

Expert Sleepers — ES-9

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Expert Sleepers ES-9: Creating Full-Length Eurorack Songs

The Expert Sleepers ES-9 is a powerful audio interface tailored for Eurorack environments, combining multichannel audio I/O, robust internal mixing, and flexible MIDI connectivity. While its primary role is often as a bridge to a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) or iOS device, careful use of its features can play a key part in composing, structuring, and performing complete modular songs.

Below, I'll analyze features from the manual and propose creative strategies—especially for arranging and structuring full-length songs when integrated with other modules.

Key Features & Their Musical Value

Multichannel Audio Input/Output

- **14 DC-coupled inputs / 12 outputs (8x 3.5mm DC-coupled, 2x balanced)**
- **USB audio interface (16 in / 16 out)**
- **Mixers, busses, flexible routing**

How this Helps:

Route multiple voices (e.g. basslines, lead, percussion, effects, CV) into

individual DAW tracks or sum and remix inside the ES-9, allowing you to record and automate multiple stems for advanced song arrangement.

Internal Mixers & Routing

- **Two 8x8 mixers (if S/PDIF is disabled)**
- **Routing between physical IO, USB, busses, and mixers**

Song Structuring Tricks: - **Dynamic Song Parts:** Mute/unmute mixer channels, swap between two saved configurations (hosted/standalone), or use MIDI to fade/move sounds between parts (intro, drop, breakdown, etc). - **On-the-fly Remixes:** Change what is sent to the main/phones/aux outs—e.g., drop out the kick, boost the reverb return, add new timbres.

Scene/Configuration Switching

- **Push-hold main knob switches between two pre-saved configurations**

Arrangement Use:

Instantly switch between two entire routing/mixing setups—perfect for toggling between "A" (e.g., verse) and "B" (chorus/breakdown) patterns for live sets.

MIDI CC Mixer Control

- **Remote mix automation from a MIDI controller/sequencer**
- **Up to 64 CCs for fader/pan/level control**

Practical Uses: - Use an external MIDI sequencer (e.g., Arturia Beatstep Pro) to mute, solo, or fade in/out stems over a song's timeline. - Program pattern-based scene changes by sending CCs for arrangement (e.g., silent breakdown, FX send bursts, complex transitions).

DAW & Hybrid Workflow

- **Tight integration with DAW/iOS for multitrack I/O**
- **Immediate resampling and live capture**

For Full Songs: - Record modular stems in the DAW, arrange/copy segments, add effects, and then, if desired, send back to modular for hybrid performances or reprocessing. - Automate ES-9's mix via your DAW, essentially treating the modular setup as a DAW-recallable instrument.

S/PDIF Digital & Headphone Out

- **Digital expandability; independent headphone cueing**

Use for Structure: - Route a special element (click track, cue mix) to headphones only—practice transitions, monitor a sidechain beat, or solo elements for performance.

Practical Song Arrangement Techniques with the ES-9

1. Modular Song Mode Swapper

- Save two radically different routings/mixes:
- **Config 1:** Standard groove/verse structure.
- **Config 2:** Add/drop voices, reverb wash, FX, or switch to a breakdown.
- Use the push-button to fluidly shift between these during a live set.

2. MIDI Scenes & Automated Mixing

- Set up MIDI CC sequences to:
- Gradually transpose synth voices.
- Mute or fade percussion.
- Send CV/LFOs to modulate pan/level of voices in time with the song.
- Use an external MIDI sequencer or DAW to automate structure, “playing” your mix and transitions live or from pre-programmed clips.

3. Hybrid Sequencing

- Sequence voices in the modular.
- Multitrack record into DAW via ES-9, edit/cut/paste to form structure.
- Route DAW tracks back to modular for real-time filter/EQ/FX via ES-9, recompose, and re-record for a hybrid electroacoustic feel.

4. Performance-Ready Live Sets

- Assign:
- Background textures and evolving pads to one mixer.
- Percussion/bass to another.
- Alternate between “mix blocks,” use ES-9’s routing/summing to crossfade, perform drop-ins, or quickly mute/unmute entire voices without repatching.

5. Advanced Song Evolution

- The ES-9’s internal EQ, DC offset, and mix smoothing can be modulated live or via MIDI, meaning your mix can evolve in character (more saturated, filtered, etc.).
- Use mix smoothing to avoid clicks/pops during abrupt changes, ensuring pro-sounding transitions.

Example Song Structure Workflow

1. **Build Modular Patch:** Multiple voice generators and sequencers patched into ES-9 inputs.
2. **Record Modular Jam via ES-9:** Capture stems to DAW, improvising with muting/mixer controls.
3. **Arrange in DAW:** Chop, repeat, and move sections for song length.
4. **Automate Mix (Optional):** Use DAW or MIDI controller to morph the song—fading out the bass, isolating the melody, layering FX, or morphing the structure.

5. **Bounce to Stereo:** Play back through ES-9, reprocess with filters/FX, or perform on stage, using configuration switching for bold changes.
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Integration Ideas with Other Eurorack Modules

- **Switches/Sequential Switches:** Use with ES-9 mixers for stepping/bursting between sound sources.
 - **Sampler/Looper Modules:** Sample phrases, then remix and re-perform sections through ES-9.
 - **Function Generators/LFOs:** Modulate mixer channel levels for organic, evolving arrangements.
 - **Logic/Trigger Modules:** Program automated scene changes, or even patch triggers to send MIDI through breakout, interacting with external gear.
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Conclusion

The ES-9 isn't just a transparent digital I/O—it's a compositional and performative tool, able to structure and morph full-length modular tracks via mixing, MIDI, and hybrid workflows. Its flexibility enables you to "play the song" just as much as any voice or sequencer modules in your rack.

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