with the Muse and with inspiration.

Here's how it usually happens for me. After work and a workout, my wife and I sit down to watch a movie or a show — like I mentioned before. During the film, I'm gently picking at the strings on a guitar plugged into my looper, which in turn is connected to a tiny home amp made by my favorite Japanese brand. The volume is turned way down. My wife is incredibly patient, but I don't like to push that patience too far.

This amp is a legendary little solid-state combo. It can emulate several classic amp models — anything from a clean acoustic channel to high-gain distortion. I love it. Actually, I have two

of them. The first one's been with me for years. After going through a bunch of modern modeling amps, I eventually bought a second one of the same model — so I'd have access to it in different rooms around the house.

Now, don't get me wrong — I'm not a retro snob. Quite the opposite. I fully embrace modern technology that helps beginners shorten the path from couch to Spotify. I follow gear releases closely, especially in the guitar world. And I truly believe the future belongs to this tech. I absolutely recommend that beginners looking for their own sound dive headfirst into it. Asian manufacturers are producing incredible options right now. Use modern modeling gadgets — amps, processors — and you'll be happy for years to come.

Of course, tube tone is a world of its own. It's not just about sound — it's about feel, philosophy, something deeper. But to be honest? It's not practical. Even for a gigging musician, it can be a hassle. And for a creative soul working in a city apartment? Completely unworkable. So let's stick to transistor tech — which gives you great tone, even at whisper volume.

Anyway — it's evening. We've got a movie playing, I've got my guitar, looper, and amp. My fingers are wandering across the strings. I'm not even thinking about it — it helps me unwind. As I said earlier, I usually have two guitars plugged into the looper. I'll talk about them in more detail later — for now, I'll just say they're two classic rock machines with different pickup setups, giving me all the tonal variety I might need.

The evening might pass with nothing but recycled riffs and familiar chords. Could be my own, could be someone else's. And maybe nothing new will come out of my fingers at all.

But suddenly — I hear something unexpected through the amp. A strange little combination of notes. I like it. I zero in on it. Try to repeat it. Find a more comfortable fingering. And before I know it, my foot is hovering over the loop button. Click. That's it. The first step to turning those notes into a song — and sending it out into the world — is done.

Usually, that first version of a riff doesn't stay untouched. So I let it loop for a while, listening closely. Could the tempo be better? Is this the right fingering? Are the notes exactly where they should be? I make a few adjustments — and boom! The riff is ready.

Now, let me highlight why I chose my particular looper in the first place: the drums.

That turned out to be such a critical factor that it completely changed the way I write.
A riff might be killer — heavy, beautiful, tender — whatever. But when you hear it over the right drum groove, something explodes inside. It's pure inspiration. If you've experienced this — you know exactly what I mean. If you haven't — this is going to change everything for you.

My advice? Get a looper with drum sync. It's a secret weapon for songwriting. You'll see the second guitar part start to take shape. The structure for a bassline will appear like magic. But more on that — in the next chapters.

## Chapter 3. A Song Is a Structure. Why a Song?

Any man-made musical composition is a structure.

Sure, there are conceptual pieces in contemporary art or other forms of musical "experimentation" — but we're not going there. No matter how short or long, every composition has — at the very least — a beginning and an end. Even if it consists of a single note. If you look at that note on an equalizer, you'll see the start and end of its waveform. But again — that's not what we're talking about. We're also skipping classical music. And club mixes. I'll be focusing exclusively on rock songs.

But before we dive into structure, I want to talk about the difference between an instrumental composition and a song.

For the sake of clarity, let's agree on this: when I say "song", I mean a musical composition that includes lyrics. Sure, you can get philosophical and play with semantics — but for this book, let's keep it simple: a song is a text, set to a melody, woven into the harmonic structure created by musical instruments.

Okay, that sounded a bit formal. Occupational hazard. Let's put it simply: a song is a song.

So — song or instrumental?

There are different perspectives on this. It makes perfect sense that a couch guitarist is, first and foremost, a guitarist. A master of their instrument. Their voice is in their fingers. So naturally, the easiest thing to create is a piece where the guitar takes the lead. A few riffs, a solid arrangement, a central theme played on guitar — and voilà! A hot fresh track, ready to serve.

And now I'm going to try and convince you why a song is better. But first, let me say — I absolutely respect instrumentals. I've included them on my full-length albums. Each had its own reason for being there. But I still believe a rock composition should be a song. Here's why.

First:
No matter how much we tell ourselves that we're just playing for our own enjoyment — that's not entirely true. There are a million reasons someone picks up a guitar — or any instrument. I won't analyze them all.

Personally, my reason was as cliché as it gets: girls. I'm sure some of you can relate. Later on, during live shows, I discovered an entirely different kind of thrill — the energy exchange with a crowd. Blasting tons of thrash metal into a room and feeling the wave of response from the audience — it's electric. Even in small venues or tiny clubs — unforgettable.

But still, let's be honest — it all started with girls. The energy they gave back after hearing a guitar ballad at some lakeside party — that was worth something too. Okay, I'm drifting into nostalgia again.

Back to point one: why a song?

Every musical instrument exists to be heard. That might sound obvious — but think about it. Go back to the origins, when the first instruments were born. They were meant to attract attention. They made sounds that didn't exist in nature. Sounds that stood out. That demanded notice.

*(Side note: If you haven't explored the history of music, do it. How instruments appeared, how music evolved across cultures — it's fascinating, and it might deeply influence your creative thinking.)*

Back to our thread. If you've picked up a guitar — even while sitting on your couch — you want to be heard. You want to share your musical point of view with the world. Whether you're playing your own riffs or someone else's — you're still expressing how you feel music. Ideally, you want your audience to connect with your view and support it.

And here comes the first key insight — especially if you want to share your own music: people who don't play instruments perceive music differently than we do. For most people, the only "instrument" they can use is their voice. That's the only way they can participate — if they like a song enough to sing along. So when you write your own piece, you're either giving them a chance to experience it and reproduce it — or you're not.

Think about casual music listeners — people for whom pop and rock are mostly just background entertainment. Sure, sometimes they truly enjoy the music — but for the most part, it's just that: entertainment. Outside of die-hard fans at concerts, when was the last time you heard someone humming a guitar part or a solo? Exactly.

What they do remember — and repeat — is the vocal melody. Even without knowing the lyrics, they hum the melody. And if they know the words — they'll sing the whole thing. A *song*.

Another important point: the vocal line is also a musical part — it's another instrument. Think of the human voice as just one more element of the soundscape. It has its own frequency range. And usually — it's the simplest part to perform. If the melody is catchy — it becomes the easiest gateway to popularity.

So to sum up point one: a composition with vocals has a much better chance of not only being heard — but being remembered, and even sung.

Point two — a song gives you a chance to share your thoughts directly. This isn't a throwaway comment online that disappears in a scroll. This is your official statement. Even if it's a song about daisies on a spring meadow.

The ability to express emotion, share a thought, and communicate a feeling — that's one of the most important human traits. Be human. Don't hide behind your guitar. Sounds lofty? Maybe. But it's true. If you're just starting out — keep that in mind.

I already mentioned: the vocal melody is usually what stays with the listener. But don't underestimate the power of lyrics either.

There are countless examples of how deeply lyrics can affect a listener. It's no secret that young people often form their identities through music — or more precisely, through *songs*. It's also no secret that propaganda has long used music to influence mass consciousness.

And of course — love songs. Especially sad ones. Who hasn't been touched by beautiful words in a ballad about love slipping away? And if those words come wrapped in a powerful, memorable melody — that's a hit.

Embedding your thoughts inside a melody isn't just powerful — it's smart. I'm not here to preach what kind of lyrics you should write. That's up to you. The listener will decide what they feel about your message. Personally, I try to keep my lyrics within the bounds of humanist values.

One day you'll look back at your lyrics and remember what you were thinking — and how your thoughts changed over time. And they *will* change. It's part of the journey.

By the way — songwriting sharpens other skills too. Crafting lyrics to fit a structure, a tone, a mood — it's an art. Learn to rhyme your ideas well — and people will start seeing you as a pro.

And when a song is complete — when it has both music and lyrics — it carries more weight. The song feels whole. And so do you, as its creator.

For the average listener, a "complete" song just sounds more polished. As musicians, we evaluate compositions differently — that's our trained ear talking. It's neither good nor bad — it just means we understand our field. But the general audience doesn't think about complexity — they respond to the most immediate elements: melody and lyrics.

And here's one last reason — though maybe not a major one, but still worth mentioning. Sometimes, vocals can help mask imperfections in your instrumental performance or tone.

I'll talk more about this in the recording chapter — but let's be honest: most of us will never play every part like a world-class session musician. No matter how hard we try. We might reach a very solid level — but this isn't our full-time job. We've got a lot going on besides our guitar time. So instead of sweating perfection, use some tricks to sound pro — even if there are tiny flaws. Vocals are one of those tricks.

So, from this point on in the book, unless otherwise noted, I'll be talking specifically about *songs*.

At the start of this chapter, I said that every piece of music has structure. And in rock, that structure tends to be even stricter than in many other genres.

What's in that structure? You've probably heard terms like "intro," "verse," "chorus," "middle 8," "outro." That's your basic framework.

Use it — and you've already got the minimum structure covered. Of course, to add originality, you can mix things up — throw in a pre-chorus, a breakdown, variations of verses or choruses, whatever. You can duplicate, skip, or rearrange sections as you like — there's room for creativity.

At first, this might sound complicated. Don't worry. Once you start writing — it'll all click into place.

And if you need a starting point — just break down a favorite song by a favorite artist into sections. Use that structure as a base for your own song. It's standard practice. Everyone does it.

To help you visualize, I'll show you the structure chart from one of my albums.

| | Intro | Verse | Pre-Chorus | Chorus | Verse | Pre-Chorus | Chorus | Middle-8 | Verse | Pre-Chorus | Chorus | Outtro |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mickhey - End of the Night | + | + | | + | + | | + | + | | | | + |
| Mickhey - Except with the Smile | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | |
| Mickhey - Go for Her | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | | | ++ | |
| Mickhey - The Bird | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | | + | + | + |
| Mickhey - I Got Cash | + | + | | + | + | | ++ | + | + | | ++ | |

Let me walk you through my personal process of writing a song. After doing this for many years, I've come to realize that my process isn't strictly linear anymore. I'd actually call it cross-woven—because I've learned to anticipate certain steps in the songwriting journey almost subconsciously. But I started out exactly the way I described earlier, and that foundational process still forms the backbone, with everything else layered on top.

It all begins with a riff. Or more precisely: a couch, a guitar, a late-night movie, and a compelling riff.

By "riff," I mean either:

- a sequence of chords—power chords for a heavier track, or rock/jazz/funk chords for the corresponding vibe,
- or a beautiful phrase made of single notes, which happens too.

That's where my songs usually start.

Professional musicians who aren't guitarists, especially those with a classical background, have often questioned why I start a song not with a melody that's later wrapped in harmony, but the other way around—with harmony first, and then melody woven into it. Honestly, I don't have a good answer. I'm an artist—this is just how I see it.

I should clarify that all the music I've officially released on streaming platforms is rooted in full-fledged rock. Depending on my emotional state and even the season, I mix in heavier, jazzy, funky, or pop elements.

So even though most of the rules I touch on in this book are applicable across genres, keep in mind that I'm unpacking everything here through the lens of rock songwriting.

I've got a short album of strictly heavy stuff ready to go—but I'm in no rush to release it just yet.

Anyway, once I've conjured up a riff, found a comfortable fingering, and looped it into the looper, I immediately start building harmony around it. At this point, my brain is already shaping what could become the song's main theme.

No, the melody's still a long way off — I'm not even thinking about that yet. What I'm focusing on is the delivery, the emotional angle carried by that harmony. Maybe it feels like a slow, bluesy slide within a minor blues scale, or maybe it's upbeat and full of tonal leaps. As I said, there's no melody yet, but the atmosphere of the future song is already there.

The next step is finding a second riff. I even make a point of trying to lock it down before I put the guitar down. Bless the Muse, if I may say so, for often bringing me two riffs in the same emotional vibe. But if she doesn't, I push myself to force that second one out.

Why two? Because two riffs already form the foundation of a song.

Even twenty years ago, many world-class artists across all genres were building full-on masterpieces using just two alternating riffs or chord progressions. Two were enough — one for the verse, one for the chorus. And that was it. Some even made do with just a single progression, changing only the vocal melody between the verse and the chorus. Try it out yourself — listen to some old hits. You probably never noticed (I hadn't either), but doing a little digging like that turns out to be quite entertaining.

Back in my youth, if you wrote a heavy song with fewer than seven riffs, you were pretty much an outcast. People would say you were soft. Okay, that's a joke — but still, realizing that chart-topping hits were built on just one or two riffs or harmonies did sting a little.

Anyway, I don't take the easy route—and I wouldn't advise you to, either. Two riffs or harmonic ideas are just a foundation for me. Three, though? That's almost a complete song. I'm not even joking. Every track I've written deliberately has three or four different chord progressions at most. Of course, with clever arrangement, you can make the same harmony sound completely different. But since we're talking about songwriting as structure here, it's these three or four core harmonies that make up the backbone.

Now back to the practical case: at this point I've got two riffs with different harmonies looping, immersing me in the song's atmosphere. One's destined to become the verse, the other the chorus. That's why I aim for two riffs in the same emotional key — because if I only get one, it might just sit there unused.

I don't jump into building a full song right after the riffs arrive. I live with them for a while. I play them over and over, tweak them, try adding things. This phase can take quite a while. Sometimes the riff morphs into something completely different, or I add variations to support the narrative arc of the future song. Sometimes I shift the tempo.

A week, a month — there are ideas I've come back to years later. That's one of the hidden joys of being a couch guitarist. You're not chasing deadlines like a pro. You exist in harmony with the Muse, and she leads you to the next step when the time is right.

Eventually, the concept takes shape. I've played those riffs to my heart's content, and I start seeing the layout of the song in my head. And songwriting, too, has its own laws of drama.

I'll admit I'm not some kind of dramaturgy expert — but over time, I've come to sense the shape of it intuitively. I'll try to describe that in my own words a little later.

Now it's ready. The future verses and choruses have taken form—conceptually at least. Still no melody or lyrics, of course. Just the atmosphere.

It's time to sketch out the structure of the song based on what I described earlier, guided by the emotional landscape I've already imagined. Something like this:

- **Intro** – Include it or not? Melody or chords? Smooth lead-in with one guitar, or hit it hard? Use the central theme, suggest it, or create something separate? Chords from the verse, chorus, or bridge (middle-8)? Echo the core harmonies?
- **Verses and choruses** – How many verses? How many choruses? How many repetitions? Do you want a verse and chorus after the bridge or solo?
- **Middle-8** – Add it or skip it? Original progression or variation of the main harmonies? Will it include vocals and/or a solo section? Does it break into silence, or push straight through into the next part?
- **Ending section** – Do you lead out with a verse or chorus? Is there a solo outro? How many repeats?
- **Outro** – A final riff, a sustained tone, an instrumental fade-out, or maybe just the drums.

By now, you're probably getting a clearer picture of how I build the instrumental framework of a song. What I've just described is the overall blueprint. The song is still far from finished. And in fact, the final structure often doesn't fully crystallize until the piece reaches its first draft form in the DAW, where it's fleshed out with bass and drums — and that, in turn, can reshape the arrangement even further, not to mention what happens once the vocals come in.

Let me walk you through two songs from my latest album, just to show how I mapped their structures in real time. I'll keep it simple — these examples are more about process than complexity.

**Mickhey – "Sun Has Sent a Light Ray"**

1. **Intro.** Hard entry—full band comes in right away, using the opening bar of the verse riff.
2. **Verse** with a lead-in.
3. **Chorus**, one round.
4. **Verse**, same as before.
5. **Chorus**, again just one round.
6. **Middle-8** with a punchy start. No vocals — features a solo section.
7. **Breakdown** based on the chorus harmony.
8. **Another breakdown** based on the verse, shortened lead-in to chorus.
9. **Chorus + repeat**, with added intensity.
10. **Outro** – held guitar note.

**Mickhey – "That Kiddo"**

1. **Intro.** Original material.

2. **Verse**, no lead-in. First half as-is, second half features a melodic variation (a kind of pre-chorus feel).
3. **Chorus**, one round.
4. **Verse**, again no lead-in. Same structure as earlier.
5. **Middle-8** enters with a punchy break. Includes vocals.
6. **Solo section** over the verse riff, ending with a trimmed-down version of the intro.
7. **Chorus** – repeat, repeat again, and then one more with a solo layered on top.
8. **Outro** – held guitar note.

I don't have a rigid structural formula or one-size-fits-all pattern for mapping sections onto a song — but as you can see, I do gravitate toward clarity and structure. My general stance is this: a song should follow some kind of structure. There needs to be a flow. A sequence of parts that helps the listener absorb it more naturally. This isn't new — it's been baked into pop culture for decades. But you'll also find it in older forms and classical music too. Audiences today are used to it. Deviating too much might not just confuse them — it might push them away. Even if they enjoy your hook or lyric, they might not revisit the track if they found it too mentally taxing to follow. And let's be honest — we don't really have the right to blame them for that. We're making music for them.

Can you experiment? Absolutely. There are no hard rules. If the Muse is pulling you somewhere strange — follow her. You may even discover a new path that makes perfect sense to you. After all, this is *your* song. You get to decide what becomes of it.

That said, if you're working toward releasing a full album, be careful: even one song with a highly irregular form can disrupt the flow of the whole thing. It might throw off not just that track's reception, but the way listeners experience the entire album.

So here's the advice I want to leave you with as I close this chapter: experiment as much as you like during the writing process. That's the fun part. That's why we do this. Let your curiosity run wild — explore new sounds, arrangements, rhythms, structures. Try new forms. Chase what excites you. Even now, when it feels like everything's already been done and there's nothing new left to invent — there is.

So invent. Tinker. Push the edges. Who knows — maybe your next big idea will be the spark that starts something new. Maybe a whole new genre. Maybe a new standard. I'm not exaggerating. It might not happen overnight — but someday, someone could trace their own path back to something you came up with in a moment of creative joy.

But…

If your main goal is to share your skills, express your thoughts, and create songs that resonate with ordinary listeners — songs that might even touch their lives — then try looking at your work through their eyes. Or more precisely, through their ears.

Don't overcomplicate. Start with a structure. Lay out a roadmap your listener can follow — and give them a melody that helps carry your message across.

Maybe I'm oversimplifying. But this way, you'll have a compass to guide you. And you'll stay focused on the music itself, instead of getting lost in the noise.

## Chapter 4. What's Within Reach: Stick With Your Gear or Go Chasing More?

Let me start this chapter with the one idea I want to drive home:
**What you play matters more than how it sounds.**

Why am I placing such emphasis on this? Because all of us are, to some extent, obsessed with gear. That's just the truth. No need to argue it. We live in an age where marketing has trained us to perceive music not just with our ears, but with our eyes. Visuals have become an inseparable part of the musical experience.

It started long ago — when magazines began printing photos and stories about musicians. When music journalism became a thing. And then came television, which suddenly allowed people to *see* the legends they'd only ever heard on vinyl. For the first time, listeners could witness how their favorite songs *looked*.

They saw faces, bodies, clothes. They watched lips move as lyrics were sung. They followed hands dancing across the strings of instruments. And, naturally, they saw the instruments themselves.

I don't know exactly how audiences reacted to that in the middle of the last century. But if instrument design had half the impact that fashion and hairstyles did back then, we can make a pretty good guess.

Fast forward to now — and you already know the rest: manufacturers, brand worship, aggressive marketing, social media, video platforms, endorsement deals, trade shows. The gear market exploded. The entry barrier to becoming a musician is now close to zero. Meanwhile, the sonic landscape has grown wider than ever.

Instruments have become mainstream consumer products. And in many cases, this whole scene has become more about *commerce* than *culture*. Is that good or bad? Hard to say.

On the one hand, easy access gives more people the chance to connect with music. On the other, music as an art — and musicianship as a craft — may be losing some of its value.

On the one hand, fierce competition among manufacturers has driven prices down and given us endless options. On the other, that same variety can overwhelm a beginner — or distract even seasoned players.

All of this could be a separate topic altogether — maybe even a philosophical one. But let's stay focused.

Let me say it again:
**What you play is more important than how your gear sounds.**

No matter what instrument you're holding, the actual content — the music itself — matters far more than the tone or timbre coming from your amp. No exceptions.

A campfire rendition of a universally loved song, played on a busted, out-of-tune guitar, will always hit harder than a lifeless tune performed by world-class players using the most

expensive gear and pristine signal chains. Even if your drunk friend can't quite hit the right chords on his beat-up acoustic, your brain will fill in the gaps — and your inner voice will carry the melody.

So while you're still in the writing phase — when your imagination is just starting to turn chords into full-fledged songs — don't stress too much about what gear happens to be within arm's reach. If you've already heard your electric guitar through an amp before, you can compose without even plugging it in. Your mind will fill in the expected tone on its own.

Of course, I'm not talking about some dusty relic from your grandfather's attic. And for any beginners reading this: rest assured, these days you can get a perfectly functional brand-new guitar for less than the cost of ten combo meals at your favorite fast-food place. Not to mention the vast world of second-hand gear.

If a guitar has a reasonably straight neck and strings that aren't spaced light-years away from the frets — you're ready to write. And as for tone? Most music stores now carry all-in-one multi-effect units that can take care of all your sonic cravings — for about the cost of a dinner party with friends.

A small side note. What I just described fits mostly into a scenario tailored for couch guitarists — those who've already decided to play or write their own music. That doesn't mean it excludes professionals, of course. But musicians who perform live, in particular, have every reason to choose gear that can withstand a tougher routine: different venues, cities, flights, constant travel. Their instruments and supporting gear have to be reliable, adaptable, and easy to work with.

For us couch players, though, convenience is key. Personally, I also like it when things don't take up too much space.

Let's talk guitars first — as our main tools.

When I say an instrument should be convenient, I mean first and foremost: it should be comfortable to record with. It should rest naturally on your leg. The neck should match the kind of part you're planning to record. For example, I typically record rhythm or chord work with one guitar, and solos with another. It's not only about comfort — but in that context, the neck is the main factor. And whenever I talk about a guitar being "comfortable," I'm mostly referring to the neck feeling right in *your* hand.

That's my advice for you too: when recording, reach for the instrument that's easiest for you to play — not necessarily the one you *love most*. If those are different guitars, of course. (We'll come back to tone later, so I'm skipping that for now.)

I bring up comfort because, for most of us — especially couch guitarists — a guitar isn't just a tool. It's a work of art. A tribute to a favorite player or brand. I've mentioned this before, so I won't repeat myself. But I'm pretty sure that almost everyone reading this book has at least *two* guitars in their collection. And many — including yours truly — have way, way more than that. And I'm only talking about standard six-string electrics here. That's not even counting acoustics, basses, baritones, or other stringed variations.

Obviously, this is just a recommendation — not a hard rule. But my experience has taught me this: it's often better to spend *less* time struggling with your hands and *more* time shaping your tone and sound than to keep fumbling through takes on a guitar that just doesn't play right — and then trying to fix the sloppy bits later in your DAW.

Of course, I know many of you can nail your parts just fine. But:

1. I want to make sure this process doesn't scare off beginners. It's doable — but it *does* take effort, and they should know that going in.
2. Even top-tier session players talk about "studio nerves." They're the ones who coined the term.
3. And don't forget: when you're recording at home, you're on your own. That means you're the one playing, and also the one pressing record, stopping takes, managing levels. That kind of mental multitasking absolutely affects your physical fluency. It's a small thing, but it makes a big difference.

So, let me walk you through how I personally approach choosing guitars. Honestly, my path is probably pretty typical for someone from my generation. It's nothing groundbreaking — it just *works*. I'll describe it, and you can figure out where you are along the same road.

Over the years, I've played dozens of guitars. Bought, swapped, built them from parts. Switched out electronics, hardware — did all the usual mods that I thought would improve my tone or my playing. I could talk about this forever. But it all led me to two truths:

1. Swapping guitars won't improve your skills — but it *can* make you more comfortable.
2. Tone is completely subjective. Full stop.

At its peak, my personal collection included fourteen guitars. Keep in mind, guitars aren't my only hobby — I'm also into cycling, skiing, and windsurfing. All of which take time, money, and storage space. So if not for those, my guitar collection would likely be even bigger.

I started out with early electric models from the former Czechoslovakia. My first Jaguar is still with me. I remember selling it after a few local shows to upgrade to a Les Paul from the same manufacturer — also still with me as a keepsake. Years later, I went on a mission to find and buy back that original Jaguar. And not just for nostalgia—sometimes I actually use those guitars in recordings. Their vintage tone fits surprisingly well into certain arrangements.

Since then, I've traveled far and wide in нок guitar world — Japan, Korea, Mexico, the U.S., China. Probably more. I've had at least thirty guitars just in my own collection. And I've played more than I can count through friends and fellow musicians. Some I still miss. Some I wish I'd never met. But I've had my fill.

No, I'm not an expert. I'm not a professional. I'm not claiming to be either. But I've played enough to know what *I* want — for now. Sure, I might still explore new options in the future. This industry never stands still. But over the last five years, my core lineup has remained unchanged. Today, my electric guitar collection includes seven instruments.

To cover anything that might come to me — anything from thrash metal to jazz —I keep these close:

1. A professional American Strat H-S-S from the world's oldest electric guitar brand, with a rosewood fingerboard and coil split on the humbucker.
2. An American Flying V H-H from the second-most iconic brand in rock history, also with a rosewood fingerboard.
3. A Chinese Telecaster S-S from a house brand of one of Europe's biggest music stores, with a maple neck and full American-spec electronics.
4. A Chinese Les Paul H-H, also from that house brand, with a Pao Ferro fingerboard and coil splits on both humbuckers.

And on rare occasions — usually for heavier stuff — I'll reach for a guitar made famous by one of the all-time greats of thrash metal, tragically killed on stage. It's a stunning American-made instrument, with a mahogany body and an ebony fretboard. But to be honest, it's not the most comfortable thing to play — so I only use it when I really need *that* tone.

And as I mentioned before, I occasionally use my old vintage guitars for a few parts here and there.

A quick side note: while I'm not a bassist, I've walked part of that road too. These days, my go-to is a five-string bass from that same well-known Chinese brand — but upgraded with high-end American electronics. That's where I've landed for now.

So, that's my guitar story. But why these specific instruments? I'll try not to get lost in the weeds — especially not in *how* I ended up with these choices. That's a great fireside topic, but it'd take up too much space here.

Now, about my working guitars: all of them have passive pickups.

I've got nothing against actives — on the contrary. Tons of modern players, including the heaviest of guitar gods, have signature models with them. From a sound engineer's perspective, actives are a dream: the signal is more consistent, and the frequency response is flatter across the board. Want to cut something? Boost it? Go ahead — clean and easy. If you're just getting started, I'd probably even *recommend* actives. I've been through that phase myself, with a brilliant Japanese superstrat that left its mark on a few of my songs — both heavy and soft.

That extra compression in the output gives players — especially newer ones — a sense of confidence. It's also great when you double-track or hard-pan left and right: the guitars sound identical, and that's super convenient. So again, if you're a beginner—actives are a safe bet.

But in my case — and maybe in yours too — that very "perfection" is what pushed me away from actives. I once found out that even some major international artists who endorse and promote active pickups don't actually use them in the studio — only live.

The main reason I prefer passives is dynamic response. They quiet down when the moment calls for tenderness and roar when the emotion peaks. Sure, we still tame those dynamics with compression in the mix — it's industry standard — but for recording real rock, blues, or anything more organic, passives breathe life into the take. As I've gotten older, I've even developed a preference for single coils — especially in the neck position. Maybe that won't mean much if you're just starting out — but some of you will know *exactly* what I'm talking about.

So, here's how my four guitars are split:

- Three have dark fingerboards, one has a light one. The darker wood — rosewood, pau ferro, ebony — tends to produce a warmer tone. In sound engineer terms: it holds the lower-midrange. The light maple board, on the other hand, leans into brighter frequencies.
- Two guitars have mahogany bodies, the other two are alder or ash. Same logic applies: mahogany = warm, alder/ash = brighter.
- Pickups… that's where things get a bit trickier. I've developed a lifelong habit of using either the neck or bridge pickups — and almost never the middle. I rarely use the fourth switch position on a Strat, either — unless I'm chasing that classic "glassy" tone. That's just my thing. It simplifies the process for me, and I know how each pickup behaves on its own. You might hear things differently — and that's great! Experiment. But if you want to follow my path for now, feel free.

Humbuckers (H) have a fuller, more powerful sound — but like darker woods, they lean toward the low end. If you compare them directly to single coils (S) in the same neck or bridge positions, you'll hear the difference instantly. Also, pickups near the neck tend to sound warmer than those by the bridge.

All of this, by the way, is public knowledge. Most of it you could figure out just by experimenting a little. But I remember being in the shoes of a young, clueless guitarist. So I'm laying this out to save beginners the headache of learning the basics the hard way — and to refresh the memory of those whose couch-playing experience runs deeper.

With this full frequency palette covered, I can now choose the right instrument for each song. And honestly? I've come to believe that you could easily get by with fewer guitars. My close friend — the one I've mentioned before — always insisted that a guitarist only needs *one* guitar. You just have to master it and learn to extract everything from it. And that's exactly what he did. His H-S-H superstrat was like a Swiss army knife.

But he's a professional musician. Music is his job. We, on the other hand, are also admirers of the guitar as an art form. For us, it's okay to play with our guitars the way we once played with toy cars.

When it comes to my own recordings, I tend to select guitars and pickups based on a pretty classic scheme. I haven't written out a strict classification — because it's all a bit fluid — but I'll give you a general idea and ust outline the basics.

- For songs with a more aggressive and dense feel.

When it comes to the basic riffs and rhythm guitar parts, I use either the **bridge** humbucker (H) or single coil (S), depending on how intense the track is. As I mentioned earlier, the H pickup has a broader frequency range. That makes it easier to adjust its place in the mix and helps it sit comfortably between the bass and vocals. I use the S pickup less often — only when I know exactly where the part will sit and want to push the bass character closer to the midrange, instead of pairing it with the deeper punch of an H.

For solos and all those little tasty licks, I usually go with a neck single coil, especially on a rosewood fingerboard. Sure, single coils don't have a wide frequency response on paper —

but in the neck position, they still offer a deep sound with plenty of top-end sparkle. Most importantly, they deliver beautiful dynamic range. I try to use them even when I need extra distortion. And only when the overloaded signal from a neck single becomes too muddy do I switch to a humbucker on another guitar.

- For lyrical or funkier songs, it's all single coils — on both dark and light fingerboards. I leave more space in the low end for the bass.

Another personal quirk: for many years, I was so convinced that the guitar should always be the dominant force in rock music that I all but ignored the role of bass. That mindset stuck with me from my thrash-metal days, where traditionally the bass just doubled the guitar's riffs one octave down.

Over time, as I matured as a listener — someone consuming music, not just creating it — I began to hear all the instruments. And since I was already a musician and had an idea of how parts could interplay, it started to click. Especially the bass. In the last few years, it's like I've been paying back what I once neglected.

There's more bass in my mixes now — not just as part of the sonic wall, but in the actual parts themselves. I've started to separate them from the guitars more consciously.

*Here's a useful tip for beginners: if you shift some of the low-end responsibilities to the bass, you can free up your fingers from having to constantly hammer the lower strings on your six-string and instead focus on crafting more interesting riffs between the fifth and second strings.*

That realization opened up a new world for me as a couch-based guitarist venturing into home recording. It might sound basic to some — but I still remember how eye-opening that moment was, and I'd love to pass that feeling on.

As for how to choose a bass guitar or match it to your needs — that's a big topic. Out of respect for bassists and the depth of their craft, I'll leave that one to them. But to wrap up my own approach to instrument choice, I'll share this:

At some point I realized that a bad bass tone can wreck a mix beyond repair. It's just how that frequency range works. So, as a guitarist, I went with the safest bet — I listened to the pros. Most seasoned session bassists agree: the most versatile, no-nonsense bass is a Precision. That's it. It cuts through a mix, the frequency range sits in the sweet spot, it pairs effortlessly with a kick drum, has solid dynamics, and responds beautifully to compression. What more do you need?

And just like with guitars, the choice of bass is still about personal taste and enjoyment. The bass is a beautiful instrument with a deep world around it — one that's maybe underrated, but absolutely rich. You can dive into woods, neck types, pickup configurations, and more. There's plenty of great info out there if you're curious.

But if you go my route, stick with a Precision. Mine, as I mentioned, is from a brand owned by one of Europe's biggest music retailers. Technically, it's a PJ—meaning a five-string Precision with an added neck pickup. But I never use that pickup anymore after a disappointing experience.

I always use the neck pickup. I swapped it out for a pro-level one modeled after the American classic. And to be honest? The difference wasn't significant enough to justify the time, money, or effort. But it is what it is — and I've now got my bass tone sorted.

I've tried other basses before — even with active pickups. They seemed ideal on paper. But not for me. The Precision showed up and settled right in — and now it's my go-to for everything, no matter the style.

And finally, let's talk strings.

This is a whole world in itself — brands, gauges, materials, coatings, you name it. I've been through that jungle too. But I don't want to dwell on it.

I tried a bunch of brands — mostly influenced by marketing campaigns or artists who endorsed them. I hunted for the best tone, the longest life. And I came to this conclusion: for me — and probably for most of you — it's just not worth it. It doesn't have enough impact on how the guitar actually sounds in a recording. In my experience, even the fingerboard wood makes a bigger difference than the brand of strings. And just to be clear — I'm talking about established, reputable brands here.

There's only one factor I think really *does* matter when it comes to recording: string gauge. That affects playability first — and by extension, tone. I experimented for a while, but eventually figured out what worked for me, and I'll share it with you.

Three out of my four guitars are tuned a half step down from standard — so the 6th string is D#, which will make sense to many of you. For those, I use the classic 10–46 gauge. The only variation: I use slightly heavier strings on guitars with a shorter scale (like my Flying V and Les Paul), and lighter ones on the long-scale Stratocaster. One of my guitars is still in standard tuning, and on that one I go with 8–42s.

Since I want to close out the topic of strings in this book, I'll also explain how I prep my strings for recording — so I don't have to revisit it in the chapter on tracking.

I don't like recording with brand new strings. On an acoustic? Sure. But on electric? Nope. Especially not on bass. I'm not saying you should wait until your strings are totally dead and lifeless — but I always change mine once I've got at least three songs ready to go. Then I make sure to play them regularly for at least a week before recording. On bass — even longer. Fresh strings just ring too brightly.

Professionals will tell you to record with fresh strings — and they're probably right. That's when you get all the overtones, the shimmer around the fundamental note. And a good engineer knows how to tame them — or even highlight them. But in a home studio mix, those bright overtones often turn into artifacts you'll just end up hiding. The guitar might sound amazing on its own, but in the mix? It might ruin everything.

And with that, I'll wrap up this chapter on choosing instruments for your recordings.

The simplest and most important advice I can give: when recording, use the guitar that feels most comfortable in your hands. Prioritize ease of playing the part you want to lay down. It'll save you from unnecessary work later.

Don’t chase brand names. I’ve deliberately mentioned several guitars in my collection that were made in China. Right now, in the middle of global trade and manufacturing chaos, the relationship between instrument quality and price has lost all connection to the logic we were taught for decades.

I can tell you with full confidence: despite having high-end American guitars within reach, some of my songs were recorded entirely with Chinese ones — because that’s what the music called for. And trust me, you wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between them and the pro-level American guitars I used to consider the gold standard.

For those who do own premium instruments — don’t let them sit idle. Play them. Use them. That’s what they’re for.

And when choosing tonewoods, fingerboards, pickups, hardware, or electronics — you’re welcome to use my setup as a reference. It works.

But above all, always remember what I said at the very start of this chapter: the music itself matters more than the sound it’s played with.

## Chapter 5. Hardware and Software

This is probably going to be the short chapter — even though the insights I'll share here took me quite a while to gather.

Ever since we got music magazines, music books, the internet, and then YouTube — ever since information became instantly accessible — our world has seen a dramatic surge in technological advancement. And it's not just music. It's every aspect of human life.

Not so long ago, if you wanted to make real progress in any field, you had to first get a formal education in that specific area. Then you'd spend years building hands-on experience. The only sources of knowledge were printed literature or, maybe, the occasional conferences.

I'm bringing up the example of science on purpose — it best illustrates my point. Yes, great breakthroughs happened. Huge ones. I have the utmost respect for the people who changed human life for the better. The ones who gave us medicine for once-incurable diseases. The ones who opened the door to space. True giants, whose discoveries often came from their own empirical research — because even access to printed research from other countries was limited back then.

Honestly, it blows my mind what these people accomplished in those days, driven not by profit, but by purpose. Okay, I've digressed a little — but not really. My point is: nowadays, with the information we have at our fingertips, you can dive headfirst into any world you're curious about.

On the one hand, this is great news for us couch guitarists. Need an answer? You can find it instantly. Want a full course on scales? Done. Want a breakdown of your favorite solo? It's there. Want a shootout between obscure guitars? Easy. It's all there — any time, anywhere.

But on the other hand, that same ease of access can cheapen the personal value of this once-precious information. Whatever you learn today, a million others can learn, too. So, is this flood of knowledge a blessing or a curse? I'll leave that to the philosophers.

As for me, I took a particular path. Back when I was just playing other people's riffs, I thought that the closer I sounded to my guitar heroes, the better I was. That's also where my collecting obsession began. With the help of early videos — and later, YouTube — I figured out how to play all my favorite riffs. And I played them all. I remember when my friends and I used to jam six songs in a row from a single album by our favorite band. Then we'd tack on three more from another record.

Eventually, I got bored out of my mind. There was nothing left I wanted to learn from those songs. And when I tried to go deeper — analyzing how those guitarists achieved their tones — it was even worse. I lost all interest.

That's when I realized: I needed to break out of this rut. And so, how my first original riffs were born — in my adult years. But it was still a long road to actual recording. My first attempts didn't go well. Ironically, it was the overload of available information that tripped me up. I got lost in it.

You see, computers have always been a part of my life. Not because I work in IT, but because I've always needed them for data analysis and decision-making. So the machines I used were always close to top-tier in terms of specs. And yet, despite that, my first attempt at recording music was mostly a frustrating experience.

After skimming through random forums and videos, I tried to set up my first mini-studio. But since I was doing it more for fun than anything serious, I went with a very budget-friendly audio interface. And despite my computer being a beast in terms of performance, the latency was absolutely insane. Anyone remember what it's like to hit a string and then wait half a second for the sound to reach your DAW? Now imagine trying to double-track on both channels like that. And back then, there was no such thing as quantizing —lining things up to the tempo wasn't even an option. Fun times.

In the end, I did manage to record something. Rough as it was, I even managed to mix it by ear. It was just enough to entertain my friends and feel like I'd learned something new. But let's be honest — there was nothing remotely professional about it. And it was still years before streaming services would become a thing.

So, after struggling with my first home recording experience, I gave it up for quite a while.

Later on, I tried recording some of my music at a friend's studio. And looking at his setup, I became convinced that real recording could only be done in a proper studio environment. I don't even remember what my reasoning was — if I had any at all — but I was sure of one thing: without a full-size mixing board, a 16-channel audio interface, a high-end condenser mic, real drums, and acoustically treated rooms, you just couldn't make music.

And yet, my top-of-the-line laptop at the time cost more than all his studio gear combined — including his computer. Still, the idea of recording at home never even crossed my mind.

Now and then, I'd go to his studio and lay down a song or two. First, because hanging out in that creative atmosphere with friends was just awesome. Second, I was happy to support his business. And third, watching a pro sound engineer work his magic — taking a pile of raw takes and turning them into a finished track — was something I truly admired. I learned a lot just by observing him.

But things changed dramatically during the COVID pandemic. Suddenly, I had to spend most of my time at home. And since I couldn't enjoy most of my other hobbies, I naturally shifted more attention to music. Riffs and song ideas started flowing like crazy. But I couldn't finish anything because I lived far from my hometown — where my friend's studio was.

So I had no choice but to learn how to record at home again.

And once again, I have to thank that same friend for cutting my learning curve in half. He answered the right questions, gave me advice tailored to my style and needs, and saved me from wasting time and energy chasing technical solutions. Because, for me, this has always been just a hobby — and if it started feeling like a chore again, I probably would've shelved it until better times.

This book is meant to do exactly what he did for me — especially for beginners. I want to help you cut through the tech stuff quickly so you can focus on what really matters: your music.

Time to keep this chapter short. Let me tell you what my studio setup looks like. I've made it as minimalistic as possible—yet it delivers more than enough quality for fully professional-level sound and mixes.

**Audio Interface**

Let's start with the interface. Nothing complicated here. Depending on your needs and how many instruments you plan to record simultaneously, you can get one with just a single combo input — for both instrument and microphone.

In most cases, that's enough. You'll likely be recording tracks one by one, and drums will either be programmed or recorded by someone else and sent to you.

I personally use an interface with six inputs.

First, it means I never have to tweak the gain knobs. I just plug each instrument into its own input and leave the settings alone.

Second, I'm firmly convinced — maybe irrationally so — that manufacturers put better preamps in their higher-end models. At least they used to five or seven years ago, and I still believe it's true.

Third, the price difference between a one-input model and a four-input one is usually small — especially when you consider the added convenience and extra features.

Another key thing to watch for is the sample rate. My interface goes up to 192 kHz. I've never once needed that. I typically record at 48 kHz, although 44.1 is the broadcast standard, and totally sufficient for professional recordings. In fact, many top producers and engineers around the world stick with 44.1.


These days, USB-C is the standard for connecting an audio interface to your computer. So, if you're picking out a new one, try to go with a USB-C model. That way, at the very least,

you'll know it's a relatively modern unit. That said, this shouldn't be your top priority. If the interface meets all your other needs, don't sweat it if it still uses the older USB type. There are still plenty of great models out there that haven't been retired yet.

One small but very convenient feature to look for: a power switch. It's not essential, but it can make life easier. For example, when your computer goes to sleep, it often loses connection with the interface. Without a switch, you'll need to unplug and replug the USB cable every time just to get things talking again. The higher-end, multi-input interfaces usually have a switch and external power — no issues there. But that's not exactly our target group here.

Another thing that's really useful — almost essential, actually — is phantom power. Make sure your interface can provide it. For those unfamiliar with the term: phantom power allows you to record with a condenser mic without needing a separate preamp. And even though dynamic mics don't require phantom power by default, with a simple booster — like the one I use — you can give your dynamic mic that extra gain it might need.


So, here's my simple advice when choosing an audio interface: for home recording, just go with any modern interface you can afford, as long as it meets the criteria I laid out above. Realistically, the music you record at home probably won't be played back on massive stadium sound systems — but from small venues down to your phone's speaker, it can sound great regardless of your interface. No matter how many comparison reviews you read, even professionals would struggle to tell which audio interface was used just by listening. Don't forget: a USB interface isn't an analog device. It's a tool for converting sound into digital data — and it won't color your tone, for better or worse.

**Microphone.**

Let me take a quick detour to talk about microphones. Obviously, that's a whole world of its own, and I won't dive too deep. I'll just share what I use and why.

In plain terms: condenser microphones are a fantastic studio choice. They capture sound with impressive detail — clean, uncolored, and natural. And that makes them easier to sculpt and polish during mixing than dynamic mics. But you should only use one in a treated room,

because they pick up everything, including reflections from walls and objects. In an untreated space, that leads to a messy, echoey recording. Plus, condensers are fragile and usually need a shock mount. All of that makes them tricky to use at home — but not impossible. If you've got a preference and the setup to match, go for it.

Dynamic mics, on the other hand, are much more forgiving. I often record vocals just holding mine in my hand — no stand, no fuss. It's a directional mic, meaning it mainly picks up what's right in front of it. Sure, it'll still catch some room reverb, but way less than a condenser would. And if your room is treated even just a little, that's usually more than enough for a quality home vocal recording.

My choice? The legendary SM-58 from the original manufacturer. There might be a mic out there that captures more nuance in my voice, sure — but this one does exactly what I need. And with the help of a little in-line preamp and phantom power, I can drive a solid, clean signal out of it. That preamp, by the way, is just a small cylinder that plugs between the mic and the cable. That's it.


Of course, both types of microphones can be used to record instruments or amp cabinets, but I don't work that way, so I won't cover that here.

**MIDI keyboard.**

I use synthesizers in some of my songs — mainly a classic vintage-style harpsichord sound that I run through a bit of distortion to give it that signature edge. Occasionally, I'll use a piano sound. Even more rarely, I'll layer in some light percussion parts.

For all of that, I use a MIDI keyboard. You could just use the virtual keyboard that comes with any DAW and input notes manually. But honestly, that's a thankless task. Especially when MIDI keyboards are so inexpensive now that it doesn't even feel like a real expense.

I have two MIDI keyboards. One has full-sized, weighted keys that mimic the feel of a real piano. The other is a compact model with 32 mini keys. Since I'm not a pianist and only ever add simple chord progressions or light melodic touches to my tracks, I haven't touched the full-sized keyboard in over three years. For what I do, the small one is more than enough.


If you plan to use keyboard instruments or other VST instruments that benefit from a keyboard, definitely get one. And if you're going to be programming drum patterns manually, then there's no question — you'll need one. Thankfully, there are now tons of keyboard options that combine traditional keys with drum pads.

Don’t chase price tags. Any MIDI keyboard will work for recording, but if you want more comfort, you’ll need to pay for it.

That pretty much wraps up the gear necessary for recording. I didn’t mention cables, but my rule of thumb is simple: the thicker the cable, the better it will probably perform.

Now let’s move on to what you’ll need for monitoring — that is, how to listen to what you’ve recorded and how you’ll be mixing it.

**Studio Monitors.**

At a glance, studio monitors don’t look much different from gaming or multimedia speakers. But their purpose is completely different. Consumer speakers are designed to make sound more pleasant. They use both physical and digital filters to smooth out inconsistencies and “beautify” the audio so it sounds more appealing to the listener.

Studio monitors, on the other hand, are designed to reproduce sound in its rawest form. They let you hear everything exactly as it is — no enhancements, no flattery. I won’t bore you with the technical details of their frequency response, which is a whole science in itself. The point is that monitors help you hear each frequency band more clearly, which allows you to better separate instruments within a mix.

There are tons of monitors to choose from now, and their prices vary based on size and brand. But back to our home studio: I recommend choosing based on volume. If you don’t mind bothering the neighbors, go bigger. If you want to keep things quiet, go smaller. They won’t be your main reference anyway — at least not without acoustic treatment.

Personally, I use a pair of compact 3.5-inch monitors, just for tracking and rough mixing. I only use monitors until I move on to serious mixing.

**Headphones.**

I should also mention that I spend about 75% of my mixing and mastering time in headphones. I haven’t tried many studio headphones, but early on, a wise friend recommended the DT 770s from the original German manufacturer. They’re not the absolute best in the world, but they’re a legend — much like the SM58 microphone. Maybe they miss some frequencies, but I know them inside and out, and they’ve never let me down.


Sure, there are probably more balanced and refined models out there. But if you don't want to waste time choosing studio headphones and still want guaranteed quality, take my advice: go for this model (the DT 770), but choose the version with medium impedance. That way, they'll sound perfectly neutral on your audio interface.

But those aren't the only monitors you should use to check your mixes. You know full well that, in most cases, your music will be played through headphones, computer speakers, laptop speakers, car stereos — or, in more extreme cases, Bluetooth speakers or even phone speakers. So, you should absolutely check your mix on all of those devices. While it's nearly impossible to make it sound perfect on all of them, you should aim for a balanced compromise.

That wraps up my advice on peripheral gear for high-quality home recording. Now let's talk about the central piece of hardware in your home studio — the computer.

At first, I planned to write about how computer technology evolved in parallel with my musical journey. It could've been an interesting story, especially since I've always had access to top-tier or near-top computers for their time. And yet, every DAW I've worked with has managed to stress the system, sometimes significantly. There was never much latency, but the system load was real.

However, in the past few years, processors have advanced so rapidly that computer power is no longer the key limiting factor for a home studio. These days, even a modest laptop meant for basic note-taking can handle a sizable DAW project. So here's my take: any modern computer will be up to the task of running a rock-oriented home studio — especially if you close out all other programs and dedicate its resources fully to your DAW.

There's just one thing I can't speak to in depth: operating system choice. For many years, I've used a platform that lets me stay fully synced across all my devices — laptop, smartphone, tablets, TV, and so on. It runs an exclusive OS built specifically for that ecosystem, all made by the same manufacturer. At some point, they claimed their system was optimized for multimedia tasks. I believed them — and stuck with it. Naturally, I recommend it. But I can't dismiss its main competitor, simply because I've never had the opportunity to compare them directly.

In the end, all major music software developers make nearly identical products for both of the world's most popular operating systems.

I use two laptops. One is more like a typewriter — I haven't updated it in five years. The second is a professional-grade machine with a large screen that I use for work and tasks that benefit from a big display. That's also the one I use for recording. Its specs far exceed the demands of running a DAW with all the necessary plugins.

Still, I can confidently say that my older laptop can easily handle a 20-track project loaded with plugins, including a heavy-duty mastering suite.

So, if you already own a reasonably modern computer, you're ready to start recording. And if not, I suggest looking into the entry-level models from the manufacturer I use—they'll handle all your needs just fine.

As for computers running the competing OS, I don't have much to say. There are a lot of manufacturers out there, with a wide range of specs. So, I recommend going for a machine with above-average processing power.

Alright, that should wrap up the hardware talk.

Now let's dive into the software side. This is another vast topic — enough to fill an entire book (or several). But I'll try to skim just the surface.

The core program used for recording is the DAW: Digital Audio Workstation. It's the software that lets you capture both audio and MIDI tracks, then process and arrange them individually or together. Basically, it's like an 8- or 16-track tape machine — but far more powerful and intuitive. Though maybe I shouldn't use outdated references like tape decks… I'm afraid newcomers might not even know what those are.

Like all software (and gear, for that matter), DAWs have gone through years of evolution. Today, we can use 10th or even 14th versions from the world's most popular developers. I personally use my favorite DAW in version 5.


By now, all modern versions of DAWs are designed to make an audio engineer's life as comfortable as possible — and even then, about 80% of their capabilities will go unused simply because they're not needed. It's an excellent multi-tool that can handle nearly every task involved in music production. In fact, in my current DAW, there are enough built-in plugins to record, mix, and even master a song without needing any third-party tools.

Honestly, if I were starting from scratch today, I could probably release a full production using just one or two external plugins — at most.

I'm not going to hint at which DAW I use. Frankly, it doesn't matter. Any of the five or six main DAWs that have stood the test of time will do just fine. Your decision should be based on interface aesthetics, pricing, the included plugin bundle, and overall user experience. From a technical standpoint, they're all the same. None of them alters the sound or adds any sort of artifact. They all output an identical digital signal — just ones and zeros. The creative part, where your sound actually takes shape, happens when you start using plugins — that's when you really become a producer.

As for plugins, like I said, the stock set included with your DAW is often enough. Still, many musicians stick to third-party plugins they've used for years and grown to trust. Maybe they even have lifetime licenses — so why switch?

Beyond the usual suite of mixing plugins, there are two plugin categories worth highlighting: guitar processors and virtual drum kits.

Guitar plugins are my most frequently used tools because I tailor the sound of each guitar track individually. I'll talk more about that in the chapter on mixing. For now, let's just say the market is flooded with options. Some are simple, offering only impulse responses (IRs)—essentially pre-recorded tones from real gear that replace the raw signal from your guitar. Others are full-blown digital studios in plugin form. They let you choose from a vast selection of amps, cabs, pedals (stompboxes that shape tone), microphones, and even rack units (like pedals, but studio-grade). Personally, I prefer the more complex plugins. I enjoy crafting the tone I want without ever leaving the plugin.

Of course, instead of a plugin, you could use an external hardware processor. There are plenty on the market today, and many are good enough for high-end professional studios, not just home setups. And prices keep going down. I've used processors myself. But I eventually moved away from them for two reasons:

First, the sound that gets recorded into your DAW is exactly what comes out of the processor — and you can't really change it later. Even with reamping features (which let you reshape a recorded track), the process is tedious enough that it's often faster to just re-record the part.

Second, you still end up applying modulation effects like delay and reverb in your DAW anyway.

With a plugin, I can dial in a killer tone from the start — and adjust it freely later. So, for me, the era of hardware processors is over.

As for virtual drums, the market is just as wide, and despite all the reviews and comparisons, most of them do their job equally well when it comes to home recording. If you don't own one yet, choose like you would with a DAW: go by looks, features, and price. You can even find free versions, though they often come with limited drum kits and grooves (pre-recorded MIDI drum patterns). But you can always tweak or replace those patterns — or build your own from scratch.

For years, I've used a drum plugin named after a legendary sound engineer. I originally grabbed it during a massive sale — got it for just 10% of the full price. Since then, I've received several free updates. I've tested other drum libraries out of curiosity, but I keep coming back to this one. I know it inside and out, and it still brings me joy.


So, that's pretty much everything you need to know about hardware and software before starting your recording journey.

As you've probably noticed once again, I deliberately avoid naming specific brands or products that may be protected by intellectual property rights. Still, I don't want you to feel lost. That's why I've included photos throughout the book — so you can easily figure out which manufacturers and programs I'm referring to.

# Chapter 6. Draft ready? Let's hit record.

Alright, everything's set for your idea to take shape. Well, at least a digital shape. But once you've followed the steps I lay out in this chapter, you'll already have something you can share with anyone.

In this chapter, I'll walk you through the exact process I use myself. Is it perfect? The most efficient? I have no idea. It's just the way that's taken shape for me over the years. Naturally, it's been influenced by information I picked up from outside sources: advice from professionals, video tutorials by audio engineering gurus, and every other resource I could find. But the key is that I adapted it all to fit me — and it works.

I live the life of your average couch guitarist. I'm in an apartment, with my loved ones and neighbors around me, so I have to respect the social contract. And while they may often be treated to my guitar riffs, I try not to push it.

Plus, I live a regular life. I work, I relax, I spend time with family, I ride my bike, I chase other hobbies, I travel. Music is a big part of my life, but not the only part. I pick up the guitar constantly — it's practically part of the furniture. They're in every room of my house and office. I honestly can't remember the last day I didn't at least strum a riff for a few seconds. But still — music doesn't run my life.

And the way I record reflects that.

For example, if I'm right at the finish line of a project, I might put everything else on hold and push through. But if I'm mid-session and the rain outside suddenly gives way to sunshine, I'll gladly drop what I'm doing, grab my bike, and head out for a few hours. And work or family? That always takes priority. That's just how normal people live.

Of course, I'll always finish what I start — and do it to the best of my ability. But if a project takes longer than expected, I don't sweat it too much.

That said, I still try to avoid dragging things out unnecessarily. That's why I've optimized my workflow: the faster I finish a song, the more time I have for other projects, or just for life.

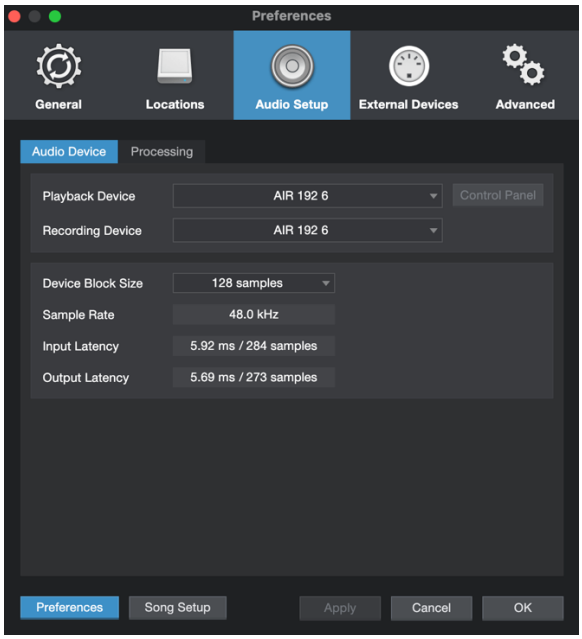
There's another reason to work efficiently: the more times you loop the same song during production, the more your ears start to gloss over the details — and worse, the more you start getting sick of the track. Yesterday you were convinced this riff would blow up the charts. Today you can't even stand to hear it again. Sound familiar? If not yet — just wait.

And here's the thing: spending more time doesn't always mean getting better results. I've lost count of how many times I ended up going back to a rough mix I'd finished hours earlier, after spending the whole day chasing something "better."

So I invite you to follow the path I've been walking for the past few years. To make this as clear and digestible as possible, I'll break my process into simple steps—and explain each one in its own section.

But first things first: before we get into recording, we need to set up the gear. Plug in your audio interface and launch your DAW.

All modern interfaces and DAWs are plug-and-play — meaning your system should automatically recognize the hardware and be ready to work with it. If not, just open your DAW's settings, find the "Audio" section, and select your interface.




And there's one more thing you'll usually need to set manually: the input channel on your interface that will feed the signal into the track you're about to record your instrument on.


These operations are very straightforward. They no longer require any special knowledge like they did a few DAW generations ago. So even if you have zero prior experience, you'll figure it out easily. And if you do run into trouble, you can always find tutorial videos tailored specifically to your DAW.

Here's the step-by-step process I follow:

1. Guitar and selecting the tempo
2. Bass and drums
3. Quantizing
4. Kick + bass pattern
5. Final song structure
6. Initial tone shaping with plugins
7. Adding primary instrumental embellishments and solos
8. Vocals
9. Secondary instrumental embellishments
10. Final tone shaping

If this looks complicated, don't worry. Once you've gone through it yourself for the first time, it'll feel like second nature. Let's begin.

### 1. Guitar and Selecting the Tempo

In the previous chapter, I shared my thoughts on choosing the right guitar for recording your main riffs. In rock songs, the guitars playing the main riffs form the backbone of your wall of sound. To a large extent, they define the song's character. Try playing any pop song using the same chords but crank the gain up on your guitars — and it instantly turns into heavy metal. You'll know exactly what I mean.

But hopefully by now, you've already got a rough idea of what your main guitar should sound like. So grab the one you need and let's plug in.

Before I hit the record button, I always adjust the input gain from my guitar to the interface. As I briefly mentioned in the last chapter, each input on your interface has a preamp. In short, this is a low-powered amplifier that boosts the signal from your guitar pickups so the interface can properly read it, convert it to digital, and send it into your DAW, which then saves a digital copy of your guitar's sound.

But you don't need to worry about the technical stuff. Just think of this adjustment like dialing in the gain on an amp or combo.

If the signal's peaking into the red zone, that's bad. If it's barely showing on the track meter, that means your instrument's not being heard. I like to set the gain so the signal peaks around -3 to -6 dB. To do that, I strum the loudest chord from the riff a few times and turn the gain knob until the green level meter starts flirting with the yellow zone.


Once the signal level is dialed in, we move on.

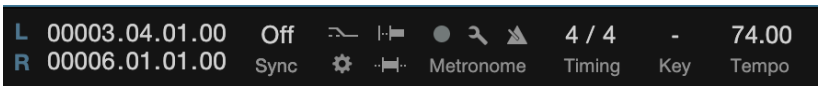
When I'm writing riffs to form the foundation of a song and I'm *not* using drum loops on a looper, my riffs sometimes don't perfectly align tempo-wise. Even though I write and record all my songs strictly in a 4/4 time signature, the tempos of individual riffs can still vary.

The reasons can be all over the place:
– some riffs are more complex to play
– the song's dramatic arc may call for a slower or faster section
– or maybe it's just how it came to me that day.

In those cases, I look for the best tempo that works across all the riffs in the song. Sometimes that means finding a compromise.

**How does this actually work in practice?**
I start by turning on the metronome in my DAW and playing through the riffs one after the other. I manually adjust the tempo as I go, listening for the point where everything just clicks. That's my preferred method — more hands-on, more intuitive.

But there's an easier, more modern option you can try:
Just record all your riffs back to back at a single tempo, and then tweak the overall project tempo afterwards. Modern DAWs will automatically time-stretch your recordings to match the new tempo — without changing the pitch. That way you can quickly test and lock in the tempo that feels right for the whole song.




I try to lock in the tempo right from the start so I won't have to come back to it later. I rarely change tempo mid-song — at least not in my rock tracks.

Now it’s time to start recording. But don’t get too excited — this isn’t the *final* take just yet. What I’m doing now is a **draft** — or as we often call it, a *scratch track*. It’s a rough version, a sketch. Like an artist laying down the first strokes of a painting.

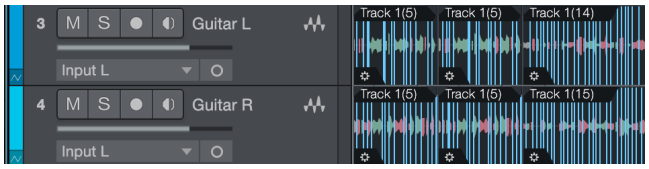
Before hitting record, make sure your guitar is in tune using a tuner. If you tune with the built-in tuner in your DAW, it’ll save you a ton of trouble later on. And don’t forget to check tuning regularly as you go.

As for whether I dial in tone right away or leave it raw — honestly, that depends. Sometimes I’ll set up a rough tone using a plugin right from the start, something close to what I imagine the final sound will be. But more often, I’ll record a clean DI signal or just add a basic distortion plugin that comes with the DAW — just enough warmth to stay inspired.

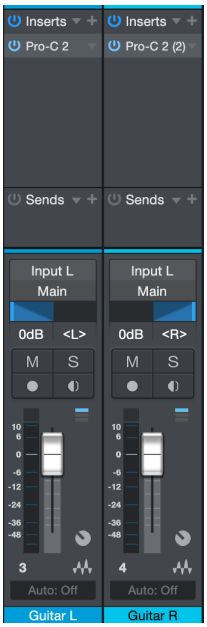
Since this is just a draft, I don’t worry about perfection. I focus on speed and getting the ideas down. I create an audio track, turn on the metronome, and record each riff several times in a row — usually 6 to 10 takes, depending on how warmed up I am.

Once all the riffs are down, I use the Blade tool (in some DAWs it’s called the Scissors tool) to split the takes and pick the best ones. Then I create a second track and drag over half of the best takes to that new track. After that, I start arranging the takes side by side to match the song’s intended structure (verse to verse, chorus to chorus).

Hope that explanation made sense.




Then I pan these tracks 100% left and right to create a stereo effect and clear space in the center for the next instruments.



**Note:** You should not copy and paste the same guitar take onto the opposite track — doing so will cancel the stereo effect.

## 2. Bass and Drums

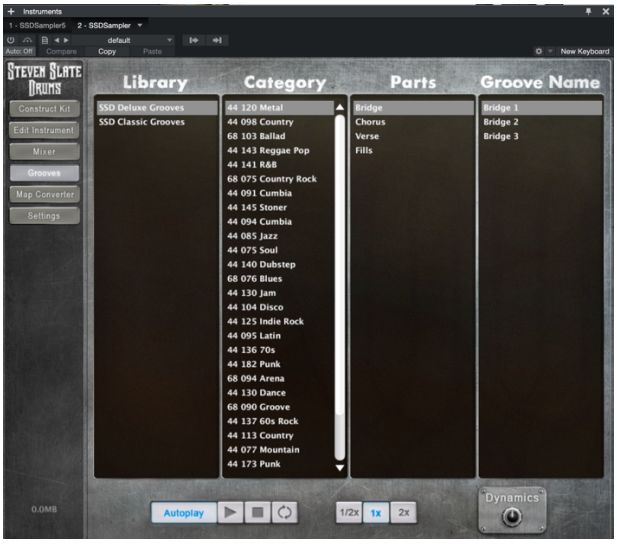
To be precise, this section should probably be called: *drums, bass, and drums again.* Because the first thing I bring into the mix after the guitar is actually the drums. They help lock me into the groove before I start shaping the bass part.

For this, I create a MIDI instrument track and load up my drum plugin. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I've been using the same plugin for years. In this plugin, I choose one of the preset drum kits, depending on my stylistic taste and the song's theme — vintage kits for funk or punchier kits for rock. The plugin allows you to preview the sound of each kit, so picking the right one is pretty straightforward.

Personally, I'm a big fan of a deep, heavy kick, so I typically go for a kit with a fat low end. These kinds of kicks are usually found in the "ROCK" presets.

The plugin also lets you choose a groove (a pre-recorded rhythm part, where real acoustic drum samples are mapped as MIDI files that you can further edit). These grooves are grouped by style and tempo. Don't worry if the groove's tempo doesn't match your project — once you drag it from the plugin into your project's track, it will automatically adjust to your song's tempo.

I usually select a groove that's at least somewhat close to the beat I'm aiming for. Since grooves are created in small blocks — 2, 4, or 8 bars — I copy it across the entire length of the song once it's in place.




Now I can hear the first draft of what my song will sound like. If you haven't yet reached this point in your own journey, you're in for a very pleasant surprise.

According to my workflow, it's now time for the bass. I'll point out again that this is *my* personal approach — some of my friends actually move on to the vocal part at this stage and only add the bass line later. But I prefer to start with the bass first.

The reason for this is simple: unfortunately, I wasn't blessed with a beautiful vocal timbre or a wide range. Sure, range can be expanded — I've taken vocal lessons and achieved some surprising results — but singing has never really become one of my hobbies. So I just work with what I've got.

That's why I try to make the bass line melodic — it helps bring out the melody in ways my limited vocals cannot. I give the bass line center stage in the mix before composing the vocal melody, essentially building the melody around the bass.

So, let's record the bass. Since the bass isn't the most noticeable instrument in a mix, I take a little shortcut and record it in sections — especially if I didn't prepare the bass line when composing the song.

I loop a region — typically four bars — and keep it playing on repeat. While it loops, I work out the bass line directly over the guitar riff. Then, within that loop, I hit record and keep playing the line until I get a good take. After that, I move to the next region. I do this until I've recorded a part for every riff. Of course, for repeated sections like verses and choruses, I just copy the parts I already recorded.

In the past, I used to try and make the parts more complex — like writing different bass lines for the first and second verses. But unless the song's dynamic or storytelling arc changes between verses, I don't bother anymore. That said, I *do* try to create a contrast between verse and chorus dynamics. If one part is filled with accents and syncopation (those unexpected rhythmic shifts), I'll keep the other part simpler, with longer sustained notes.

And naturally, accented bass notes — the so-called "strong" beats — should align exactly with the strong beats in the guitar riff. Why? Because it locks in the groove.

The bass part is now recorded. It matches the accents in the riff. This is the perfect moment to return to the drums and pay closer attention to the kick (the low, thumping drum) and snare (the bright, punchy drum). I begin tweaking their patterns to align more tightly with the rhythmic accents of the guitar riff and bass line. To do this, I open the MIDI editor for the drum track and manually move, remove, or add notes to highlight the shared accents. If you're a beginner and have never done this before, take the time to learn — it's a really fun process. And once you've done it, your rough track will already start to sound like a real foundation you can confidently build upon.

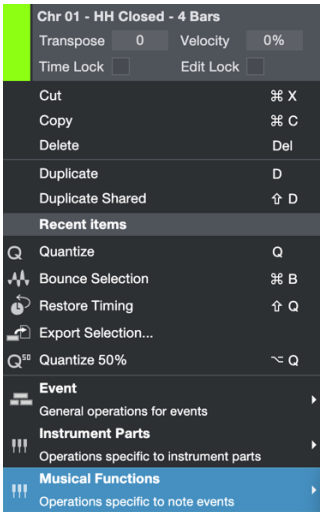
And now we'll tighten up that foundation even more.

### 3. Quantizing

For those unfamiliar with the term, quantizing is a feature in your DAW that automatically aligns notes to the closest beat or gridline. Professional musicians who've spent their lives mastering rhythm and playing to a metronome might not "get" why we need this. (I'm joking, of course.) Even top-tier pros can sometimes rush or drag notes relative to the beat.

It was eye-opening for me to learn that different people, even when playing the same rhythm with perfect internal timing, can tend to either rush ahead of the beat or lag slightly behind it. The spacing between the notes might be accurate, but their placement relative to the grid still varies. This is just human nature.

And that’s where quantizing comes to the rescue. I’m not sure how it works in other DAWs, but in mine, I just right-click on a track and select “Quantize” from the dropdown menu. My DAW offers options like 50% or 100% quantizing. After applying it, the notes automatically shift to the closest beat — even if they were slightly off — and you can see all the adjustments visually on the track.




I’ve experimented a lot with different approaches. In the end, I always follow the same routine. I quantize the track or take to 100% using default settings. But since automatic quantizing is far from perfect, I usually adjust some notes manually — and that’s totally fine.

Sometimes only one or two notes in a take are off-beat, and for that, most DAWs have a tool that lets you move individual notes without affecting the rest of the track.

Let me briefly return to the topic of drums — this is especially important for beginners. Drum parts in grooves you choose for your song may be played in a "shuffle" (laid-back) feel. In that case, the drum notes (yes, all drum sounds are also MIDI notes) may seem out of place, and on the piano roll, you’ll see that their starts don’t line up with the grid. If that happens, either pick another groove or manually shift the notes into place.

Once everything is tightened up and the accents are clearly in place, your track will already sound much more professional. For those making their first recording, this will feel like a revelation.

**4. Kick + Bass Groove**

Even though we’ve already touched on aligning the drums with the guitar parts, I want to quickly revisit the topic — especially after quantizing everything.

The interaction between the kick drum and bass guitar is foundational in rock. When the accented bass notes line up with the kick drum, they create the “pillar” on which the whole song stands — especially if the song’s tempo is on the slower side. Pay close attention to this. If you’ve ever listened to classic Western rock bands, you’ve probably noticed that the bass line often mirrors the kick pattern completely. And if the guitars, vocals, or other instruments are especially active, the bass part might just follow the kick pattern and hold long notes after the accents, leaving room for everything else.

That's why I often return to the drums after quantizing—to lock them in even tighter with the bass line.

**5. Final Song Structure**

At this point, I have a nearly complete picture of how the song will sound. Time to finalize the structure. I return to this step only now, after the foundation is strong enough to support the song's final shape.

Several factors can influence this:

- **Length**: The music industry has rough standards for rock tracks intended for radio or music videos. Generally, songs should fall between 3:00 and 3:30 minutes. The idea is that this is enough time to develop a complete musical idea. I don't aim for this specifically, but I try not to go over 5 minutes.
- **Riff appeal**: If one of your riffs stands out as particularly strong, you may want to extend it — add a few extra bars. And if a section drags, consider shortening it.
- **Narrative flow**: Each song has its own character — Its own *story arc*. Think of it like a novel: a soft intro as the beginning of the tale, a verse to develop the idea, and a chorus where the emotion peaks and you make your statement loud and clear. A proper ending — the song's "catharsis" — raps it all up. Of course, this is just one example. A song can tell any story it wants, with any pattern of tension and release. That's the beauty of it.

Based on this, you can adjust your structure: add another verse if there's more to say, or repeat the chorus to drive home your message. The possibilities are endless.

Technically, this stage *should* come after writing the lyrics and recording vocals, since the meaning of the song may reshape the structure. But in my case, the structure is set here — because I'm a musician first, and a lyricist second. I rarely change the structure afterward, but even if I do, it's not a big deal.

**6. Initial Sound Shaping with Plugins**

Once the structure is in place — intro, verse, chorus, etc.—it's time to give the track its first sonic identity.

Of course, the sound will evolve many times during mixing. But it's essential to start defining it now.

At this point, the instrumental backbone is in place: two rhythm guitars panned hard left and right, bass centered, and a drum kit with spatial stereo spread. We'll fine-tune all this later, but for now, it's enough.

I begin with the guitars. Even if I applied some effects during the initial takes, I usually start fresh here.

As I've mentioned before, I prefer working with plugins inside my DAW rather than using outboard gear. Someone might argue that nothing beats the tone of a real tube amp — but

we’re recording in a digital environment anyway. And the convenience of in-the-box processing puts plugins firmly in the lead.

To be thorough, I’ll add that before loading my main guitar amp plugin, I insert an EQ and compressor.

- On the **EQ**, I cut the low frequencies below 500 Hz. I won’t need them on guitars.
- Then I apply a few dB of the **compression** threshold, and bring the gain back up in the compressor to compensate.

That’s enough for the initial pass.


The next step is placing a guitar plugin on the track. For both guitars and bass, when shaping the tone, I stick to a classic, time-tested method. First, I choose an amp.

Honestly, it’s not that hard — mainly because I’ve already made a personal decision: in my recordings, I use only the most iconic amps from the past. These are legendary units that need no introduction. Among the amp models included in my plugin, I simply pick one of the classics.

Of course, you should experiment and find your own preferences — not just for amps, but for the other elements too, like cabinets or pedals. But for me, the choice is straightforward. These amps are already pretty much aligned with what I expect. Once I’ve selected an amp, I then pair it with a cabinet — if one hasn’t been loaded automatically.

In most cases, the plugin I use assigns a default cabinet to each amp — usually the one that’s historically and sonically the most appropriate. And in the vast majority of cases, I just leave it as is.

This plugin also lets you change the mic position relative to the speaker inside the cabinet. But I almost never touch this setting either.

Once the amp and cabinet are set and the guitar sounds the way I imagine it should for the song, I add a distortion pedal to the chain. I place it directly before the amp.

To be fair, I usually keep the gain level on the distortion pedal fairly low. Sometimes I even set it to zero and just use the pedal’s output level to push the amp.

You can pick whatever pedal works for you. I also switch between different models depending on the track, but I usually leave the amp and its gain settings pretty consistent from song to song.

Sometimes — when the tone calls for it — I'll use a compressor pedal inside the plugin as well. In that case, I place it before the distortion pedal. My plugin offers several compressor pedal options, and I choose whichever fits the tone I'm after.

I wouldn't call myself an expert in physical pedals, so when it comes to choosing plugin versions for recording, I just go with what sounds good to me at the moment. I experiment until I find something that clicks.

Once I'm happy with the guitars and their tone, I move on. It's not the final version just yet—we'll come back to it later during the mixdown stage.


Next up is the bass. Before working on the bass track, I — just like with guitars — apply EQ and compression plugins. But in this case, I do the opposite with the EQ: I roll off the high frequencies, usually up to around 400–500 Hz. And I apply about twice as much compression as I do to the guitars. From there, the bass goes through the same process as the guitars — I run it through an amp and cabinet, choosing from models within the plugin that are designed specifically for bass.

Here's a tip: even if your song has a soft and mellow vibe, I recommend adding a touch of distortion to the bass. It helps the low end cut through the mix just a bit more. Even if the bass sounds too gritty on its own, once it sits inside the mix, it'll come across smoother — and still stand out clearly against the other instruments.

As for the drums, at this stage I typically leave them as they are, using the default plugin settings. The only adjustment I make is balancing their volume against the guitars and bass. Once all the instruments are at a level where each can be heard clearly without struggling, I consider that a solid rough mix.

At this point, we're getting even closer to how the finished track will sound.

## 7. Adding Primary Instrumental Layers and Solos

Now that the structure is falling into place and the foundational tracks are sounding pretty close to the final result, I start adding melodic embellishments — little touches that give the track flavor. This usually means layering in additional guitar parts, and sometimes some subtle keyboard lines.

For each song, I try to come up with a lead melodic phrase — something that functions similarly to a vocal melody in terms of emotional impact, but still distinct from the vocal line itself. Ideally, it should be memorable. Sometimes it's a four-bar guitar lick, other times it's a super short melodic motif built from just a few notes.

I might have come up with this melody earlier, while writing riffs, or it might take shape right here and now — during this layering stage.

For example:
***Mickhey – "End of the Night"***

The next step is laying down the lead guitar solo. As I've mentioned before, I'm not a professional lead guitarist. Even though my playing skills are well above average, I still can't pull off a polished solo on the spot without at least five to seven days of practice. And I imagine many of you are in the same boat — let's be honest with ourselves.

Most of the time, I write solos during this stage. It's rare that I've worked them out in advance, long before getting to the recording phase. In fact, I'll admit — the vast majority of my solos are improvised.

Like with the bass, I'll loop the section of the song I want to solo over and just jam. I play over the progression until I land on a part that sticks — placing accents, following the dynamics, making sure the solo fits melodically, harmonically, and emotionally.

There was a time when I believed every solo needed to be recorded in one perfect take from start to finish. I used to spend hours on a single lead track. Those days are gone. Now, I record solos in sections. Whether you do it that way or not is completely up to you.

One thing I'll point out: I record both the lead melody and the solo at this stage in their final form — meaning they're intended to stay as-is in the finished mix. Unlike rhythm guitars or supporting parts, which I might re-track later, these parts are "locked in." Don't forget to quantize the takes (if you think they need it) — especially if you're building them in pieces.

## 8. Vocals

Now it's time for vocals. Once the full instrumental foundation of the song is in place, the only thing left is to "slip in" the vocal line between the other elements.

As I've already mentioned, my vocal range leaves much to be desired. So, even if my vocal lines don't sound entirely sparse, they still come in more as an afterthought. Again — that's just my personal reality. You may, of course, assign musical importance to vocals, guitars, or any other instruments as you see fit.

My process of finding and composing the vocal melody is very similar to how I work with guitars — something I've already talked about multiple times. I take a selected fragment of the song, loop the riff that defines the harmony (and the main melodic theme, if there is one), put on my headphones, and just hum until I land on something that fits. Sometimes the Muse helps.

To make it easier for myself, I create a vocal track, put on my headphones, pick up the mic, and let my melodic thoughts take flight. When I feel like I'm close to something good, I hit record and lay it down. If it doesn't work the first time, I try again, adding new notes, changing the rhythm, or tweaking whatever feels off.

Once the vocal melody is recorded for the entire song, I put the project aside for a few days. I export this version — where the instruments are already mixed and the vocals are simply hummed without lyrics — as an MP3 and send it to my phone. Then I listen to it over and over again while doing other things.

These few days give me a chance to hear the song with fresh ears — not as the creator, but as a casual listener. In half the cases, I realize the melody needs changing. It also helps me hear spots where I could add a second or even a third vocal layer.

Once I'm fully used to the melody, I sit down to write lyrics. The main technical consideration in lyric writing for me is rhythm. I firmly believe that all songs — like poems — must rhyme.

Modern pop music doesn't always follow that rule, but for me, rhyme is essential. And I mean more than just matching line endings — I expect rhythmic symmetry within each verse block at the very least. Choruses, I allow a little more freedom, but even there I keep it restrained.

As for lyrical themes — I don't want to dive too deep into that in this book. Everyone sees the world through their own lens. We all have things that trouble us now, and things we may care about later. You get to choose your own themes and shape your songs accordingly.

The main themes that show up in art, including music, are pretty universal: love, joy, sorrow and loss, social issues, the struggle or simplicity of life, and the journey into one's inner world. Take your pick.

I could describe how I write lyrics, but unfortunately, I can't lay it out like a structured workflow — unlike how I handle instruments. Writing lyrics is a completely different beast. It happens in all sorts of ways.

Sometimes I'll sit with a notebook and try to squeeze words out of myself under a specific topic. Other times, I'll just lie down, close my eyes, and try to feel the entire lyric from start to finish. But one practical trick that really helps me is writing while walking.

Before I head out for a walk with lyric writing in mind, I create short audio files with the backing parts for the verse, chorus, and maybe middle-8. Then, while walking and listening, words come to me much more easily — especially out in nature, away from distractions. Try it — it may work for you too.

Once the lyrics are finished, it’s time to record them. But that usually comes after I've recorded the final instrument parts.

Sometimes those overlap, since lyric writing can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks — depending on how busy or inspired I am.

*When it’s time to record the instruments for real — the final takes — I prep carefully. These are the takes that will stay with the song forever. So I spend several days just focusing on playing guitar. I usually prepare several songs at once for final tracking. When your fingers are warmed up, it’s much easier to knock out multiple recordings in a row than it is to treat each one as a separate project.*

*There’s no need to describe the recording process again — it’s the same thing I explained earlier with the drafts. The only difference is the increased attention to performance quality.*

All the following steps — or what we musicians call "tracking" — won’t take up much space in my story. Despite their importance, the bulk of the groundwork has already been done.

Now let’s talk about how I record vocals at home. Fair warning — this might surprise some of you. But it works, and since it works, I have no reason to believe I’m doing anything wrong.

I’ve already mentioned I use the most iconic and legendary dynamic vocal microphone. I run it through a small inline preamp that boosts its signal up to something close to a condenser mic — without sacrificing its directional qualities.

I don’t have any special acoustic treatment in my room. To reduce echo and unwanted reflections, I use… my closet. And instead of acoustic foam, I rely on the clothes hanging inside it. I won’t show you how it looks — it’s too funny. But it works. And that’s all that matters.

Sure, it would be much more comfortable to record in a real studio. If you have that option — use it. If you’ve got friends or connections, or if you’re proud of your voice and want it to shine with all its nuance — I wholeheartedly recommend a studio. There you’ll find purpose-built rooms, condenser mics, and most importantly — a vibe that’s more relaxed than home recording. And the result will sound more open and polished.

But I’m not particularly proud of my vocal chops, so I try to "hide" my voice in the mix. And for that, a closet works just fine.

Unlike guitar recording, which you can monitor quietly through headphones, vocals are a more exposed process. If you’re not a performer or used to singing in front of people, be prepared to feel a little embarrassed recording vocals at home. I still get that feeling, but over the years, I’ve learned to deal with it.

You can probably imagine how odd it is to hear your naked voice with no accompaniment — because you’re only hearing the music in your headphones. It’s not a big deal though. And if you focus on the final result, you’ll find these little discomforts are easy to overcome.

When I record vocals, I treat the setup just like I would for guitar. I set the input gain so that it never peaks into the red, even during the loudest parts — but still reads clearly.

To visually check the loudness, I do a test take and look at the waveform — ideally, the amplitude should stay between 40% and 70% of full scale, depending on dynamics.

Naturally, vocals are recorded exclusively with headphones. You're listening to the music in your ears while singing. Let me note one subtle issue: my headphones are closed-back. That's great for mixing, but not always ideal for vocal tracking. If you want to hear both your natural voice and the monitored one, you might need to lift one earcup slightly. But that can let sound leak from the headphones into the mic.

To prevent that, I just turn the headphone volume down. I've tried panning the mix into the ear that stays on — but I don't like that. I'd rather lower the volume and get used to it. You need to learn how to hear both the track and your own voice simultaneously — that's one of the small inconveniences of home recording. But in my view, the benefits far outweigh them.

I don't think I have much else to say about vocal recording. I hope what I've shared here will be enough to help you.

**9. Adding Secondary Instrumental Embellishments**

Among my friends, we call this part the "treats." I've been using this term for so long, I honestly don't even remember what the proper musical term is supposed to be. What we mean by "treats" are little elements that get added to the instrumental part of a song — but that don't carry any major melodic weight.

Usually, these are short musical phrases that weave into the main melodic flow with the purpose of surrounding it, highlighting it, or adding subtle texture. Sometimes, they're used to prepare the listener for a coming shift in the emotional tone. Other times, they serve as a bridge that helps the melody transition from one section of the song to another — like from a verse to a chorus.

These "treats" are often made up of just a few notes — maybe a short melodic phrase or two-note, maybe three-note chords. They're typically played in a different register from the main riff — usually higher strings, somewhere around the middle of the neck.

You can hear lots of these kinds of examples in this track:
***Mickhey – Sunny Days***

And it doesn't have to be a guitar part. You can use keys under the same logic. Or percussion — as long as it stands out from the main rhythm section. You can even use vocal improvisations: wordless backing vocals or short vocal phrases that don't belong to the main lyrics (you can hear examples of this in the same song).

Honestly, you'll find examples of these little inserts in just about every modern track by any current artist. It's become a must-have. Any song that features these kinds of details tends to sound more professional, more vibrant, and more alive than one that doesn't.

I wish I could give you a concrete set of steps on how to do this — but the truth is, I think it's something that just comes with experience. Still, here's a general guideline that helps me: when listening to your track, picture it as a wall or a fence. Some parts of that wall might be taller, some might be shorter. But ideally, there shouldn't be any gaps.

So when I listen to a song I'm working on, I actively listen for those gaps. For example, there might be a lull between the end of a verse and the start of a chorus. If I feel like the energy drops off too much in that moment — I try to fill it with a short guitar phrase. It's not a strict rule, but it often works.

Honestly, I didn't expect it to be this hard to explain. There's really nothing complicated or mystical about it. But picking the right "treats" to fit a song — that's a skill that takes time to develop. I wouldn't say I've mastered it. To me, it's not just about filling empty space in a track mechanically. It's also about adding emotional color.

I really hope you get the idea I'm trying to convey here.

**10. Final Tone Shaping of Instruments**

So here we are — the final step in the tracking process. This is where I wrap up shaping the sound of all the instruments and vocals. At this point, I "decorate" each track with plugins, dialing in the sound that fits the specific song I'm working on.

Naturally, I always start with the guitars. And I shape the tone of each one individually. I solo each track, mute the rest, and use my guitar plugin to find the sound I like best. Because from this point on, that tone will stay with the song forever. It's essentially the same process I go through during the initial tone shaping — but this time I approach it even more carefully.

Here's one little detail I should mention: when shaping the tone of rhythm guitars (the ones playing the main riffs), I usually start with one guitar, then copy all the plugin settings over to the second rhythm guitar. That way, the guitars panned left and right sound nearly identical.

Some professionals advise against making rhythm guitars sound exactly the same, but after a lot of trials and errors, I've decided that having perfectly matched rhythm guitars, panned 100% left and right, actually helps with clarity and balance. No matter how tight your playing is, the two takes will still differ slightly — which already gives them a live, human feel. By keeping their tone identical, I avoid unnecessary complications during mixing when it comes to EQ and volume balance.

Here's another bit of advice: even if you feel your rhythm guitars should be super heavy, go easy on the distortion. Or better yet, set the distortion level where you *think* it should be — then dial it back by about a third. In practice, distortion always sounds more washed out in the mix than it does when listening to a guitar in solo.

As for the rest — compression, amp gain, EQ, presence — set those however you want your guitar to sound. But keep a cooler head when dealing with distortion and overdrive.

I often revisit guitar tone adjustments during the mixing process, so don't stress if something feels off here. You can always come back to it later.

The same approach applies to the lead guitar playing the main melody, and to the little “treats” I talked about earlier. One important note: any guitar that sits in the center of the stereo image should have a different tone from the rhythm guitars. The easiest way to do that — without changing your plugin settings — is to simply switch your pickup position. Rhythm parts are usually recorded with the bridge pickup, which works better alongside the bass. For central melodic lines, I prefer the neck pickup.

In terms of panning (the way I do it, and how I recommend you do it too): rhythm guitars go far left and far right. The melodic guitar sits dead center. That gives you a well-balanced stereo image, with everything fully audible — including the bass.

Of course, this isn’t a rule. Feel free to experiment. Some producers prefer to keep the main riff dead center and add width with stereo delay or reverb. I’m personally not a fan of this approach. First, I find it tricky to mix reverb on individual instruments (we’ll talk more about that in the mixing chapter). Second, I believe that two takes of the same riff panned wide provide a more natural "live" feeling than any reverb plugin ever could. But that’s just my personal taste.

Now, bass guitar — this part is fairly straightforward. When I’m shaping the bass tone, I always listen to it together with the drums. I’ve already talked about the relationship between kick and bass guitar earlier — feel free to revisit that section if needed. One thing to highlight here: bass usually needs significantly more compression than guitar. We’ll cover that in more depth in the next chapter.

As for keys: any DAW will offer you a huge library of virtual instruments if you want to add some rock-style pads or sprinkle in a bit of piano. Unfortunately, I can’t offer much advice here, since this isn’t my specialty. In my songs, I stick to just two options: either classic piano, or a vintage Hammond-style organ — usually with a touch of distortion added. That distortion can come from within the plugin or from a separate plugin on the track.

Drums are another crucial element when it comes to tone shaping. And here my opinion is… mixed. I’ve tried a few different approaches.

The most complex method is to break out each drum into a separate track. Most drum plugins allow this. Then I’d bounce each of those tracks to audio and process them individually. That gave me full control but required a lot of work.

The second method is simpler: apply plugins to each drum within the plugin itself, without bouncing anything to audio. This lets you tweak things freely without locking anything in. For several years, I worked this way. It took more time, but I felt like the results were better.

Then — surprise — I came across an old mix of mine where I hadn’t separated the drums at all. I had done all the shaping inside the plugin itself. And guess what? It sounded just fine. In fact, I didn’t even need to mess with the Overhead or Room tracks. And if you’ve ever tried managing room reverb while mixing a full track — you’ll know what a headache that can be. How do you blend the drums’ natural room sound with your overall reverb bus.

The last two songs on my most recent album were mixed this way — all drum shaping done within the plugin. And the results honestly surprised me in a good way. So if this is your first time working with virtual drums, I recommend doing all your drum tone shaping right inside

the drum plugin. If you pick a good kit to begin with, you might not need to tweak anything at all. Most of these kits are recorded by top professionals, and the default sounds are solid enough to hold up in a full mix.

That said, in my experience, the kick drum (together with the bass guitar) should provide a solid, powerful foundation — while the snare should cut through the mix without overpowering it.

And that brings us to the next chapter: **mixing and mastering**, where we'll explore how to bring all these instruments together into a cohesive final sound.

## Chapter 7. Mixing and Mastering

When I first set out to write this book, I wanted it to be simple and easy to read. I aimed to keep each chapter under 2,500 words, with a minimum of fluff and a maximum of clear, structured, digestible information. But as it turns out, that's not so easy. Over the years I've spent working with music production on my own, I've accumulated so much experience that once I start sharing it, it feels like there's just too much. Honestly, I didn't expect it myself.

For someone like me — someone who works hands-on — many of the things I mention have become second nature. I don't even think about them. But I'm sure that's true for anyone who's spent a long time doing something: a lot of the knowledge just becomes background noise, operating automatically in the back of your mind.

Still, I kept writing — and couldn't stop. By the time I got to this chapter, all about mixing and mastering, I had already mapped out a plan. And that's when it hit me: all the steps I'd gone through in earlier chapters had made the mixing process so clear and straightforward, it now takes far less time than I thought it would. Time I can now spend on a new song instead.

So, if you've followed the process up to this point, all the prep work for your mix should be done. Most likely, while you were working on your instruments' tone, you were also adjusting their levels so that the song sounded listenable overall. That's natural, which is why I didn't call it out specifically. But now it's time to save your project and test how it sounds on different devices. And there's a 90% chance it won't sound that great just yet. The mix is still raw. To make your music sound solid across different playback systems, you'll need to run it through the process of mixing — and then mastering.

Mixing, simply put, is about balancing all the elements of your song: placing them across the stereo field and the frequency spectrum. You've already learned about panning in earlier chapters — how we position sounds across left and right space. For example: guitars go hard left and right, bass sits in the center, kick drum in the center, snare in the center, cymbals spread left and right. That's how we create a sense of space and presence.

But mixing isn't just about stereo placement. It's also about separating instruments across their natural frequency ranges.

Back when I was just a listener of rock music, I wondered why almost all rock bands used the same standard setup: drums, bass, one or two electric guitars, and vocals. The answer turned out to be simple: those instruments naturally occupy different parts of the frequency spectrum. Even without any processing, you can hear each one clearly.

So then, why mix at all? If each instrument already lives in its own frequency space, why not just leave it alone? The thing is, as musical instruments and audio technology have evolved, they've also started to occupy more and more of the sonic space. It's like plants growing toward the light — eventually they start shading each other out. In today's production world, instruments often overlap each other, and we have to untangle them manually.

Maybe in the future, mixing will be fully automated. But for now, we've still got the reins — so let's use them.

At this point, your bass, drums, guitars, and vocals are all laid down. But right now, they probably sound like one big sonic soup. Our goal is to separate those ingredients so the listener can taste each one. The simplest way to do that is to divide them by frequency, like this:

- Bass guitar: lowest range
- Kick drum: slightly above
- Rhythm guitars: midrange
- Vocals: slightly higher
- Lead guitar: above the vocals
- Cymbals and percussion: highest range

Even just high-passing and low-passing every instrument to stay within its zone will already clean things up dramatically. But it's even better if these frequency bands taper into one another—complementing instead of clashing.


Above, in the image, I showed you some EQ options I usually apply in a typical situation (kick, bass, guitar, vocal). Of course, you can see that these curves aren't identical or uniform. Every instrument has its own character, and a more detailed EQ approach often requires more nuance — cutting some frequencies here, boosting others there.

At the same time, there's always the challenge of preserving the guitar tone you intended, while also making sure the vocals are clear. And in the places where two instruments overlap in frequency, you need to resolve that conflict by deciding which one should dominate. Because if two instruments fight for space in the same frequency range, the result can be muddy and affect the overall mix quality. So, "placing" instruments into the mix requires care and precision.

I'll share a method that has helped me streamline my mixing process and save time in the long run — although it does require a bit of effort upfront.

At one point, I created a template where I saved what I considered the best EQ and tone settings for guitars, vocals, and other instruments I used in a particular song. That was quite a while ago, but to this day, I still feel that song sounds the best of all my work.

To save time on rough EQing and even tone shaping, I now use that template as a base when starting new projects. Later on, realizing how effective this was, I created several more templates with different instrument setups.

Now, when I start working on a new song, even during the early recording stage, I load up the template that I feel best suits the direction of the song — especially if I know I'll be using similar instruments. But to prepare templates like these, you need to first walk this path yourself to understand how frequency interaction works.

I'll start my EQ advice from the bottom up. Low frequencies are usually dominated by just two instruments—kick drum and bass guitar. These two almost always clash. So, to avoid serious conflicts, I try to separate them just a little. Let me show you how I typically do this using the bass guitar and kick drum combo I use in most of my songs.


If you're not familiar with the term *sidechain*, let me explain. It refers to a technique where, when two notes from different instruments overlap at the same frequency, one of them is automatically lowered in volume. For example, if a kick drum and a bass guitar both hit at the same time, sidechain compression can be set to either duck the kick or the bass — depending on your settings and preferences.

When it comes to the relationship between the bass guitar and the kick, I still believe that these instruments should sound together. So I approach it like this: I carve out a small pocket

in the low frequencies of the kick to make more room for the bass guitar. However, I let them overlap around the peak impact zone—roughly 50–70 Hz—so they can punch together. That gives the mix more weight and drive.

If you'd like to hear how this works in practice, I suggest listening to this song:
**Mickhey – Suh Has Sent a Light Ray (1:54)**

In that moment, the kick and bass guitar perfectly demonstrate the effect I'm describing.

I treat the bass guitar more delicately. As I've mentioned earlier in this book, I've started giving it more attention in recent years — giving it more space in the frequency spectrum. Honestly, I sometimes "steal" that space from the guitars. But in my case, given the relatively high timbre of my voice, I can afford to let the guitars live more in the upper ranges and give the lower ones to the bass.

Also, unlike many engineers, I almost never leave high frequencies in the bass guitar. I've tried many times, but I've never found a compelling reason to keep them. With a Precision-style bass, I simply cut the highs, and to my ears, I don't lose anything important.

That said, there are other approaches. Many musicians, for example, prefer Jazz Bass models, which are much harder to tame in the high frequencies. If you're a beginner, you might not fully grasp this yet — but once you encounter it in practice, it will all start to make sense.

And finally, let me emphasize again: the bass guitar needs more compression than most other instruments. I often use two compressors — one right after the EQ at the start of the chain, and another closer to the end. This helps keep the bass tone tight and consistent in the mix.

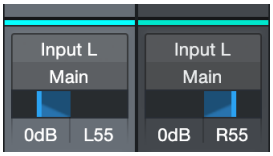
Guitars, in terms of frequency handling, are in my opinion much more complex than bass. That's because guitars often play chords instead of single notes, which means multiple notes layered on top of each other — each with its own harmonic content, sometimes clashing with each other.

That's why, as you can see in the screenshot below, the EQ curve for guitar tends to be much more sculpted and complex than for bass. It's also due to the fact that this frequency range is where both vocals and other guitars live as well.

And here’s another reason why I separate rhythm guitars across different stereo channels. If a song features two lead guitars that, for instance, are playing in counterpoint or call-and-response, I also pan them apart — but not as wide as the rhythm guitars.

When instruments are spread out across the stereo field and occupy different spatial positions, frequency conflicts become much easier to resolve — even when their tonal ranges overlap.

To illustrate this point, take a look at the screenshot below.




Notice how ruthlessly I’ve cut the low-end frequencies from the guitars. If you were to solo the guitar track without the bass playing alongside it, you wouldn’t even recognize the tone I dialed in earlier. But together with the bass guitar, it sounds exactly as intended.

As for compression on guitars — this is where I can’t offer a clear-cut answer. On one hand, I like guitars to sound tight and controlled. On the other, I don’t want to lose their dynamic range. It’s a delicate balance, and only you can determine what works best for your particular song.

This is especially true for lead guitar, because higher notes in the upper frequency range can cut through the mix too aggressively, while notes played on the lower strings can easily get lost. So finding the right balance is a manual process — there’s no universal solution here.

One practical tip I can offer: use delay on guitar parts. It’s a universal trick that adds a smooth, velvety quality — especially in solo passages with isolated notes. It leaves behind a beautiful trailing echo. Just don’t forget to roll off the low-end from the delay tail. The delay plugin and specific settings I use can be seen here.


Next up in my EQ chain is the snare. But as I mentioned earlier, I tend to leave the drums pretty much as they come out of the plugin. I usually only adjust the snare's volume. Some might argue it deserves more attention — fair enough. But to me, the snare doesn’t carry as

much emotional weight, so I treat it with a lighter touch. That's not to say I ignore it entirely — I just leave it sounding more or less as it came.

The same goes for the final element on the frequency spectrum — the overheads. For those unfamiliar, these are the cymbals — the shimmering, high-frequency components of a drum kit. They occupy the top end of the frequency range — at least in my mixes. Like the snare, I don't consider them a crucial part of the emotional message, so I simply cut out everything below 3,000 Hz and adjust their volume as needed.

Once all the EQ work is done — whether you follow my advice, watch a few tutorials, or just copy the EQ curves from my screenshots (which, by the way, also show which plugins I use most often) — it's time for the next step: leveling.

**Balancing Track Levels**

The goal here is to make sure every instrument is clear and audible — not just on your studio monitors or high-end headphones, but on any device.

That's why, in addition to headphones and monitors, I test my mixes on:

- Bluetooth earbuds
- a small speaker
- computer speakers
- my car stereo
- and my phone's built-in speaker

I also check the mix at the lowest possible monitor volume and often switch my DAW to mono mode.

The golden rule: at the lowest possible volume, you should still be able to hear every instrument clearly — and none of them should dominate the mix.

One of the best pieces of advice I got from a friend is this: balance your mix at the quietest volume, you should still be able to hear every instrument clearly — and none of them should dominate the mix.. If you can hear everything clearly at that level, you can trust the mix to translate well when the volume is turned up.

Once you've completed this stage, you'll finally hear what sounds like a finished mix. But here's an important detail: neither your final mix nor any individual track should be clipping into the red zone — otherwise, you'll get unwanted distortion.

On the flip side, your overall mix level shouldn't be too quiet either. If your peak level is below -12 dB, that likely means you need to boost the gain of all tracks, or go back and rework each one. This matters because we're about to move into the final step: mastering — and starting with too low a signal can hurt the end result.

The only extra processing I might apply to the mix bus before mastering is very light compression (just 0.5-1 dB) and a very gentle distortion. While this technically reduces dynamic range by taming peaks, the effect is so subtle that it doesn't noticeably alter the mix.

There's one more element I occasionally add to the master output — reverb. But I use it very sparingly. If the song is in a harder rock style, I prefer it to sound "in your face." I want to feel like I'm standing right there between the musicians. If the song is more emotional or lyrical, I'll make the overall sound a bit more spacious. But even then, the most I'll use is something like a "small hall" setting. And again, I recommend cutting the low end out of the reverb tail.

At this point, you can pretty much call your mix done — unless you suddenly get the urge to tweak it just a little more.

**Welcome to the World of Mastering**

Thirty years ago, this is where the entire process would have ended. Studios around the world released records with no universal standards — for either loudness or quality. Compare albums from 30+ years ago, and the differences in both volume and tonal balance are obvious. But today, that's rarely the case. Nearly all classic albums have since been remastered to meet today's broadcast and streaming norms.

Technically, you could stop here. If you've built a solid mix, any streaming platform will accept your song without complaint. But they'll automatically adjust your track to match their own standards — without your input.

Personally, I prefer not to leave this in the hands of algorithms. I want full control over how my track sounds when it hits the world. That's what mastering is all about.

**Mastering Is the Final Polish**

To put it simply, mastering is the process of preparing your final mix for release on streaming platforms, making sure it sounds as clear, powerful, and balanced as other professional tracks. It's essentially the quality benchmark.

Being honest — I approach mastering, like most aspects of home production, with a focus on efficiency. I want everything to be fast and practical. That's why, for the past couple of years, I've used one of the top all-in-one mastering suites on the market. I have version 11 installed, and although I got most of my other plugins and software at discounted rates, I paid full price for this one. And I have no regrets — it's one of my best purchases.

At first glance, it might seem like its only job is to boost loudness to meet streaming specs. But it does far more than that. This software analyzes your track's full frequency spectrum and helps shape it to match the standards of a particular musical genre. Each genre has its own sonic fingerprint, shaped by radio, television, and most of all — listener expectations.

When you select your genre, the software shows you the typical frequency curve for that style and lets you tweak your mix to match it — without needing to go back into your mix. Of course, it's not perfect. I often leave my mix as-is if I prefer the original sound, even if it doesn't match the suggested curve. But it's a powerful analysis tool and a great learning aid.

To start, you just load your mix, hit the analyze button, and the software does the rest — it scans frequency and loudness data, suggests changes, and applies them automatically. You

can fine-tune manually afterward. While I try to do most of my shaping in the mix, I don't mind doing a bit of final adjustment during mastering.

## A Note About Loudness Standards

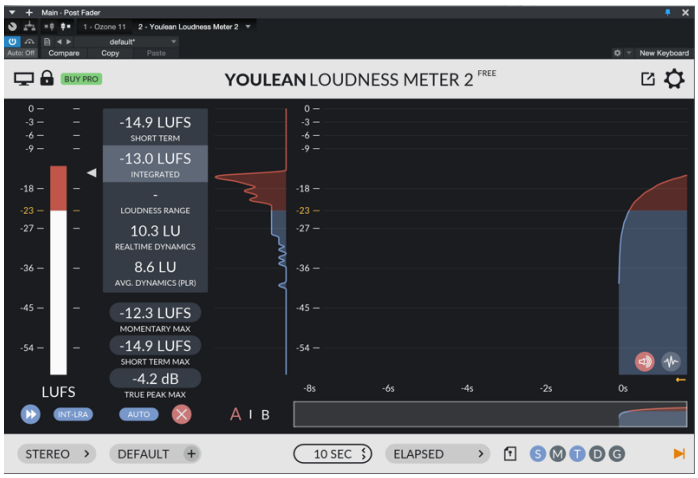
As I've said, streaming platforms impose loudness limits on uploaded songs. We all know the major services — paid or free — that let you stream music from all over the world. Their technical requirements differ slightly, but not enough to stress over.

Personally, I stick to one specific loudness standard and let my distributor handle converting it for other platforms. My go-to benchmark is the INTEGRATED LUFS -13 dB target used by the same company that makes the computers and devices I've used for years. It just makes sense to align with the ecosystem I already trust.

I won't go into detail here about the specific plugin settings I use — you can see those in the screenshots that follow.


## Final Check: Loudness Metering

The last piece in my mastering chain is a loudness meter plugin — the most widely used free tool in the world for this purpose. It lets me verify that my track's output level is exactly where it needs to be before uploading.




Once the mastering software finishes processing the song and I've double-checked the loudness level, I export the final version to my computer.

Even though streaming platforms accept various formats, I stick to just one: WAV, 48 kHz, 24-bit. This format is universally accepted and offers high enough quality for comfortable listening — even on professional sound systems.

And that's it. The track is finished. Its sound now meets modern media standards. It's ready to be heard.

Congratulations.

But before we wrap things up, let me offer one last piece of advice. If possible, don't release songs one by one. Release them as a group.

When someone hears your music and likes it, they'll want to know more about you. Having a few more tracks available gives them that chance.

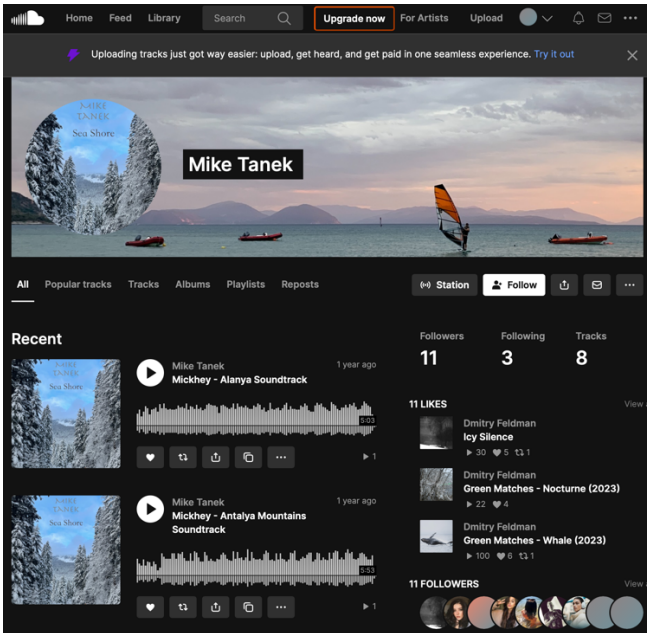
That's why I always release music in the form of albums — with a minimum of five songs. And I highly recommend you do the same.

You now have a real shot at being heard alongside today's top artists. Landing next to them — even for a moment — is a win.

Especially if your journey started from the couch.

## Chapter 8. How to Get on Streaming Services

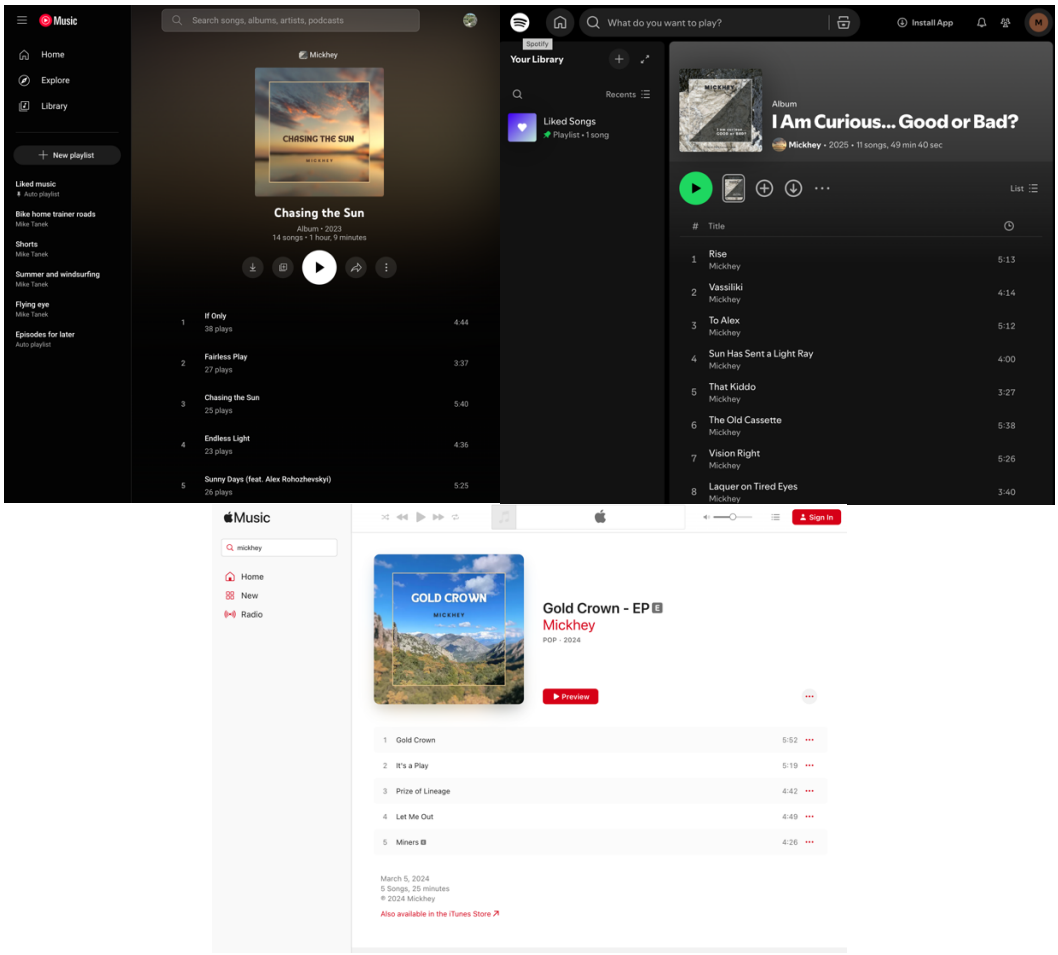
I started putting my music online long before I ever thought about getting it onto streaming platforms. At first, I did it simply to share my songs with friends. A few years ago, I created an account on one of the most popular free music-sharing platforms, where I uploaded many of my tracks without any listening restrictions. Many of those songs are still available there to this day.




I hope you've recognized the platform I mentioned. If you're not aiming to promote your music on the major streaming services, this kind of solution might suit you just fine. You can share direct links to your tracks, and listeners won't need a paid account to hear your songs.

Still, being listed alongside your favorite artists — those who no longer upload their music to free platforms — feels truly special. I don't blame those artists for stepping away from free distribution. The music industry is a tough business, and it's not the musicians who call the shots — it's the labels they work for. And those labels are in it to make money.

Today, there are many subscription-based streaming services where you can upload your music — even as an independent artist — and offer it to listeners in exchange for a share of the subscription revenue. Here are three of the biggest and most popular platforms:




For perhaps the first time in this book, I'll say this plainly: all the work I put into getting my songs onto these platforms has nothing to do with making money. My real joy lies in knowing that somewhere, someone might hear my song in a playlist alongside the music of my heroes.

Once, during a long bike ride, I was listening to a playlist in shuffle mode within a specific genre. After a track by one of my favorite guitarists finished, the next song to play in my headphones... was mine. It's hard to put that feeling into words. That artist is one of the greatest modern blues guitarists, and I only play guitar while sitting on my couch. And yet, despite the vast gap between us, music allowed us to be side by side — at least for a moment.

I truly hope you get to feel something like that one day.

And if your goal is to become a well-known artist, I sincerely wish you the best. Streaming platforms really can be the springboard that helps you take your first steps.

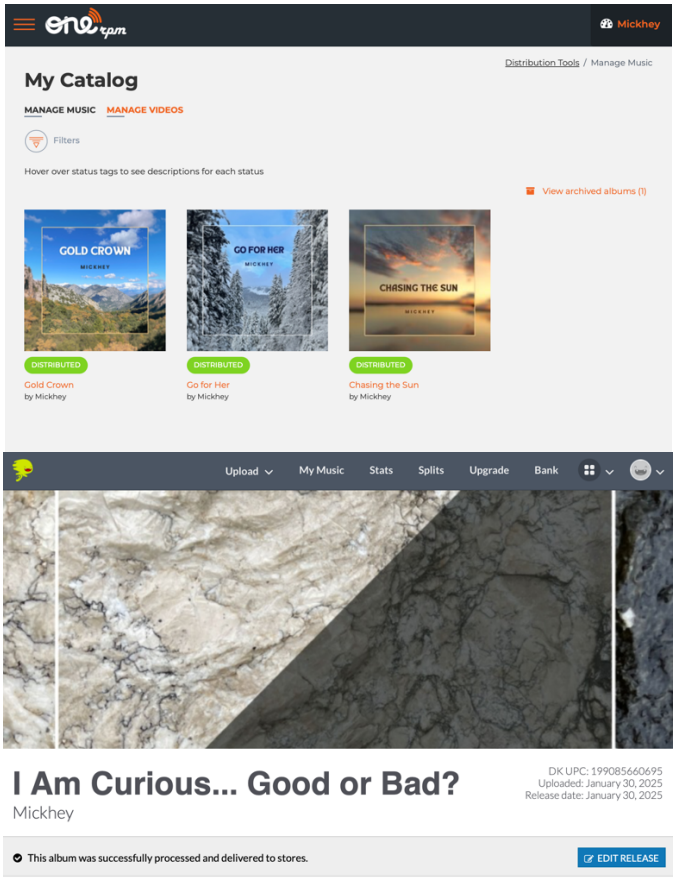
So, you've decided — you want to release your song (or even a full album) on the streaming platforms. Now let's talk about how to actually do it. Honestly, I don't know if you can submit tracks directly to a platform as an independent artist and expect them to be accepted and moderated. Maybe that option exists, but I suspect it would be a frustrating waste of time.

What I did — and what I recommend you do as well — is use one of the many digital music distribution services. These distributors handle the moderation and formatting process required by streaming services. Most importantly, they take care of the legal side of things. Remember: your music is intellectual property. Once you publish it, it becomes a subject of legal responsibility as well as artistic expression. Streaming platforms aim to protect themselves and their users, without infringing on your rights.

Through a distribution service, you can choose which platforms you want your music released on. If you don't like some platforms, you can usually exclude them — but I recommend keeping the most popular ones in the list.

Choosing a distributor is a personal decision. Below, I'll show screenshots of two services I personally work with, but you can pick whichever suits you best. Some distributors are free, others charge a subscription fee or one-time payment. The main difference is this: free distributors usually take a percentage of your revenue, while paid ones often let you keep up to 100%.

To figure this out for myself, I released different albums through different platforms—one through a paid distributor, another through a free one. Based on personal experience, I can tell you: I didn't notice any major difference.




Once you've chosen a distributor, the next step is to create a personal account on their website. The registration process is usually straightforward. The only thing you should really pay close attention to ahead of time is the payment information — this can vary from one

distributor to another. Before you sign up, I recommend reading the payment terms carefully on the site of the service you've selected. In the end, it's the financial side that could determine your decision.

As soon as you've registered, you'll be prompted to upload your music. When adding songs, the distributor will typically ask for detailed information about each track. This might include:

- the track title,
- genre,
- composer,
- performer,
- rights holder,
- possibly other details I can't recall,
- plus the lyrics.

Before you start uploading (usually one track at a time), I highly recommend preparing all this information in advance. Any mistake during input might force you to start over from scratch.

Pay special attention to your lyrics. They should be proofread and properly formatted. Many streaming platforms display the lyrics alongside the music, and if your song sounds professional but the text looks sloppy, it will reflect poorly on the overall impression.

One more tip on lyrics: streaming platforms pay close attention to explicit language. In practice, it's allowed, but it can significantly delay the moderation process — both for the lyrics and for the track as a whole. It might even slow down the approval of the entire album. That happened to me: I used a swear word in two songs, and the moderation time for the album ended up being two to three times longer than expected — nearly two and a half months. For later releases, I avoided profanity entirely, and the albums were approved within 10–14 days.

I can't say for sure that this will happen to you, but the possibility is real. So keep that in mind when writing and submitting your lyrics.

That said, I completely understand and accept the view that profanity may sometimes serve an artistic or emotional purpose. But in that case, I'd suggest replacing the word with a pause or a neutral sound during recording. Trust me — listeners will still get the message, but the moderation process will go much faster.

Also — and this is just a personal opinion — you probably won't regret avoiding strong language in the long run. You won't have to explain anything to your parents or your kids. Read the memoirs of well-known musicians — many of them regret the careless lyrics they wrote in their youth.

Once you click "submit" and the distributor confirms your upload, consider your job nearly done.

I don't know what happens if a song is rejected, because all of my releases were accepted on the first try. But if any of your songs get flagged either by the distributor or a streaming

service, you'll receive a message with an explanation. If you don't hear anything after a few days, it's likely your release went through successfully. Keep in mind: if it is accepted, you usually won't get an email — instead, your dashboard will show the planned release date, when your album will go live on the streaming platforms.

Sometimes the release appears on all platforms at once; other times, it rolls out over several days. So don't worry if your song isn't visible everywhere right away. If the distributor guaranteed placement, it will show up.

Waiting for your release to go live can be nerve-wracking — but the moment you type your project or album name into the search bar of your favorite streaming service and see your work in the results? That's priceless. For some, it's a routine event. But for someone who went through every step of the journey — from the first note to the final upload — it brings a deep sense of joy and pride.

It's a feeling of belonging to global culture. And if that sounds like an exaggeration — that's exactly how it feels to me. Because the music you create will remain. It won't just live today — it could still be heard years from now, and maybe someone will feel connected to you through it. I truly believe that.

One final recommendation: to make the wait for release day easier, I keep writing and preparing new material. Even now, after spending so much time writing this book, I still pick up my guitar, follow my inspiration, and wait for my Muse to arrive.

I sincerely wish the same for you.

## Chapter 9. Releasing Your Music Isn't Enough? Then Let's Try Promotion.

This might just be the shortest chapter in the whole book. In a way, I even feel a bit awkward about it — maybe you were expecting some clear and practical advice on promoting your music and yourself as a musician in the industry. But unfortunately, I'm not a real expert in this field.

We've made it to the release. It's approved and now live on all the major platforms. For me, that's where the journey ends. I stop right there and don't go any further.

At the very beginning of this book, I said that music is a part of my life. A very important part. It has accompanied me in the past, continues to do so today, and I'm sure it'll be with me to the end. But at the same time, I don't aim for my music to be seen as anything more than what it is.

Some of you probably already know: today, music is just as much a business as anything else. And yes, if I really wanted to, I probably could have become a professional musician. It's a beautiful profession. And if it were the only thing I loved doing, I think my life would've been bright and fulfilling. But…

I've seen too many examples of people choosing a career in music without being fully certain that it was what they truly wanted. The desire to become a rock musician almost always begins in youth — a wonderful time when energy spills over and needs an outlet. For poetic, sensitive souls, music offers a way to express themselves. For angry, explosive personalities, it can help avoid bad choices and keep them from going too far down the wrong path.

For me, and many of my friends, music was a lifeline. It saved us from decisions we might not have been able to come back from. Like anyone, I had friends who chose a different path. I'm thankful to music that I chose this one.

The main thing I've taken from my musical journey is this: I want music to remain my hobby, my escape, my cozy little world. A place I can return to in moments of sadness or joy. I love sharing my songs with family and friends, but I don't want to annoy them with it. That's how I feel about music as a whole, and my own creativity in particular.

Being self-critical, I'll admit that I don't see my songs as anything extraordinary. Sure, many people like them, some even like them a lot. Probably because their taste in music aligns with mine in a special way. Still, I prefer my music to remain niche. So even though I want it to be heard all over the world — or at least to have the chance to be — I don't want to push it beyond what feels natural.

A few years ago, I couldn't even imagine promoting my music. In the professional world I inhabit because of my main job, it would have felt completely out of place. The idea that one of my partners or clients might find out the song they're hearing on a streaming service was written by me? I couldn't even picture it — whether as a bold fantasy or a nightmare. But friends and, most importantly, a close friend involved in the music industry convinced me otherwise. They helped me get past my own internal barrier and realize I have every right to give my music a shot — and to stop being ashamed of the fact that I'm the one who made it.

Maybe one day I'll return to this idea. At the very least, I've taken the step of sharing my experience by writing this book. But let me say it again: I've never seriously wanted to turn my creative work into a business or make a name for myself as a composer or performer.

Still, since my job involves modern digital tools and online marketing, I do have a general understanding of how promotion works. So here are a few thoughts. They won't give you a step-by-step plan, but they can help point you in the right direction.

I'm writing this in 2025. Right now, the most effective ways to reach potential listeners — including music fans — are social networks and increasingly popular messaging apps.

Of course, traditional marketing theory says you should segment your audience: by age, gender, location, nationality, etc. Ideally, any campaign should be tailored to a specific segment, with different channels and types of messaging. I'm simplifying here just to give you a clearer overview.

So depending on your genre, your target group, your country, and even the language of your lyrics, your campaign will differ. In the best case, you'd use all available channels to reach all possible segments.

I'm talking about "neutral" music here — like mine. But if you're writing music specifically for commercial success, you'll need to start planning your campaign as early as the songwriting phase.

But let me be honest: this book is for true "couch guitarists" like me. For people who see music as a personal space — an emotional outlet — not as a product. I hope it's also useful to those heading toward the music business. After all, no one said you can't make money from your art. Still, I believe that when music is created for the sole purpose of profit, it's often more about formulas and less about feeling. That's not wrong — it's just not what this book is about.

That said, if you've decided to take the next step and promote your music, you have several options:

**Option one:** Learn the tools and channels yourself and do all the work manually. I assure you, it's a fascinating world in its own right. But it requires deep immersion. You probably won't manage it the same way you write music — "in your spare time, on the couch." Promotion takes effort, especially time. If it's part of your profession, great. If you're only diving in now, after finishing your album, get ready for a long journey. I'm not sure it's worth it — unless you want music to become your job.

**Option two:** Let professionals handle it. These days, there are countless people who specialize in music promotion. Even without being a pro, today's youth often live inside the world of digital marketing. You can choose a freelance beginner or a full-fledged agency that focuses on independent artists. Naturally, this requires both financial investment and personal involvement.

You'll have to engage with your audience. People still want to see musicians live. Often, promotion means gigs, live performances, and collaboration. And for many couch musicians

— who likely also have a full-time job—that might be too much. But life has a way of showing that nothing is truly impossible.

**Option three:** The easiest one. Most music distribution services offer promotion tools. You can set up a campaign yourself or let the platform's algorithm do everything for you. These options are usually built into your dashboard.

Whichever path you choose, know this: it will take effort. You'll need to put in work, time, and attention. And in doing so, you'll step beyond being just a couch guitarist.

## Conclusion

As I bring this book to a close, I want to explain why I wrote it and what it's really about.

As I mentioned earlier, this book is dedicated to my friend Alex — a wonderful person, an incredibly talented musician, and a brilliant audio engineer. As you've probably already gathered from the context, Alex is no longer with us. And while that's a deeply sorrowful truth, it's part of life, and none of us has the power to change its course.

Alex was one of the few people I've ever known who truly *lived* music. He knew it from every angle: as a musician, as the owner of a recording studio. His band — more of a personal project, really — was a local legend and lasted almost thirty years, starting when he was just a teenager.

On weekends, he'd play in small bars, performing exclusively original material. He was adamant about never playing covers. On weekdays, he worked in the studio with a vast range of artists — from gospel to rap, folk to metal. He worked with rare instruments and had a full arsenal of modern digital recording tools.

But despite all of that, he never released a full album of his own. I encouraged him to do it more times than I can count, but he was a perfectionist. He kept waiting for the perfect moment — the right mood, the right musicians, the right vibe, the right inspiration. Above all, he was tormented by performance quality. If he heard even the slightest flaw, he wouldn't release the song. It became an insurmountable internal barrier. His recordings remained "demos," no matter how powerful or beautiful they were.

After his passing, access to all his projects was lost. I tried to finish his album — but I couldn't. That was a painful realization. He had poured his soul into that music, and yet it missed its chance to be heard by the world.

That's what made me reflect: fate can step in at any moment and take away our chance to leave a mark. Whether that mark *matters* to the world isn't up to us. But if we don't even try — then no one will ever know. That's why I wrote this book: to make the path easier for someone else. Maybe it'll give someone the push they need, change their mind, spark their confidence, or equip them with practical tools.

Alex's story is a reminder: finish what you started — especially if you've poured your heart into it. Even if it's just one song. That one song could be a thread that ties you to other people. Someday, someone might hear your track through headphones or car speakers and feel closer to you, even if just for a moment.

This book is my message to couch guitarists — to those who live and breathe music but never take a step toward the world. I want to show you: that step isn't as big as it seems. And it's definitely worth taking.

Music isn't just sound, gear, or algorithms. It's a state of mind captured in time. When you record a song, you preserve that moment. And when you release it — you share it with others. And when you listen to it later, you can relive everything you felt when you wrote it.

If you're ready to share — then you have every right to do so. Don't be ashamed. That act of openness gives you a sense of inner freedom. And that freedom, in turn, gives you inspiration.

Of course, if you picked up a guitar for the first time yesterday, you won't release an album tomorrow. But the path from your first chord to your first recording is much shorter than

many people think. Professionals follow a long and specific journey. But just because music is your hobby doesn't mean you can't have access to technology, great sound, or listener respect.

Yes, professionals who've dedicated their entire lives to music will have better production quality. But the gap is no longer huge. Modern tools have leveled the playing field. All that's left is desire — and a little effort. Without effort, nothing happens. I'm honest about that. But the effort is worth it.

I'm not advocating for perfectionism. On the contrary — feeling *alive* in your music is more important than perfect performance. Still, quality matters. It should be good enough not to disappoint the listener. A mix doesn't have to be flawless. There may be frequency clashes. But if they get in the way of enjoying the song — they need to be fixed. That's part of the work. It's not the easiest, but it's far from impossible.

So yes, this path isn't elementary. It's not for first-graders — but it *is* within reach for anyone who's taken even their first steps in this direction.

And if this book helps even one person record their first song — then it's all been worth it.