



GT130

Session Secrets

Robbie Williams

Robbie Williams was at the heart of the Brit-pop movement, and as such was partly responsible for the resurgence of guitar playing in the UK; for that alone he and his music deserve our thanks!

This month we're going to picture ourselves in the studio with Robbie Williams. During his incredible career, Robbie has managed to draw on a wide range of influences and create a sound that's uniquely his. This has a reflection on the equipment you need to bring for the session. Basically you have to be ready for everything, from jazz to funk, country to rock!

The reference points for this track are two of his previous hits; 'No Regrets' and 'Come Undone'. Moreover, he'll 'talk' in the intro/verse and 'sing' in the chorus, and he wants a real modern/futurist sound but maintaining his very strong British pop roots.

Here's the chart:

First guitar to be recorded is the 'futurist' guitar, and here you can be creative; go for the weirdest sounds! When experimenting with effects, keep in mind that a different position in the effects chain can drastically change the sound. For instance, think of a delay and an overdrive. The common ('right') way to use these is overdrive followed by delay. Yet, if you swap them over (delay-overdrive) you'll see that there's a huge difference, which may be just what you wanted!



For this guitar the idea is get a more 'synthetic' sound, more akin to a keyboard. To record this part, try an overdrive amp with a few effects. Firstly, go through a compressor to give sustain, followed by a noise gate to gently cut the end of the sound. For both of these, a rack version is preferable, actually, as you have more parameters to edit and shape the sound to exactly your tastes.

Next effect in the chain is an auto-wah; I chose an auto-wah as your feet are then still free to do something else! You can try the great 'Mu-tron III' or the ZVex 'Seek-wah', but also the more simple Boss would work fine. The following effect was a phaser (such as a Phase 90) with the sweep speed in time with the song. We now need to split the signal into stereo, for a stereo delay is next; to do this try a stereo phaser or a stereo volume pedal (this would be a good place for a volume pedal, before the delay and reverb).

The delay is set to repeat every beat, or quarter note, at 857ms. I set the delay with the first repeat on the right side and the second on the left, which spreads the part across the stereo spectrum. Set the feedback to produce a nice 'tale' that doesn't mess up the sound. You can also add, or ask the sound engineer to, a warm reverb.

The second guitar plays a clean arpeggio; try a humbucker equipped guitar and experimenting with effects such as tremolo, chorus and a Leslie simulation.

The third part will be played on the acoustic guitar. The acoustic has always been present on British pop records and is generally played in a quite straight-forward way. As always, look for interesting solutions using capos and alternative tunings.

For the 'chorus' section you can add another guitar with a crunch sound; this will help the dynamics and the songs emotive content develop. Note that in the backing track there's no repeats in the verse. That's all for now, see ya next month!

tone settings

There are billions of ways to use the delay effect. You can create a slap back echo repeat (typical of old rock'n'roll and country) or you can use it in your solos to create a little more ambience and lengthen your sound. The modern approach to delay is to use very precise timings; think of 'The Edge'.

To set the delay properly you'll need a calculator (back to school!). The formula to calculate the quarter note in milliseconds (as most delays are set by) is $60000 \text{ (milliseconds per minute)} / \text{the speed of the song in bpm}$. For example, for a song at 100bpm this gives 600ms. Of course, this does rely on you (or your drummer) playing in time!



Electric 1:

For this guitar you can use any humbucker equipped guitar (I've used a Les Paul). Use the neck or middle pickup, as we need quite a warm sound. I've used a Rotary speaker set to a fast speed.

Ac Gtr $\text{♩} = 70$ D Gmaj7 x4 F#7
 El Gtr 1
 El Gtr 2
 El Gtr 3

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Electric 2:

This is the 'weird' guitar part; any model would work fine, but I used my Strat. The challenge here is to hit the strings with a consistent attack so the auto-wah will always 'answer' in the same way.

Electric 3:

This guitar comes in the chorus. Any medium-small amp with a humbucker equipped guitar would work. Both the F# and the G5 should be strummed quite slowly, almost like a rake.

4 Bm G Gm⁶ D

let ring-----

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