

## Chapter 2 – Covering Songs

**2. Covering Songs:** Some of the best artists in the biz do it. It's ok. I can't tell you how many bands/musicians I've heard say "I don't play cover songs!" as if it is a bad thing. It's not. As a matter of fact, cover songs tend to allow the listener to become accustomed to you, your interests, and even learn to relate to you. However, an all-cover-song setlist could absolutely destroy your reputation. This chapter will teach you how to avoid 'duplicating' and instead learn to 'interpret' a song so that your audience will find your own songs easy to relate to.

Mix up the list, but not TOO much.

Maybe a blues song, then a folk song. Maybe a classic rock song, then a folk song. Never go from a jazz or blues song to a straight rock song. Keep the change seamless, but not too big. DO NOT go from a quiet song to a heavy song, regardless of what folks say. It's irritating.

a. Originals vs. Covers - This tutorial focuses on songs found within your own style of interest that will allow your audience to feel comfortable. Many times musicians pick songs that don't fall in a category of how they actually play. My EZ Strummer members know when I play a song that isn't a song I am comfortable with. Imagine how hard it is to go from a song by James Taylor to a song by Lynyrd Skynyrd. It's not easy, and I wouldn't play these songs together in public. The diversity is TOO much. What if I were the composer of "Fire and Rain" but then followed up with a rendition of "Sweet Home Alabama?" It wouldn't sound right would it? It would force the audience to trail off so to speak. Here you'll learn how to combine the perfect original song with the perfect cover song - and it's much easier than you might think!

b. Making A Song "Your Own" - When you play a cover song, no matter what song it is, you MUST make the song your own. It could be a vocal phrasing you change up (think of the various versions of "Star Spangled Banner" you've heard) or even a complete key change on the guitar. It could even be simply taking pieces of a song and rearranging it (think "Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen. There's NO WAY you'll play the entire song. It's impossible to make it sound right. But you know the part everyone finds so pretty and full of emotion don't you? It's the verse!) so that it fits your own style. After all, your interpretation of a song is the key to your success as a performer.

c. The Level Playing Field - How many covers do you need? How many originals? It all depends on your goal. If you want to book multiple clubs, you'll need a lot of material. I mean ALOT of material. But how do you decide how much is enough? What if you want to play one night a week at your local bar? Do you need covers? Do you need originals? All of your questions will be answered in this tutorial.

d. The Dreaded Setlist - This tutorial goes along with "The Level Playing Field" in the sense that ANY artist, whether a beginning performer or 20 year veteran needs to compose the perfect setlist. This list is what sets the framework for live playing, and is what keeps the audience wanting more. Setlists are quite difficult to create, but with my help you'll learn to create a setlist in UNDER 10 minutes - guaranteed!

(Exercise – name your first five to ten favorite bands and then go!)

My list:

1. **Dave Matthews Band** – maybe “Crash Into Me” or “Ants Marching”
2. **Blue October** – “Ugly Side” or “Hate Me”
3. **Foo Fighters** – “Everlong” or “Times Like These” or “My Hero”
4. **Tom Waits** – “Tom Traubert’s Blues” or “I Hope That I Don’t Fall In Love With You”
5. **Smashing Pumpkins** – “Disarm” or “Tonight, Tonight”

On reserve:

1. **James Taylor**
2. **Garth Brooks**
3. **Johnny Cash**
4. **Bob Dylan**
5. **The Beatles**
6. **Pink Floyd**
7. **Lady Antebellum**
8. **Neil Young**
9. **Lynyrd Skynyrd**
10. **Led Zeppelin**

By creating a list of YOUR favorite bands, the only thing left to do is organize them logically so that the styles within these bands flow nicely.

If I were playing at a small night club, such as a piano bar or something, I would organize this list like this:

1. **Pink Floyd** – NOT “Wish You Were Here” but more “Comfortably Numb” or “Another Brick...”
2. **The Beatles** – “And I Love Her” or maybe “Something”
3. **Johnny Cash** – “Folsom Prison Blues” or “God’s Gonna Cut You Down”
4. **ORIGINAL** – keep it rather low key!
5. **Garth Brooks** – “Friends In Low Places” or “Much Too Young...” would work here
6. **Bob Dylan** – “Just Like A Woman” or “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door”
7. **Dave Matthews Band** – “Crash Into Me” or “Ants Marching”
8. **ORIGINAL** – bring it up a little in terms of heaviness
9. **Neil Young (or Led Zeppelin)** – either bands would work here, just avoid “Stairway...”
10. **Foo Fighters** – “Times Like These” or “Everlong”
11. **Blue October** – “Hate Me” or “Ugly Side” (most people won’t know the latter)
12. **ORIGINAL** – BRING IT THIS TIME!
13. **Smashing Pumpkins** – “Disarm” or “Tonight, Tonight”
14. **Lady Antebellum (or Zac Brown Band)** – “Need You Now” or “Chicken Fried” (country and earnest always works!)

15. Lynyrd Skynyrd – NOT “Sweet Home Alabama” (PLEASE!) but maybe “Gimme Three Steps” or “Gimme Back My Bullets” or even...yes...”Simple Man.”
16. ORIGINAL – bring it back down a little bit
17. James Taylor – “Sweet Baby James” or “Fire and Rain” or even “Carolina In My Mind”
18. Tom Waits – end with a killer such as “Tom Traubert’s Blues” or “I Hope That I Don’t Fall In Love With You”

Again – these are songs that I would choose and doesn’t reflect your opinion obviously. However, what I’ve done here is brainstorm the bands I like, then applied some song choices to them. Don’t think of the song. Think of the band or artist. That will help tremendously.