



The image above is from a recent recording session of mine. They are lead vocal tracks - different takes - of the exact same verse of this song.

Each track was performed in tune, and all the lyrics were sung correctly.

So the question is: Why so many takes?

As many of you have experienced, it doesn't take that much time to learn how to record a nice clear, undistorted track. In other words, the technical side is just a matter of learning and following a few golden rules and you'll be rewarded with full bodied recordings.

The mistake people make is when they devote 90% of their effort to the technical side without acknowledging that it is really only half of the process

for making a good record. The kind of record that people actually want to hear again and again.

It's easy to understand why people are so attracted to - and immerse themselves in - the relatively straight-forward process of recording, and they do everything they can (without even realizing they're doing it) to avoid the sometimes winding path it takes to create a performance that connects with a listeners in a real and meaningful way.

So let's ask the question again:

“Why so many takes?”

All those vocal takes you see shown above, is typical of my sessions. I know the song very well, so each take is in tune with no “mistakes.” But my goal and absolute first priority is always to achieve a real “performance.” A performance that captures real human emotion and feeling of some kind.

It might be cheeky, confident, tragic, exhausted, energized or whatever - depending on the song.

The only thing I can tell you is that you will know it when you hear it. And it often requires multiple takes to get something “special.”

The thing that makes a certain take special, is often not something you can put into words or define. (In one of the takes above, my voice kind of gave out at the end of a note, but it created the most effective moment. It sounded as though my heart was broken. **actually it was simply due to it being really early in the morning and I was still half asleep when I recorded the take. But the consequence of that gravelly voiced take was just what that verse needed.*)

So, beware of the voice in your head that says, “that’s pretty good - I’ll fix everything in the mix.”

Your mix can do a lot of things. But it can't bring soul to tracks that weren't performed with any soul.

Here's a golden rule - at least for me:

The recording process and the mixing process are two separate and distinct jobs and each one has its own responsibilities.

You can't pawn the responsibilities of of the recording/performance process onto the mixing process and expect to end up with a record that affects people on some kind of personal/emotional level.

So...

- don't shy away from the *important work* of capturing (recording) performances that carry something special in their dna. Keep trying different approaches and takes until a take makes the hairs stand up on your arm.

- the clock's not ticking. The song doesn't really *have* to be finished today or tomorrow. Don't rush it. It's so worth it.

- be the kind of person who refuses to settle for blank or empty performances because something great will happen: You will get better and faster at delivering and recognizing special performances and takes. This will lift your game in a major and very noticeable way and is one of the most dramatic things you can do to set yourself apart.

- let your mix be about mixing not fixing.

Remember why you're doing this. The songs are meant to leave a mark.

So, make sure to leave a mark.

All my best to you all,

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