



Guitar Virtual Learning

Ensemble Precision

April 22, 2020



Guitar

Lesson: April 22, 2020

Objective/Learning Target:

What is ensemble precision and why is it important to making music?



Warm-Up activity:

Click on the link and listen to “Bad” by Michael Jackson. As you listen, clap along to the beat of the song.

Alternatively, mute the strings on your guitar and strum to the beat.

["Bad" by Michael Jackson](#)



2nd Warm-Up activity:

What is the difference between these two recordings?

Here are two versions of the same song by Michael Jackson. The instruments used and the recording of him singing are exactly the same, but somehow one of these recording sounds good and one sounds “off”. Listen to both and try and figure out what is different between them. Write down a description of what you think the difference is.

[“Good” version of *Bad*](#)

[“Bad” version of *Bad*](#)



The difference you are trying to describe is called “ensemble precision”

You probably noticed that the second video included the description “(All Instruments Off Tempo)”. We will explore the concept of “tempo” in another lesson, but when different musicians playing together aren’t keeping the beat at the same, that makes it hard for them to stay together on the beat. This is a big factor in ensemble precision.

So what is “ensemble precision”? Let’s define it!



The difference you are trying to describe is called “ensemble precision”

Ensemble Precision

Definition:

How tightly together a group of musicians (an ensemble) sync up to each other, including their sense of beat, their entrances and cut offs, and the rhythms they are playing.



So how do we evaluate or measure ensemble precision?

If you are trying to evaluate how well an ensemble is playing together, here is a list of things you can listen for:

So how do we evaluate or measure ensemble precision?

- Everyone keeping the beat together
 - No one rushing the tempo or going too slow
- Everyone entering at the same time in a new section
- Everyone cutting off together at the same time
- The words being sung sync up with each other
 - If this ISN'T happening, the words will sound messy or mumbled
- The overall effect of the music should could be described as “crisp” or “clean” if the ensemble precision of the group is being successful



Let's evaluate some Ensemble Precision!

Now that you have a sense of what “ensemble precision” is, let's try and evaluate how successful a few different ensembles are in their ensemble precision!

For the sake of this exercise, we are going to use the ensemble rating system that judges use at large ensemble contests for choirs, orchestras and bands.



Let's evaluate some Ensemble Precision!

That means, as you evaluate, come up with a rating between 1 (the best you can do) and 5 (the worst you can do). We will evaluate three ensembles different ensembles performing three different pieces of music.

1

Exemplary

2

Outstanding

3

Satisfactory

4

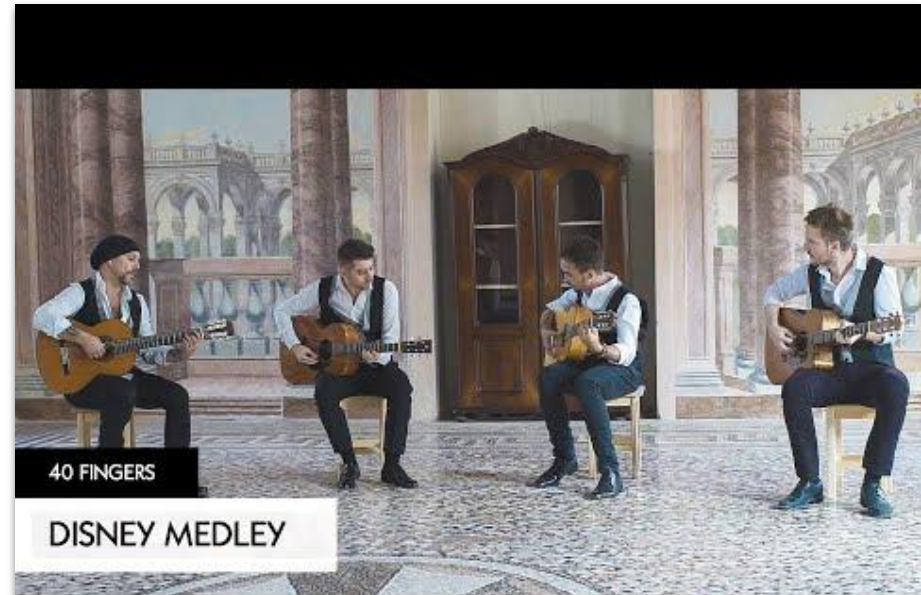
Developing

5

Ineffective

Ensemble #1: “40 Fingers”

This is a band made up of 4 guitar players, each playing a slightly different type of guitar. In this video, they are playing a medley of Disney songs!



Ensemble #2: “Trans-Siberian Orchestra”

This is a live performance by the rock group, Trans-Siberian Orchestra. Listen to their introduction (first three minutes of the video). Live performance definitely plays into a groups ensemble precision!



Ensemble #3: “Worst Choir Ever”

This choir has quite a few issues, but definitely one of them is their ensemble precision!



Ensemble #4: “Fogerty Factory”

John Fogerty is famous as the lead singer, song-writer, and guitarist for the classic rock group Creedence Clearwater Revival. During this quarantine, he’s been at home jamming with his family! They produced a video of his family performing a CCR hit, “Down on the Corner”



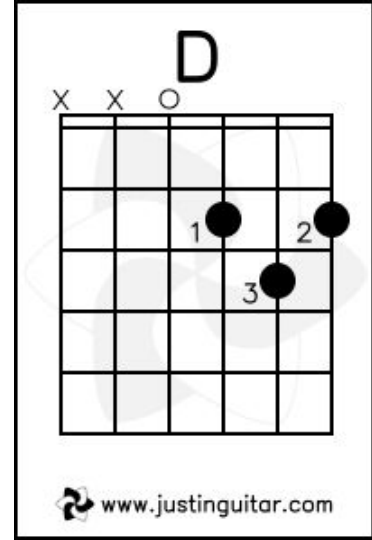
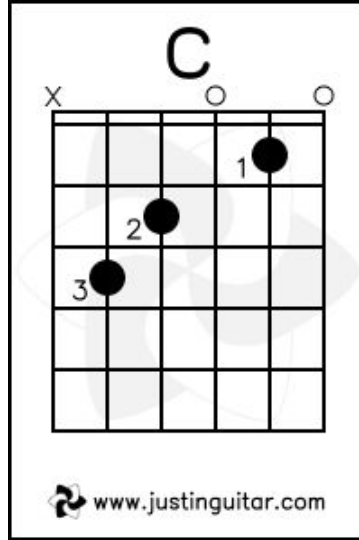
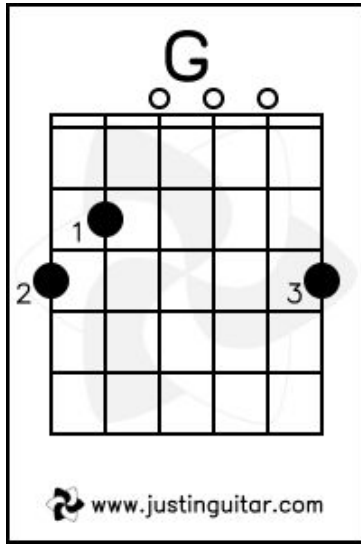


Guitar Playing Practice Activity

If you have a guitar at home, here is a simple exercise for experiencing ensemble precision. In this practice activity, you are going to strum along to the beat along to a practice track on YouTube. Your goal is to line up your strum perfectly with the music on the video. The video will tell you when to change chords!

Guitar Playing Practice Activity

Here are the three chords you will use:



Guitar Playing Practice Activity

And here's the video:





Extension activity for more challenge!

Now, find some recordings of your own favorite bands, and evaluate their performances for “ensemble precision”.

How did they do? Write down ideas for how the groups could improve in their ensemble precision and remember that the next time you are playing guitar with other musicians!