

Project Two - Building a complete song

Objective - Our first project involved building an eight bar piece of music and arranging it for three backing instruments.

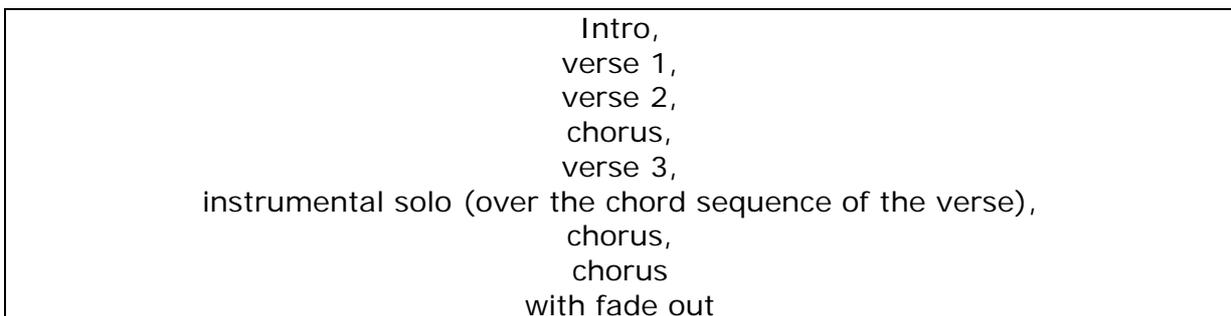
In this second project we will consider how we can extend this to form a complete song.

Step 1 - Exploring structure.

Most songs have a **verse and chorus structure**.

The verse takes the story or purpose of the song forward, whilst the chorus contains the songs essential message. This is reinforced by repetition between verses.

There may well be other sections: an introduction, a pre-chorus, a bridge or middle eight, etc. A common pattern might look like this:



See how much repetition there is! Basically, the whole song is built over two musical ideas: the verse and the chorus.

Teaching Topic 1 – Song Structure

Step 2 - Choosing your Chords

Getting to work on our song then we need two chord patterns to get us going. Usually the more catchy, livelier chords are used for the chorus. The less exciting chords can be used for the verses.

If you were happy with your eight bar sequence you could use this for either the verse or chorus.

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GarageBand for iOS will have made this an eight bar Song Section. Let us look more closely at this.

The + sign opens a menu that at this stage would show Section A 8 bars. Below that are two options: Duplicate or Add.

- Duplicate makes another 8 bar section, labelled section B with the same music you have in section A.
- Add gives a new section with 8 that is blank. By default all sections are 8 bars. This can be changed using the > sign after the number 8.

We will come back to this menu when we are planning the order of sections (verses and choruses).

First we need to consider your contrasting B section.

In the first exercise you were encouraged to limit your chords to no more than four with one of them being the key chord of C major.

Let's look at the options.



GarageBand for iOS lays chords out in a sequence known to musicians as the cycle of fifths.

Each chord has an affinity with its neighbour, so in general choosing adjacent chords will work well. Apart from Bb, all the chords are in the key of C major.

The first three chords have the letter *m* - they are minor chords. They have a more sombre quality than the major chords. These are denoted just using a capital letter.

The final chord Bdim is a minor chord with a diminished (flattened) fifth. It works well with G major where the combined chord gives a dominant seventh, a strong chord to use before the key chord.

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As well as choice of chords you could consider the frequency of change. This might be as little as once every four bars to, in some places, maybe twice a bar. As you are experimenting with chords, remain open to the melodic lines that you might be able to build.



More ambitious musicians might like to explore the custom chord tool in Song Settings. Here you will find a wide range of harmony options including the option to add a 7th to your G major.

If we are working on a song we really should have some words sketched out too. Again the words might suggest a rhythm and melodic shape.

Teaching Topic 2 – More advanced chords (Bdim and seventh chords)

In our first exercise we used the auto chord accompaniments in our recording.

Let's use play the chord columns directly this time, the keyboards can have more than one finger and the guitars can be strummed or struck on the chord header letter.

Which comes first?
 Words, melody or
 harmony.

The answer is - it
 can be any of these.



The bass offers different notes on its four strings. Experienced musicians will hear that these are the root of the chord on the lowest, thickest string, then the fifth, the octave and the octave plus third. If you want to keep it simple and musically strong, go for the root note on the bottom string.

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Step 3 - The Drum part

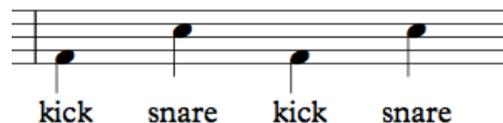
Drums can be quite rewarding to play and will give an insight as to how a drummer goes about building a groove. So we are going to select real drums choosing classic studio kit from the six possible drum options.



Drums have a default setting in the Quantization set to 16ths, meaning that whatever you play will be corrected to the nearest semi-quaver. Your playing will always be accurate and in time! The other default setting (pull down the menu with the faders icon) is Merge is set to on. Merge means a recording can be accumulated over several passes; you do not have to record everything at once.

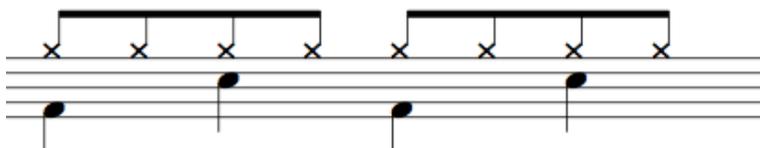
Let's get acquainted with the elements of a drum kit. Access the help sign (?) which will label each drum. The kick and snare provide the basic rhythmic signature, generally alternating between kick on the beat and snare off.

The simplest pattern would be just that:



This then could be what you lay down in the first recorded pass.

The hi-hat and the ride cymbals are used to fill out the pulse either every beat or half beat.



This is how a drummer would write this rhythm using standard notation for kit percussion

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A standard pattern could be four closed hi-hats with a final half beat open hi-hat.

Record this on the second pass.

Finally, the crash and the tom-toms are used for fills and highlights. Record them on a separate track as needed.

With the chords, bass and drums recorded, it is time to plan the overall structure of our song.

Step 4 - Planning the song's structure

Although GarageBand for iOS Song Sections are labelled alphabetically with no repeated letters, we could simply describe our plan as comprising of section A and section B.

Arranging these in a simple and common pattern might be described like this: AABA.

In the absence of anything more definite this could be a good pattern to adopt for this exercise. In GarageBand for iOS's lettering system we would have to duplicate section A twice. They would be lettered C and D. To change their order, go to edit and touch the icon with the three grey strips. Finally, select all regions to view the whole project.



Whether you adopt this fairly simple plan or a more extended exercise, now is the moment to get it into its finished shape ahead of work on the melody.



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Step 5 - The melody line

We have two options depending on whether we have a viable song i.e. we have some words and a singer who has devised a melodic line that works over the two parts of the song.

If that is the case we need to consider the recording practicalities. Headphones for monitoring and a quiet space are needed for the recording.



Option one - vocals.

Choose the Audio Recorder 'instrument' with the old school mic image. With the headphones for hearing the existing tracks, return the play head to the beginning and press record to begin. You might prefer to hear your recorded voice in the monitor mix in which case click on the jack plug button and slide the monitor option to 'On'.



If you make a mistake, you can set the play head to a suitable point and continue from there. Each time you stop the play head automatically returns to your most recent start point saving you time in resetting it manually.

Option two - an instrumental improvisation.

Choose an instrument with a prominent sustained sound. We suggest one of the synth sounds for this but it could be an electric guitar or a stringed instrument.

This is a good moment to introduce GarageBand for iOS's scale feature. On the smart instruments, this is accessed via Notes. It brings up a list of nine scale presets that display a playing surface that excludes all notes not in the selected scale.

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I know we are by default in C major which means the major scale consists of the white notes but on the guitar and stringed instruments non players will benefit from this help. The scales that are likely to work best are major, mixolydian (a major scale with a flattened seventh), major pentatonic and possibly the major blues scale. Experiment with all of them.

If you are using the keyboard, the scales keyboard strips out all black notes highlighting just the key note at each octave.



Guitars and strings retain their strings though they are tuned in thirds. What this means is a scale is made by playing two notes per string. Alternatively, notes can be accessed in a linear manner, moving along the string.

Experimentation is the name of the game. That is exactly what improvising is; there are no wrong notes - particularly now that we have cut out everything outside the key!

You can either record everything, discarding what you don't like or you can establish a melody line that works for you and then record it.

Step 6 - Final editing

When the recording is done, there is still some tidying up to do.

Firstly, are you happy with the arrangement? Do the repeated sections want to be exactly the same or could a part be taken out (deleted) for contrast?

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Then we need to position each instrument in across the stereo spectrum. This is called pan position and is found in track settings. Where we also find track volume to balance the track within the overall mix. While this window is open you might like to adjust the reverb and echo.

Teaching Topic 3 – More Scales (mixolydian, major pentatonic and blues scale in C)

Finally hit My Song to save.

Rename the song with a more memorable name and consider whether you wish to share you masterpiece with the world!