



GT128

Session Secrets

Avril Lavigne

There are many very successful artists in this genre at the moment, such as Avril Lavigne, and this month Dario Cortese looks at how to you can create those guitar sounds.

LA has been the commercial music capital of the world since the 1950's. It is a very competitive environment and to work here you have to have the qualities shared by all of the best session players; great accuracy, timing and sound, an easy going nature (not to mention always being on time!).

This month's scenario is that rock and pop producer Cliff Magness (Celine Dion, Jessica Simpson, etc) requires guitar parts for a new song by Avril Lavigne. You only have three hours to do the session, and in that includes set-up and down of your gear. To make life easier, most of the session guys in LA use a company to transport and set their gear up.

Most of the time, for this kind of session, you'll work alone with the producer and engineers. You probably won't record with the band, almost never with the artist, and sometimes you have to play along to a midi 'guide track' or even just a click; you have to create a great 'vibe' in the most 'sterile' of situations!

As always, we start by finding out what the producer wants. In this case it's acoustic parts and a couple of rock guitar parts, something like "Complicated". He wants the song to start quietly, then build into a loud and strong chorus. He wants a modern "fresh" sound for the rock guitars. Here's the chart:

Swing 16th ♩ = 80

The musical notation consists of two staves in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first staff contains four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) with chord diagrams above: F#m, A, E, B, A, B. The second staff starts at measure 5 and contains four measures of rhythmic notation with chord diagrams above: E, B, C#m, A, E, B, C#m, A. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accents.



Get familiar with the chords and form so you can cross reference it to the following guitar parts.

First up will be the acoustic parts, and a dreadnought would be perfect. Listen very carefully to the drum groove to find a rhythm pattern that fits. In terms of chords, you should avoid using Barre chords wherever possible. Always try to use open chords and if necessary use a capo. The reason is very simple; open chords sound much better.

For strumming on the acoustic use a thin pick (.38mm to .58mm). This is because what's usually needed for the track is just the strumming noise of the pick on the strings; the engineer will probably EQ a lot of the 'body' out of the sound. You can try both 12- and 6-string guitars to see which one suits best. Always use a wide, energetic movement of the forearm and wrist. A common way to record the acoustic is by blending both the D.I. and microphone signals. This means that you can't move while playing; no tapping of feet and be careful with your forearm on the body of the guitar. Also, check your chair for squeaks before the 'red light' for recording and, at the end of the pass, stay still until you get the nod from the engineer.

Next up are the electric guitars. We're looking for a kind of modern 'fresh' crunchy sound; a sound that responds to the dynamics of your playing. Try a Les Paul style guitar through a Marshall-type amp and 4x12 cabinet. Let's try the same formula that Magness often employs, that is, two almost-clean guitars that play a few fills (again – question and answer) in the verse and then a strong power chord riff for the chorus. Again, the idea with this sort of playing is to build up textures that don't leap out as separate parts. See you next month!



Acoustic 1 & 2:

These are the acoustic guitar parts. Gtr 1 uses capo at 2nd fret (think D key instead of E) whereas gtr 2 uses capo at 4th fret (think C instead of E).

Whilst they play rhythmically the same thing, the different voicings from each will give a thicker sound in the mix. Note that they are panned out to give a wider sound.

Electric 1 & 2:

Both guitars play fills in the verse followed by power chords in the bridge and chorus, with a 'chip' that answers each other.

The power chords have the 5th in the bass because this has been used in many tracks of this style; for example How You Remind Me.

Electric 3:

Guitar three is only in for the chorus and plays double stops in eighths.

The reason for this part is that it helps support the vocal. In most tunes of this style the vocal is on the beat, and especially on 2 and 4 (again, think How You Remind Me).

This kind of repetitive, hypnotic part helps to reinforce the feel of the beat.

TONE SETTINGS

The 4x12 Cabinet

For a modern rock session you'll need to use a 4x12 cabinet. These can totally change the sound of your amp, and even slight variations in cab shape will change the tone; in essence it adds more bass and treble. Famous models are by Marshall, Mesa Boogie, Peavey and boutique ones such as Cornford. The most famous speakers are Greenbacks and Vintage 30s.

THE CAPO

The capo is a great tool that can make your life much easier, and result in some great sounding parts that would be impossible in normal tuning. If you are playing a song in F, put the capo on the 1st fret and think one semitone lower (ie in the key of E). This is a simple general rule; if the capo is on the 3rd fret, think three semitones lower, and so on.

