

## **The Lag-Time Between Practicing New Things and Using them on Gigs**

by Dennis Winge

It is a very common frustration among musicians that it seems to take a long time before they can actually use things they've been practicing on gigs. It tries our patience and potentially even undermines our faith in the overall process of learning when we practice something for hours, days, weeks, or months, and it is still not showing up in our playing during performances.

It is important to understand that when we perform, our actions are to a large extent determined by intuition. This intuition is determined by habit, and habit is generated by many years (or months) of doing things a certain way. What this means is that during performance, unless it is possible to step outside of your usual way of doing things, then it is not practical to expect that new ways of doing things will automatically show up.

You don't even necessarily have a choice in the matter, either. When you perform, you are remembering (or reading) your parts, making sure you are coordinating with the other band members in a rhythmically solid way, controlling your volume, (and potentially for guitarists or keyboardists) changing effects on the fly, gauging how well the audience is responding, etc. Let's face it: there are a ton of things to think about and unless the gig is going perfectly well and all the other elements you normally need to think about have lined up perfectly, you may simply not have any extra mental space in which to try to implement new things that you've been practicing.

Even if there is extra mental 'bandwidth' for you to try and use what you've been working on spontaneously, the new technique, concept, lick, voicing or set of voicings, or idea has to be related to the context of the songs you're playing, and it has to not be a huge leap into uncharted territory that it is unrelated to the rest of the way you play.

Guitarist Joe Diorio says in one of his instructional videos, "it comes after many years." A thing may take 6 months just to get it down, and then another 6 months to integrate itself into your overall playing language. But don't be discouraged. It is simply a time continuum.

Your playing is the results of your past efforts, and you never need to think about all the things you used to work on in the distant past. They are automatic to you now, and, if you have been playing for a long time, you have lots of wonderful things that are automatic. You now enjoy them without thinking, and your playing has advanced to an extent wherein you are now able to concentrate on even more creative, informed, and expressive elements in your playing.

Not only that, but your subconscious goes to work for you to solve problems. Have you ever struggled with something, then put it away for a time, and when you came back to it, you saw the path to doing it efficiently very clearly and you were able to execute it easily? Surely you have had the experience of trying to remember a name or small detail and it came to you when you were no longer thinking about it. When you have a

frustration, as long as you don't abandon the desire to 'figure it out' completely, your subconscious will go to work on it for you.

In addition, sometimes certain things become easier to play at a later time, even though you haven't practiced them specifically, simply because your overall musicianship is improving and you are now a better musician, so those things you formerly found challenging are now no problem.

It is important to recognize, in light of this, that what you are currently practicing is truly, to use an overused buzz word, the 'cutting edge' of your playing. It makes perfect sense that this cutting edge should be nebulous. The overall growth of your musicianship is not something you can really point to definitively, but you can see it over time, just as parents don't notice the children growing on a daily basis, but relatives who only see the kids once a year can easily notice it.