

MICHAEL FRYE

Acoustability

Many worship leaders lead from that heavenly instrument, the acoustic guitar. Most worship teams welcome the sound of an acoustic guitar into their mix, as it brings a warm and rhythmic element to the musical worship experience. Here are some tips I've picked up over the 25 years I've been playing the acoustic guitar (I started young!):

Choose Your Pick Wisely

Find the right pick (plectrum) for your guitar. Ask others who play better than you. You will be surprised what a difference to volume and tone the right pick can make.

Cut Your Nails

Keep the fingernails on your left hand short (or right hand, if you play left-handed), and you will find it easier to play clear sounding chords.

Play Well Within Your Ability

When you are leading worship with your guitar, play well within your limits. Don't try that "new chord" until it feels natural, and you can do it without thinking about it. By playing at 75% of your ability instead of stretching yourself to 100%, the overall quality of your music will be higher, more consistent and you will feel much more confident.

Improve Your Timing Skills

To improve your timing and strumming technique, play along to a CD, drum machine and/or metronome. Playing with other people who are better than you is also a very helpful way to develop your skills.

Use A Capo

A capo is a great tool for:

• Avoiding tricky chords: a song with Eb, Ab, Bb and a Cm chords is a bit tricky to play on the guitar. Put a capo on the 1st fret and you can play D, G, A and Bm shapes, or put the capo on the 3rd fret and play with C, F, G and Am shapes.

• Changing the key of a song: don't panic if you need to change the key of a song. Just use a capo and you should be able play the same chord sequences (unless you need to lower the key, in which case you will have to play different chords).

• Changing the feel of a song: all chord shapes have a unique sound and a unique relationship to other chords. Try playing a song in E with a capo on the 2nd fret, and play it with D chords. Or play a song in G with a capo on the 3rd fret, and play E chords. If you have two guitars playing together, it sounds great if you each play different chord shapes by one of you using a capo.

The Picking/Strumming Switch Trick

If I want to finger pick and strum all in one song I have a little trick I use. Hold the pick in between your index and middle fingers about half way up (between the knuckles). You should then be able to finger pick and not drop the pick. When you want to switch to playing rhythm you put your thumb on the pick, lift up your index finger and use your index finger to slide the pick into a playing position. With some practice you can actually get quite slick at this. You can also switch back to finger picking mode by using a reverse action.

Choosing A Capo

The Kyser Quick-Change capo is a popular choice, as it can clip on to the end of your guitar when you are not using it. If you find your guitar sounds out of tune when you put a Kyser on, try a Shubb capo, as they are adjustable and more accurate. If it still sounds out of tune, you might need a guitar shop to check it for you - or get a better guitar!

Tuners

Invest in a stage tuner you can use while you are playing. Learn to tune by sight as well by ear. If the tuner has a "bypass" and/or "mute" function, that's even better. You can tune silently and plug/unplug your guitar (to save batteries) without upsetting the soundman (and wrecking everyone's ears).

Effects

I typically have a little reverb on my guitar, and use delay some of the time. I occasionally use chorus as well, but the key is to be subtle.

Playing With A band

Play less when playing with a band!

Improve The Sound Of Chords

Be aware of the bass note of the chord and start your strum from there (i.e., don't always use all 6 strings). If you are playing an A chord the bass note is the A string (2nd from bottom) – i.e., you might want to avoid playing the bottom E string.

Michael Frye, along with his wife Helen, leads worship at the Taunton Vineyard in the UK. He is the author of the song "Be The Centre," and has played acoustic guitar on various Vineyard Music UK recordings. Mike is presently developing a project to encourage people into musical creativity through learning an instrument, songwriting, recording and performing.

