BandLab Case Study - 14 March 2018

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I've used BandLab a few times to record some of my own stuff. And being familiar with more powerful desktop DAWs like Protools and Sonar, I have to say that I was extremely impressed at what this app could do. I did notice that at first, I had a few hiccups in the navigation of the app, so I decided to take a free with my 1D copy of it to see what was keeping me from getting to that musical goodness as fast as possible.

The First Look

The first thing I wanted to do was just to look around and see what was possible on the app, it's an enormous project! There are so many amazing features and yet I felt it was almost too difficult to find all of them. Because I could spend forever discussing each page, I decided for this case study to take a look at the biggest difficulty I personally had while using the app – the navigation.

My initial thinking was there are two main types of users, creators and listeners. Here's what I noticed from their perspectives on main page:

As a creator
It's confusing – where do I start? If I click on the "+" from a blank project, I'm just stuck with a blank screen.
(preferred by 2/3 users)

As a listener
Why would I follow these people? – I don't know anyone on this platform so I don't know who to follow.
(preferred by 1/3 users)

The problem on the front page is that there is not enough to do, which is ironic because there's just so much to do with this app. But at this glance I don't know where to go to "create" or "listen".

So I added a navigation bar that displays some options outright. A Bottom Navigation Bar is used in both Android and iOS users.
(preferred by 3/3 users)

While the navigation bar helps at knowing what's possible, but I still don't see how to record stuff. Personally, I don't feel like a "Who to Follow" is the most important part of the app, and yet it's the only thing on our main page. So that begs the question, what are the most important parts of the app? Here's the results of a quick brainstorm:

BandLab Goals
Give creators tools to create
Allow listeners to discover
Allow creators to collaborate (now I didn't think of this at first, kind of a combination of creators and listeners)

Features (ordered by importance, as seen on the Play Store Description)
Multi-track recording
Discover musicians/bits you enjoy
Collaborate with others
Competitions
Remix/fork tracks
Collections
Playlists

I like the word Remix better – it's more universally known. Fork is a GitHub term.
(preferred by 2/3 users)

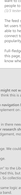
These top features should be what users see upfront. There shouldn't be any guessing as to how to record, discover, and collaborate. I created some personas as initial "best cases" to represent the people using these features. I had some testers take on these personas and try to fulfill their needs.

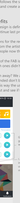
Personas	Needs	User-driven Difficulties
Creators Nicholas is a guy fresh out of college. He's always jamming in his free time. He just wants to mess around with different guitar sounds and jamming to his own beats.	Multitrack recording	Can't find the create project option
Collaborators Kai is a teenage drummer that loves creating beats with his friends. He's still learning how to get anything substantial done by himself with just drums. He wants to find people to collaborate with him so that he can make entire songs rather than just drum beats.	Multitrack recording Finding people who need a hard rock drummer (collaborate)	Can't find hard rock people (hidden in the search bar, no clear direction)
Listeners Elise is a jazz pianist, and is always on the lookout for new, fresh jazz improv. She hopes that as she continues to listen, she'll be able to improve her own skills and improvise.	A consistent jazz feed	They looked at other things besides the general feed, like "Discover New Musicians"
Eric is in charge of the K-Capella club in his university. He wants to make more arrangements, and hopes that he can find some inspiration from recent things.	Find A Cappella artists and songs to listen to	Can't find A Cappella people, since it's not a listed genre

Goal: Each persona can fulfill their need either on the front page, or know where to go for it on another page.

There are definitely more types of users than this, but I feel these cover some good ground. With these people in mind, I want to think of a few ways that the app could improve upon their first time. Creating an Audio Project is so integral to this app, that I think it should be on the front page. So what should it go?

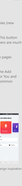
This app is interesting because it's so social. So I go to the hot social apps and check out how their front pages is and take what I like going on:





With these in mind, I came up with some similarities. As I went through some different ideas, I'm mostly inspired by the Facebook page, with both creating and consuming both in one page. I'm trying to get as much value as I can for these 4 personas' needs. We don't want to change too much of the UI, since there are 1+ million users on the platform. So we need to keep things as familiar as possible while still giving them a smoother navigation experience. I'll mix existing UI with wireframe just to brainstorm (and rationalize the personas' general needs for easy access).

Needs	How These Needs Are Met
Multitrack recording	New Project is much more apparent, and added a continue last project for frequent users.
Finding Collaborators you need or who need you.	"Recommended for you" adds more purpose. We add a play button as users know they are considering. Because you are a Guitarist/Lyricist for the Bottom/Rap/Jazz/Blues.
A consistent genre feed	The feed stays about the same, but the Customize button can let users break what kind of feed they want, they might be able to help us know the kinds of people they might want to connect to (e.g. Experimental Collaborators, certain genres, popularity, etc).
Find genre artists and songs to listen to	Full-Ranged discover features might be too much to cram in this page, but the Explore Tab that's now showing lets users know where to go.



Accolade Idea – Different Feed Sources would be nice
Discover
Discover Feed
Trending Posts Feed

Potential Design Flaws

Some of these changes to the discover/explore page might not want to use the "New Project" and "Continue Project". It might take up real estate that they will want to use for more discover features. But that is not current, but you never know.

Along the lines of real estate, the **bottom navigation bar takes up more space**. But the scroll down to hide feature that a lot of navigation bars have is quite simple to implement – on Android devices, assuming we use a CoordinatorLayout for the BottomNavigationView.

With the FAB gone, the actions that were in there need to be placed somewhere. There might be a slight learning curve for older users to find where they are. Also, **further research should be done on how removing the FAB from other pages affects the navigation experience**. Using my best judgement, moving the FAB items should not cause too much of an issue. So where do the FAB items move to?

Start Project – Moves to the home page. We could add another "Start Project" to the Library Tab.

Give a Shout – Moves to the home page.

Collections – Moving "New Collection" to the Library where you see all your other collections would be a good place. Adding collections to songs would be a multi-step process, but it's a fairly rare action. Plus, the actual act of creating a collection, for collections usually starts from a song pool, and isn't needed in a FAB.

New Band – I think this follows the same logic as the Collections. You either find your members first, or go to the Library and create a band.

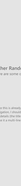
Potential Design Benefits

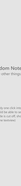
The main beneficiary of this design is definitely the Creator. **Creating content is really accessible now**. Both for newbies (new project) and for vet users (continue last project).

I feel some of the new additions for the Recommended page are boss, especially the "Play Sample Work" button. This button would play a featured song, or a random one if they don't have any. Now Youtube has featured videos for a channel. Listeners are much **more likely to follow** these people now that they have an instant way to listen to their work.

I think overall the elimination of the FAB is a good thing. Creators **have more consistency**, because you never know which pages would have the FAB and which ones didn't.

So, can more be added? Seen away? We added it to the page, but I don't feel it's necessarily cluttered. Perhaps the Add Project, Shout, and Recommended don't belong in the same place. If anything, I would remove the Recommended for You and Trending Posts from the Discover page. Trending Posts is a great feature, but it's a little confusing to have two different discover actions available. It's fresh it out and see if there's that clustering problem.



Since the user is new to the app, I added descriptions to the actions.

I added descriptions to the actions, but I'm uncertain on that the average user would understand.