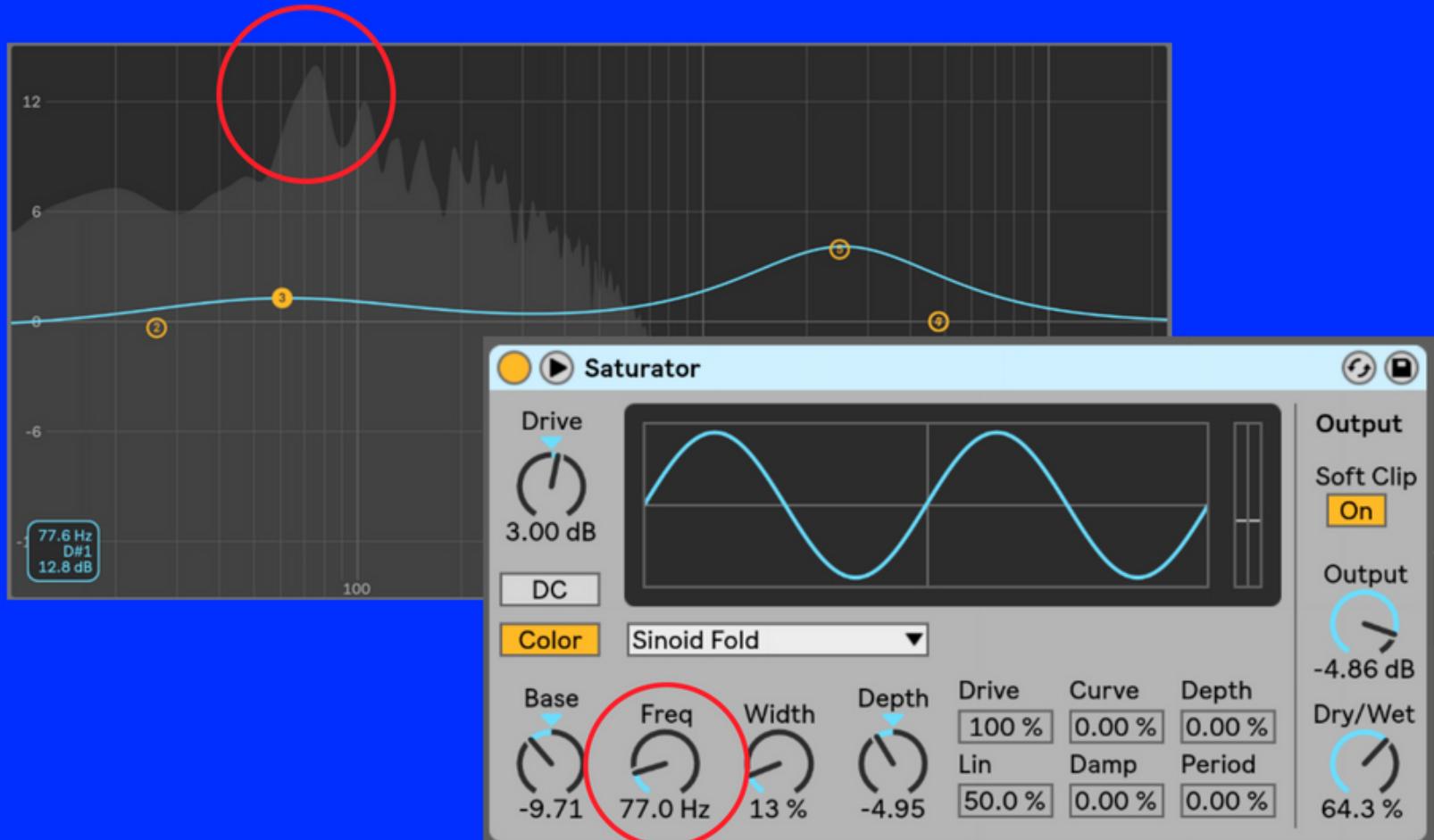




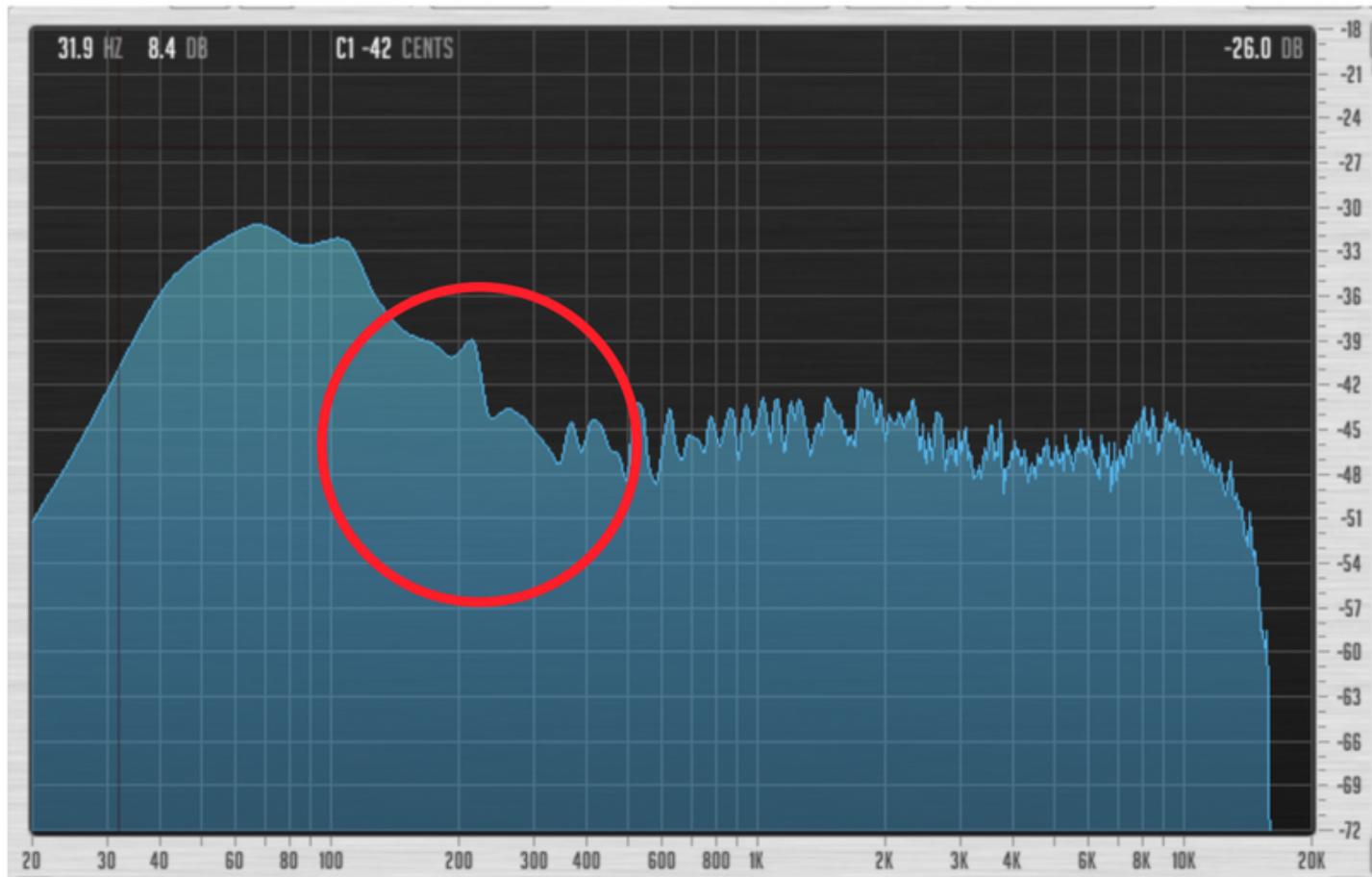
101 Music Production Tips and Tricks

SATURATION TRICK



When processing a bass, experiment with saturating the root frequency of the sound in order to add tonal distortion and grit to the bass.

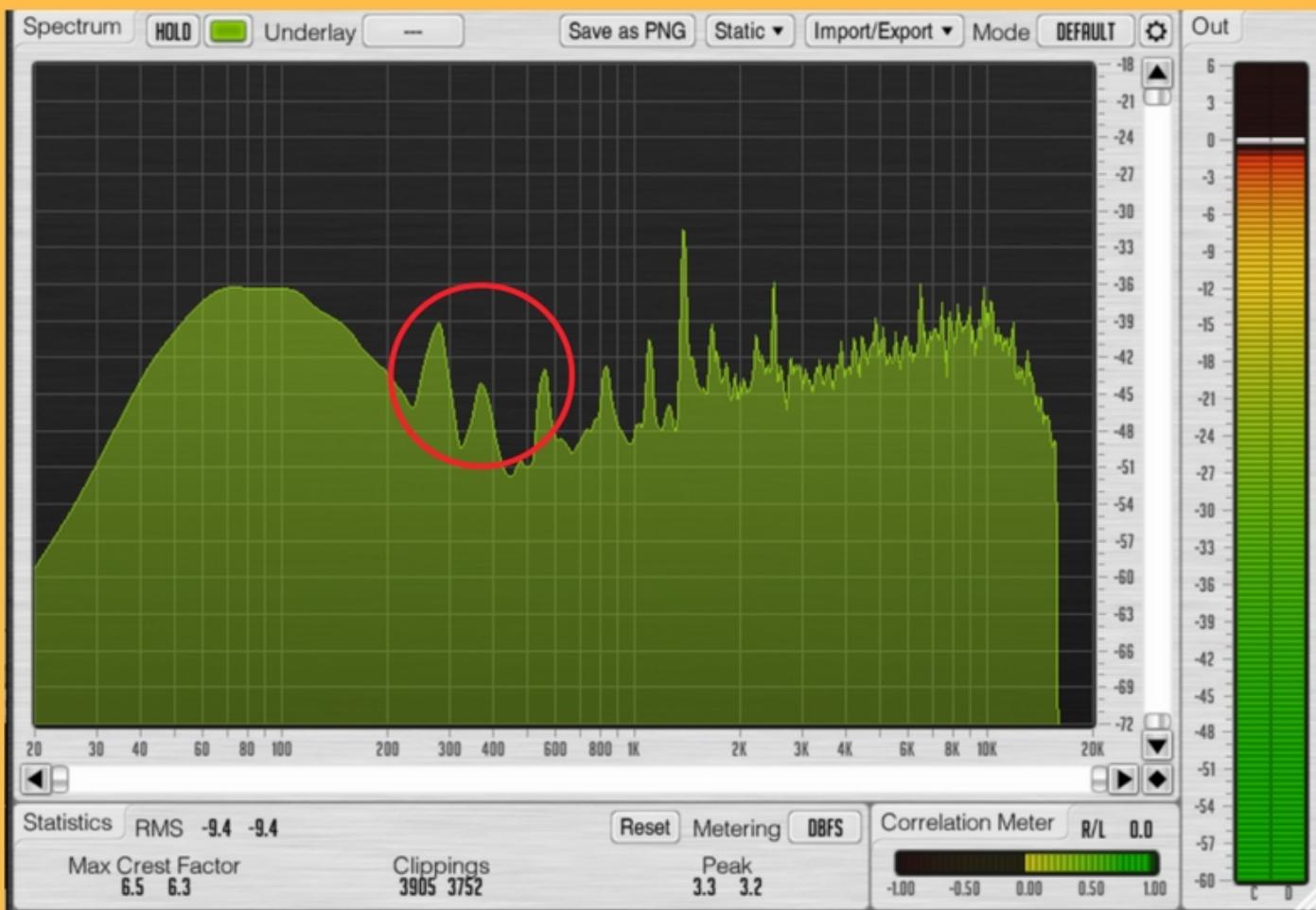
MIXING TIP



If your mix sounds too "muddy" try **reducing frequencies between 100 - 500 Hz**. This is one of the business areas because almost every sound has frequencies in this range.



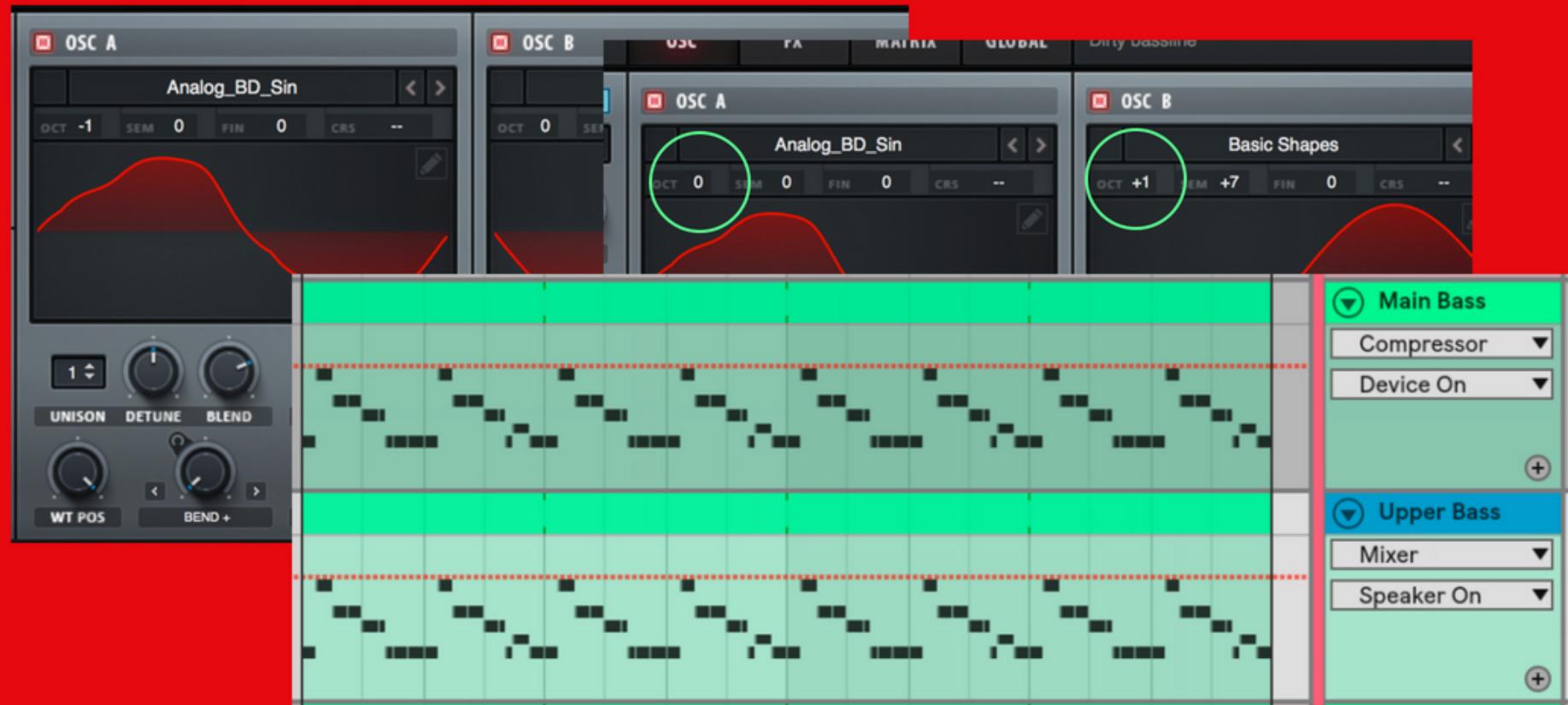
MIXING TIP



Be careful between 270 - 400 Hz as it is a very busy frequency range and almost every instrument has frequencies in this area



BASSLINE TRICK



In order to make your bassline more audible on smaller speakers (phone, laptop, ect), duplicate your bass. Pitch this layer up one octave and remove the low end with an EQ. Adjust the volume and blend in to taste.



MASTERING TRICK



If you need a little extra volume, try adjusting the lookahead, attack, and release of your limiter. Shorter lookahead, longer attack time, and shorter release times will give the loudest results.

PROCESSING TIP



To add subtle harmonic distortion and brighten up the high end of your mix, try using an Exciter. An Exciter allows you to easily add punch, warmth, brightness, and presence to your track without muddying up the sound.

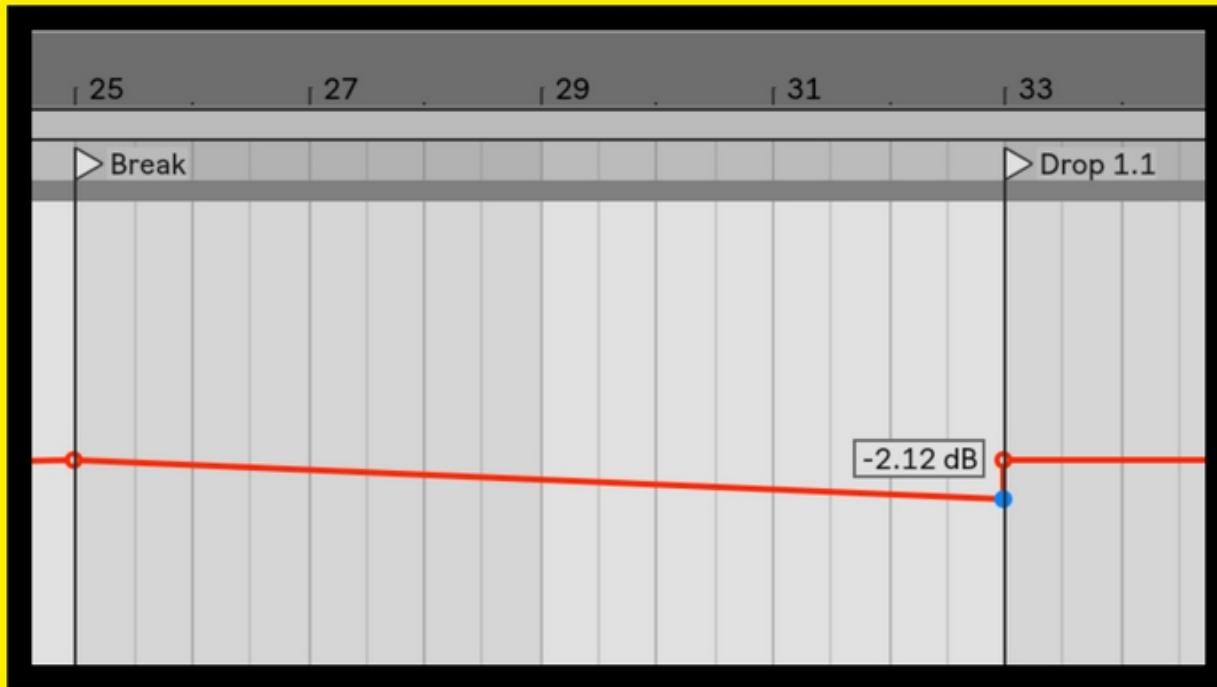
VOCALS TRICK



For smooth vocal transitions, try using a reverse. To do this, resample the first syllable in your vocal with lots of reverb. Then reverse this new clip, place it in front of your main vocal and fade in to taste.

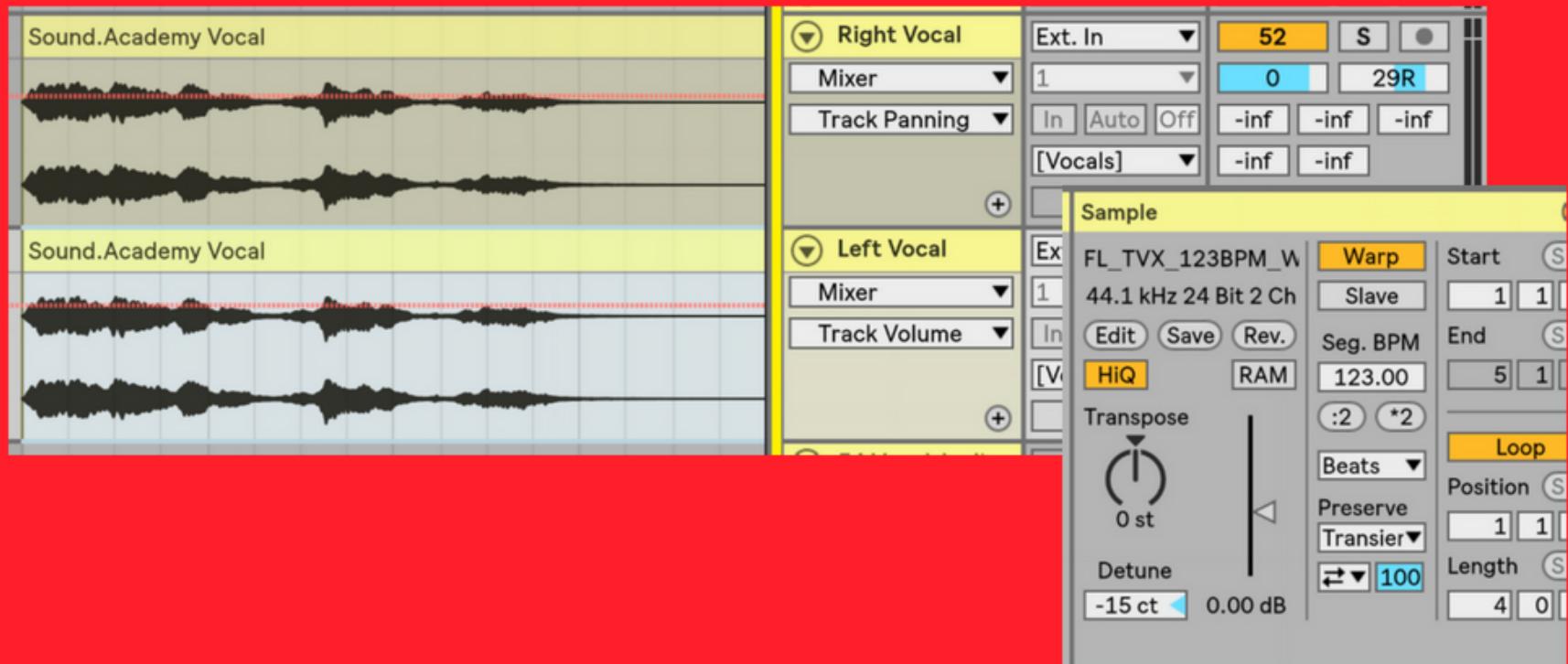


MAKE BIGGER DROPS



Try automating the volume of your track down by 1-3 dB over the course of the build. When the drop comes in at full volume, it will seem much bigger and louder.

WIDENING TRICK

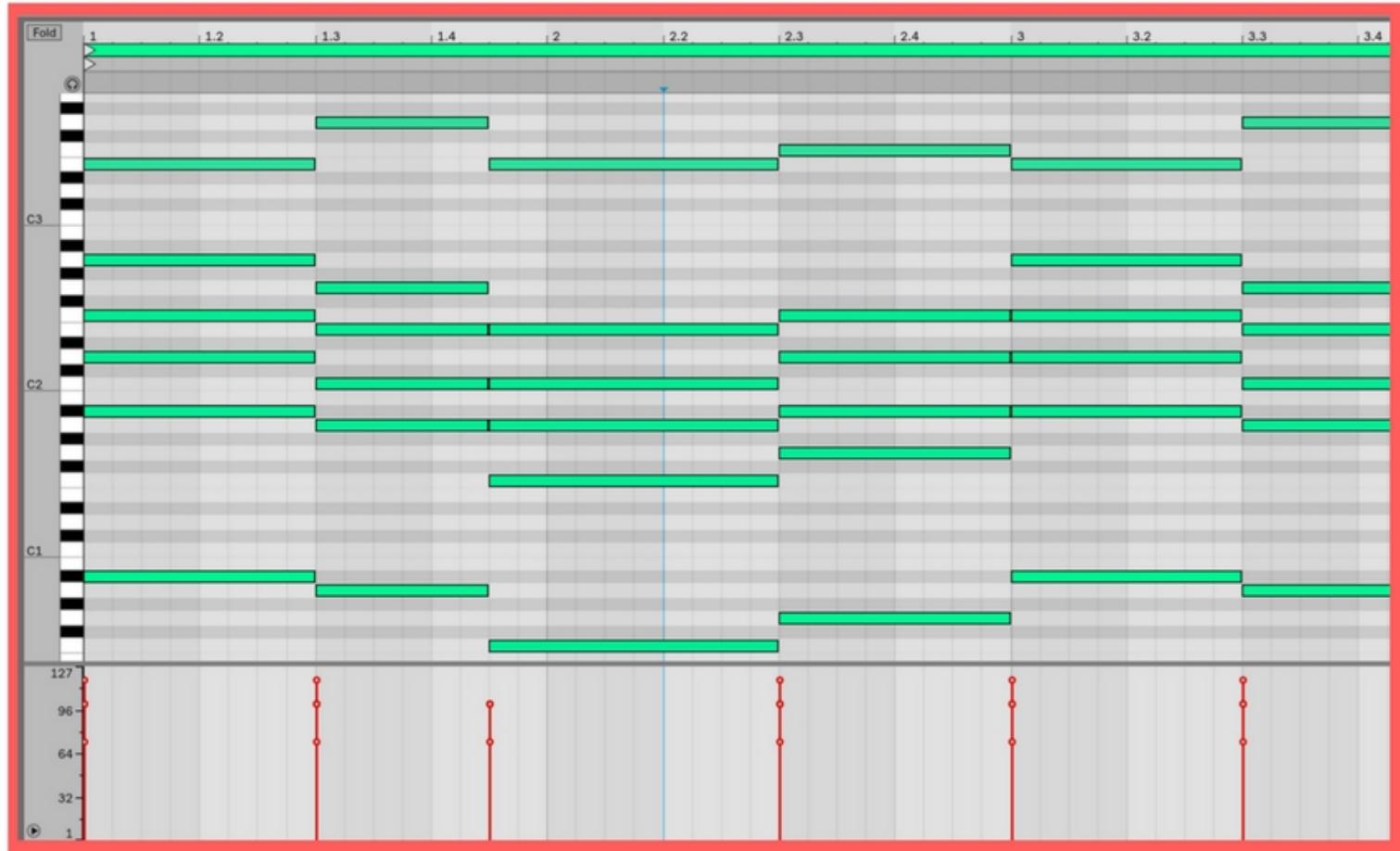


To add width to a sample, try duplicating it and panning each to different sides of the stereo field. Pitch one side up ~15 cents and the other down ~15 cents. Finally, add a slight 5-10ms delay to one side.



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MUSIC THEORY TRICK



To give your chord progressions a darker feel, increase the velocity of the bottom notes.



DELAY TIP



Using an EQ to make a small reduction on your delays between 2-5 kHz will tuck them in to the mix creating depth without being too obvious.



REVERB TRICK



Automate the reverb time throughout the track; longer times for the chorus to create more depth and sustain - shorten the reverb to clean up when there's a lot of things going on at the same time.

MIXING TIP



**Every sound in your mix
must serve a specific
purpose in order for your
song to be meaningful.**

SAMPLE ORGANIZATION



Create a personalized folder for all of your favorite samples. To get started, go back through all your old projects and put your favorite samples from each project in this folder. Having a folder of go-to samples will speed up your workflow dramatically when producing.

VOCAL EQ GUIDE

Boost

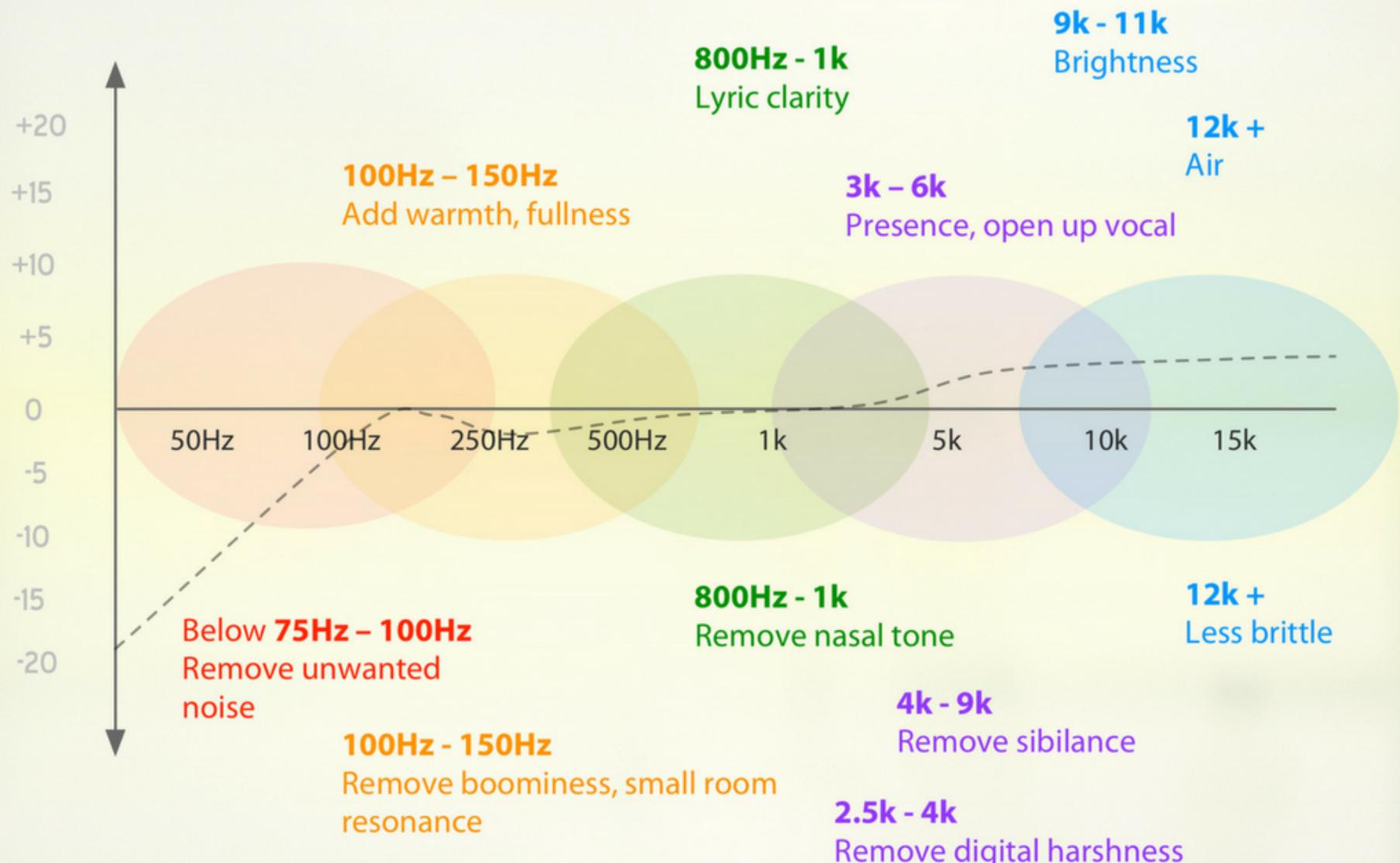
LF

LMF

MF

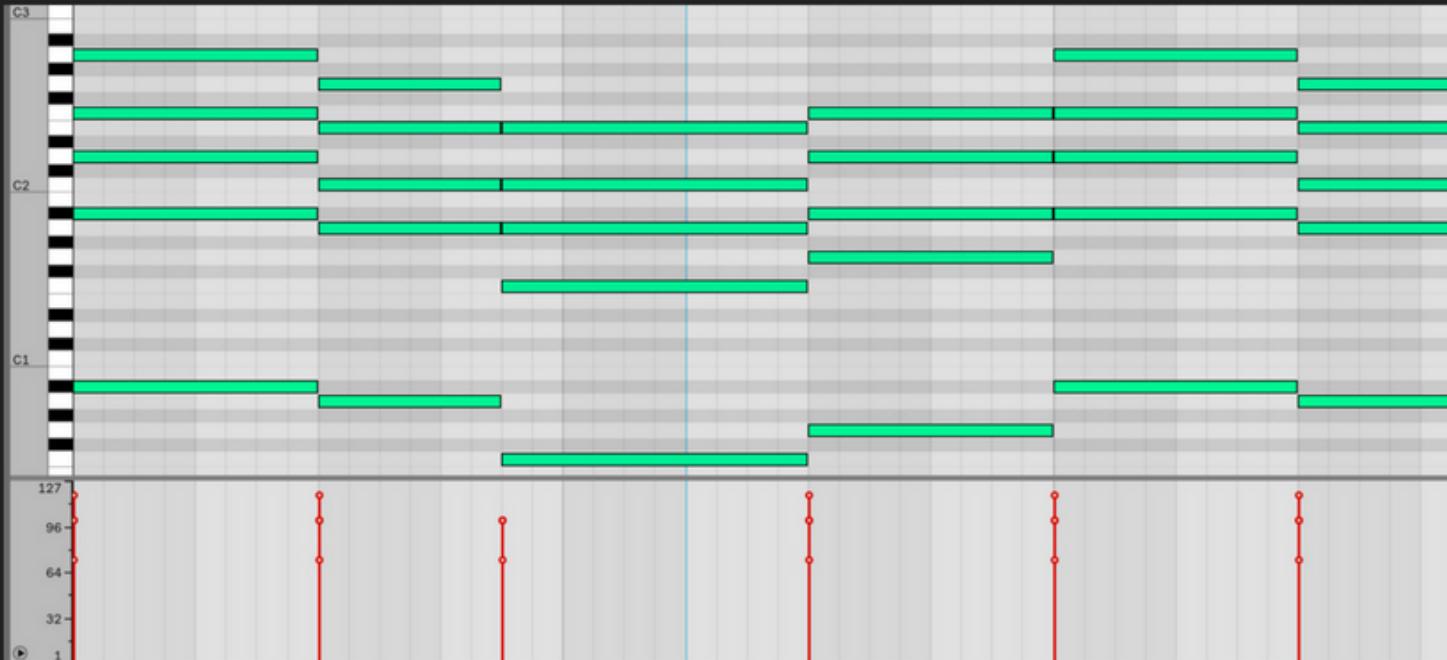
HMF

HF



Cut

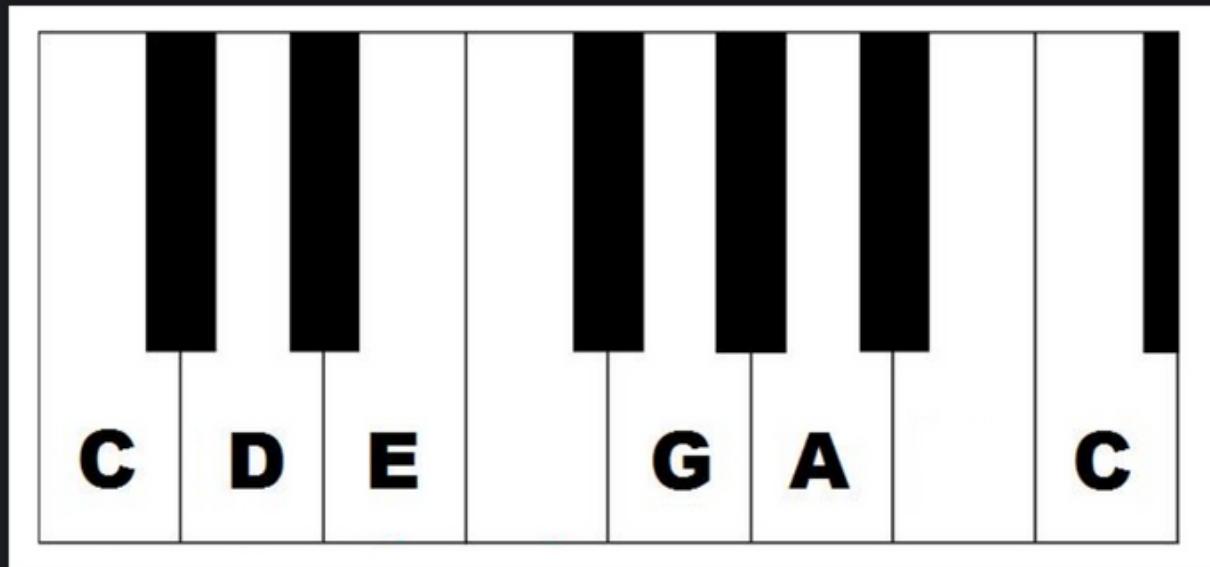
CHORDS TRICK



To give your chords a darker feel,
try increasing the velocity of the
bottom notes.

MUSIC THEORY

C Major Pentatonic Scale



Creating melodies with pentatonic scales is easy. To define a pentatonic scale, start at any note and move up the keyboard in note spacing:

2 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 3

Although pentatonic scales are simple, they can be extremely compelling.

How to Move a Sound Forward in Your Mix



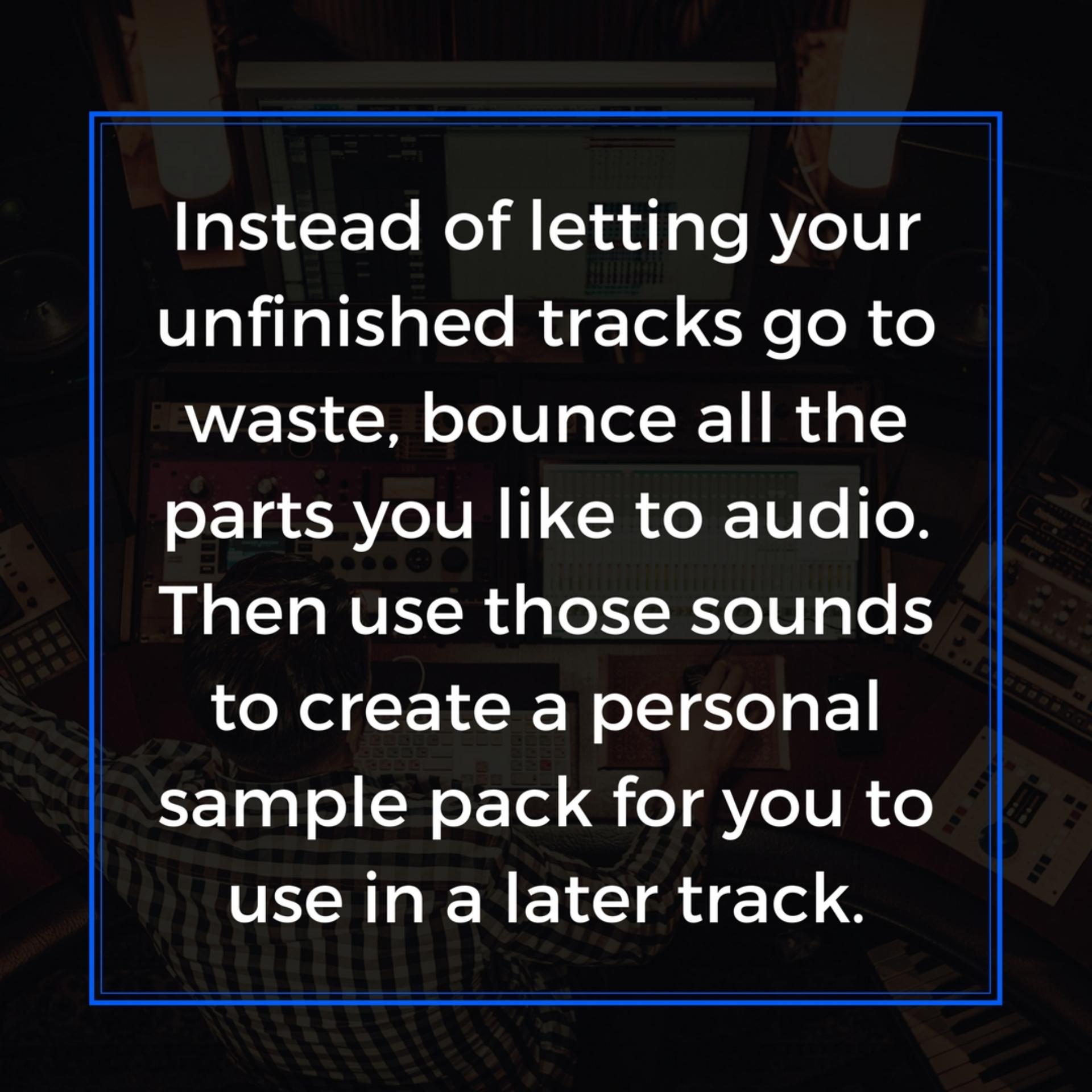
- Automate a low pass filter opening
- Slowly increase the volume
- Decrease the dry/wet on the reverb



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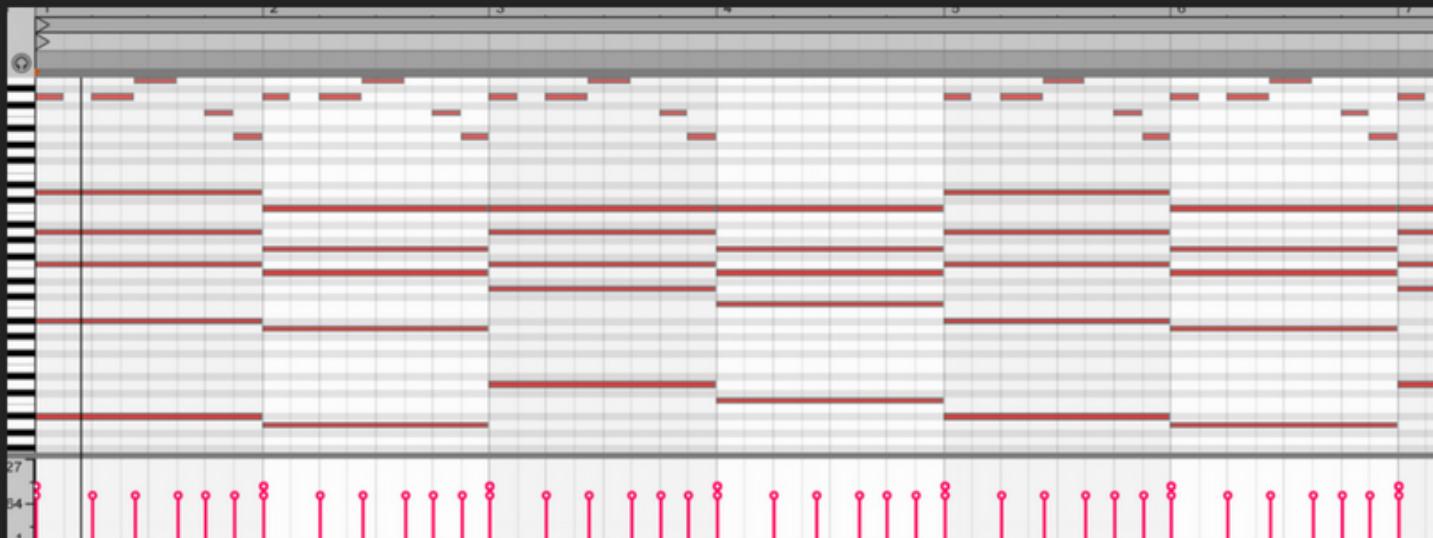
TYPES OF REVERB

- Small rooms and short plates create the "**front**" of the mix
- Medium rooms and medium plates create the **middle** part of the mix
- Large rooms, halls, chambers and plates create the "**back**" of the mix

A photograph of a person from the side, wearing a black and white checkered shirt. They are seated at a keyboard, with their hands resting on the keys. The background is a studio environment with various pieces of audio equipment, including a rack of synthesizers and a computer monitor displaying digital audio software. The lighting is warm and focused on the person and the equipment.

Instead of letting your unfinished tracks go to waste, bounce all the parts you like to audio. Then use those sounds to create a personal sample pack for you to use in a later track.

WORKFLOW TRICK



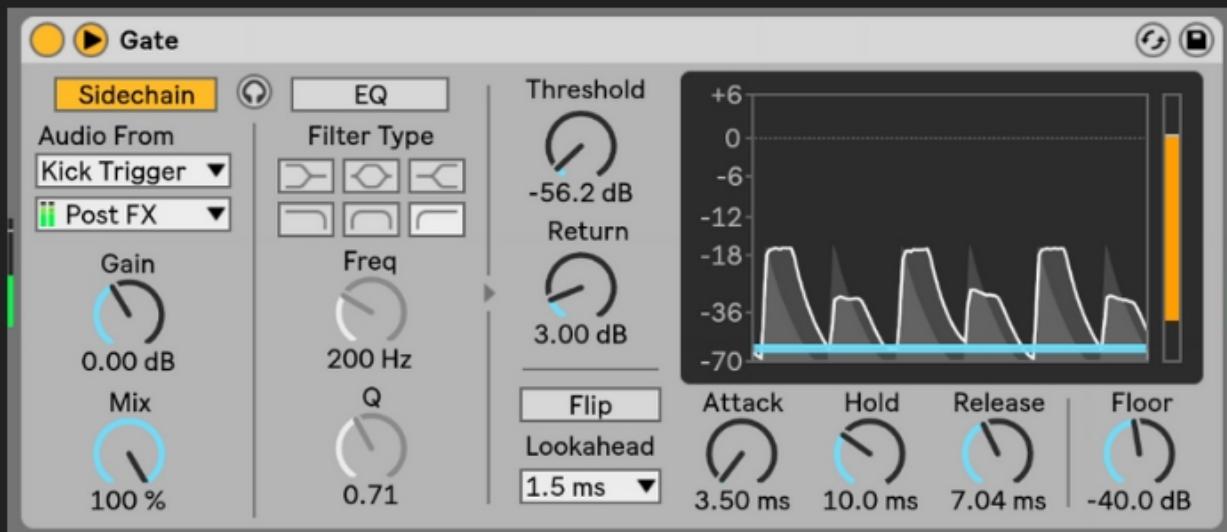
When starting a new track, try creating your entire chord progression and melody in a single MIDI clip before arranging.

MIXING TIP



When EQing, it's more important how an instrument sounds **in the context of the whole mix**, rather than just by itself

SIDECHAIN TIP



To gain more control over the tail of your lead sounds, **try sidechaining with a Gate**. Use a short attack time and play around with the release. This will help clean up your mix and minimize muddiness.

EQ TRICK



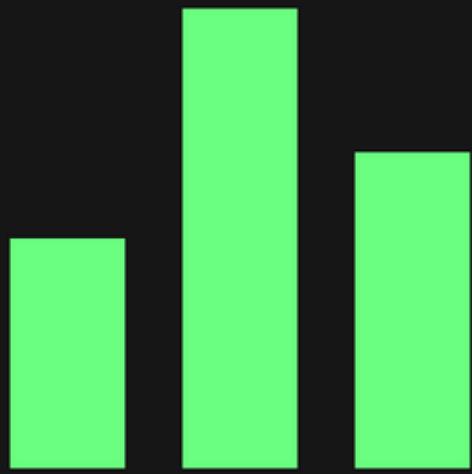
To add width to a sound, try using a Left/Right EQ. Creating slight differences between the left and right sides make the sound appear to be wider.

EQ TRICK



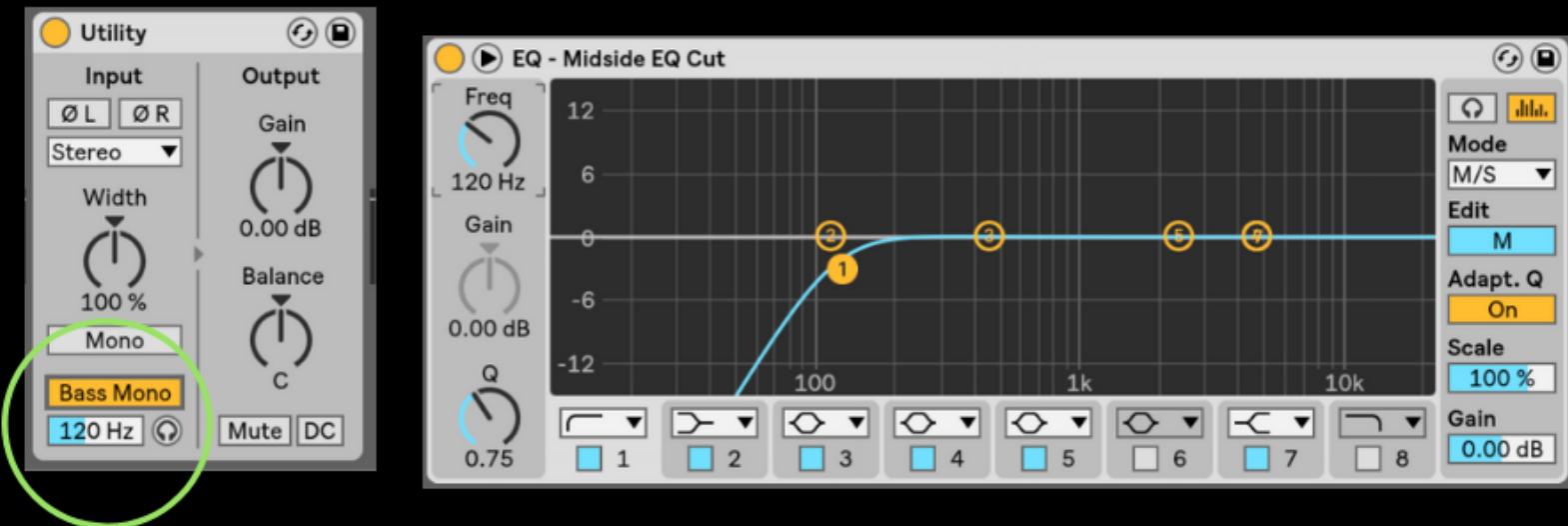
To add width to a sound, try using a Left/Right EQ. Creating slight differences between the left and right sides make the sound appear to be wider.

MIXING TIP



How an instrument sounds in the mix with everything else is always more important than how that instrument sounds by itself.

MIXING TIP



When mixing your track, set your frequencies below ~120 Hz to mono. It will help you create a tighter mix while maximizing available headroom. Sub bass is also an omni-directional sound, which means that you cannot tell which direction it is coming from.



PUNCHY KICK TRICK



To help your kick punch through the mix more, use an EQ to subtract the fundamental frequency of that kick from other elements in that frequency range (bass, sub, ect).

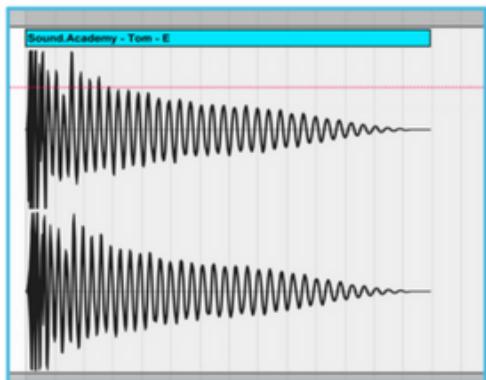
EQ TIP



When boosting the high end with an EQ, **you should also make a high cut**. Boosting the highs with a high shelf, for example, will add a lot of unnecessary air to the sound. Using a high cut is a transparent way to tame these high end frequencies.

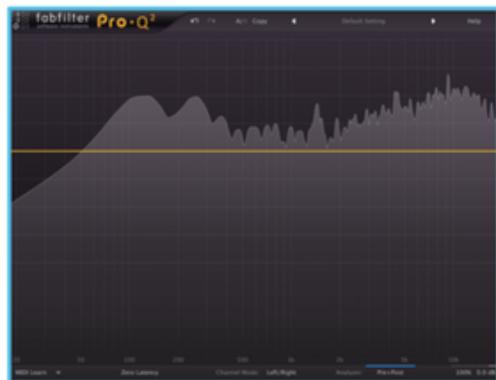
How To EQ

LISTEN



- Use your ears, tuning into specific frequency ranges
- Reference your drums by listening to similar drums from other tracks

LOOK



- Use an EQ or spectrum analyzer to view your sound's frequencies
- Pay close attention to any areas missing or any peaks sticking out too much

SWEEP



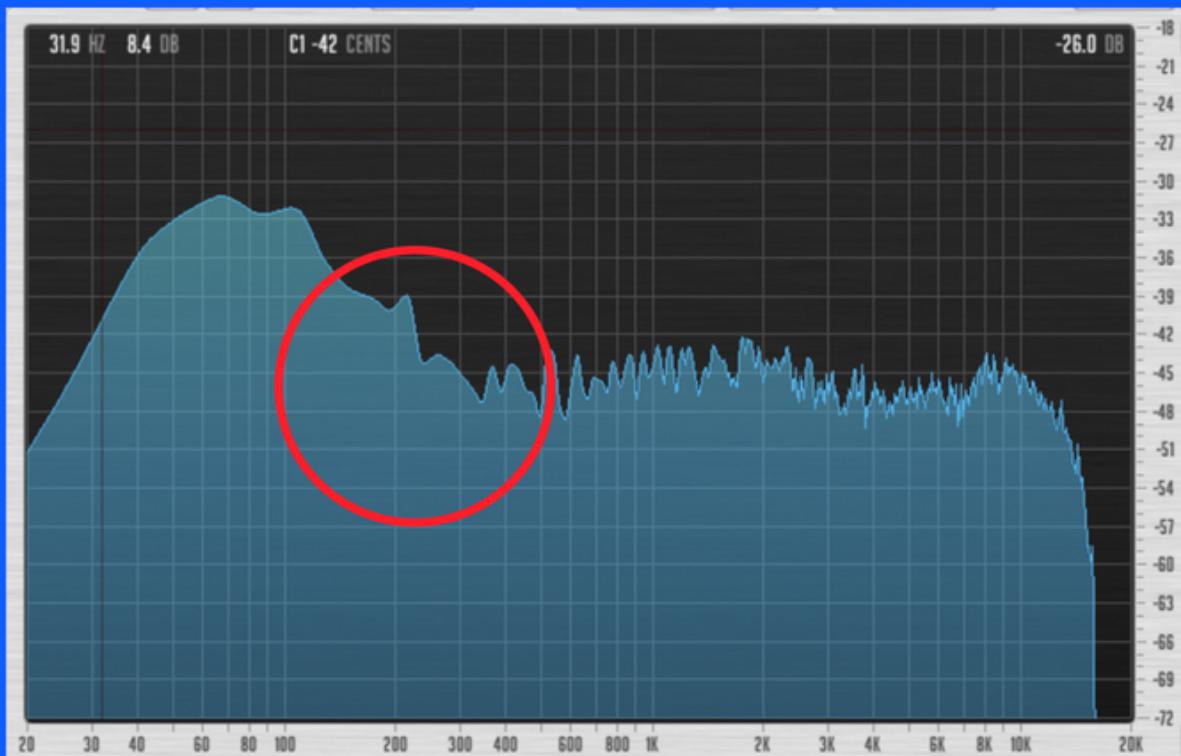
- Create a bell curve with a narrow bandwidth to sweep around, listening for harsh frequencies
- Both boost or cut any suspicious frequencies to compare the sound

Join 3,987 other producers receiving production tips & tricks each week (link in bio)

3 STEPS TO BIGGER, FULLER VOCALS

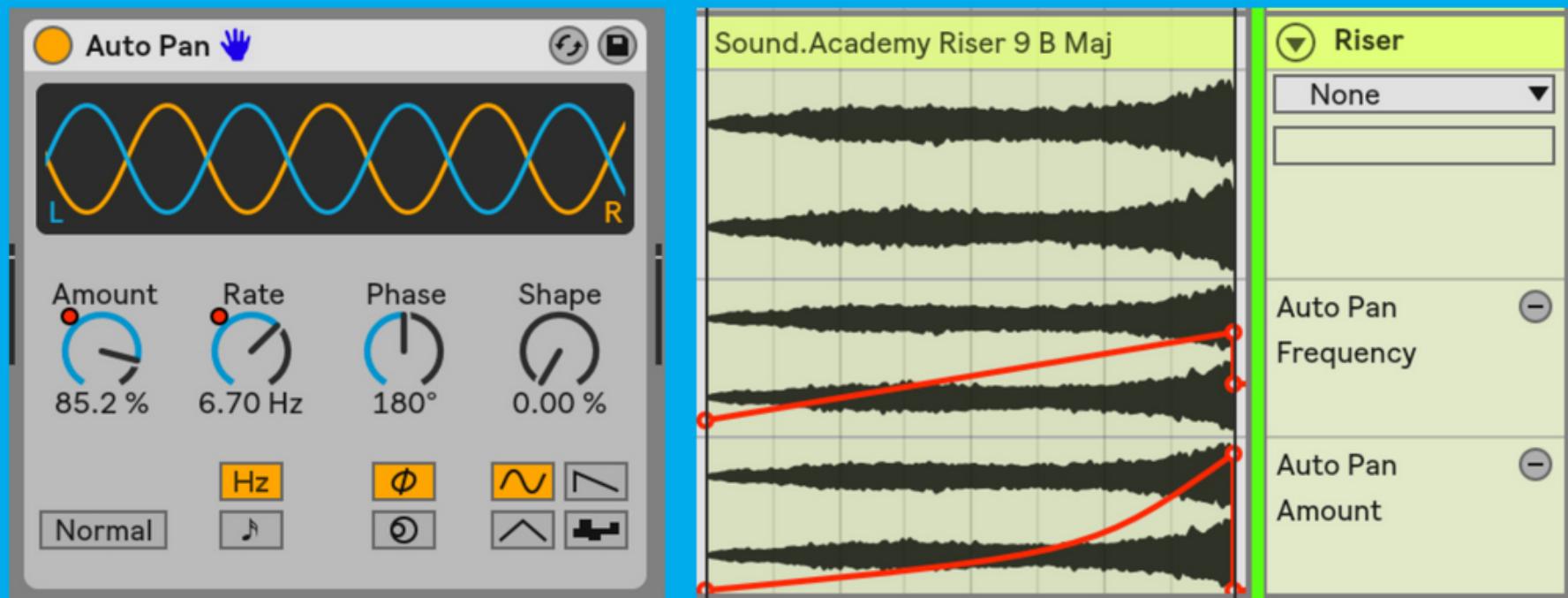
1. Duplicate the main vocal twice, turning each duplicate down -10dB
2. Pan one vocal 30% left and pitch it down 12 semitones
3. Pan the other vocal 25% right, pitch it up 12 semitones

MIXING TIP



If your mix sounds too "muddy" try **reducing frequencies between 100 - 500 Hz**. This is one of the business areas because almost every sound has frequencies in this range.

BUILDUP FX TRICK



To make a riser more interesting, add an Auto Pan. Automate both the Amount and Rate up over the course of the riser. Together, these two automations will add energy and interest to your buildup.

PRODUCTIVITY HACK



Turn your **mouse sensitivity all the way up**.
This will significantly increase the speed at
which you can get things done in your DAW.

MIXING TRICK



Take a bell EQ with a narrow Q and sweep around between 250-500 Hz until it sounds really bad. Then make a small cut in that area of 2-3 dB.

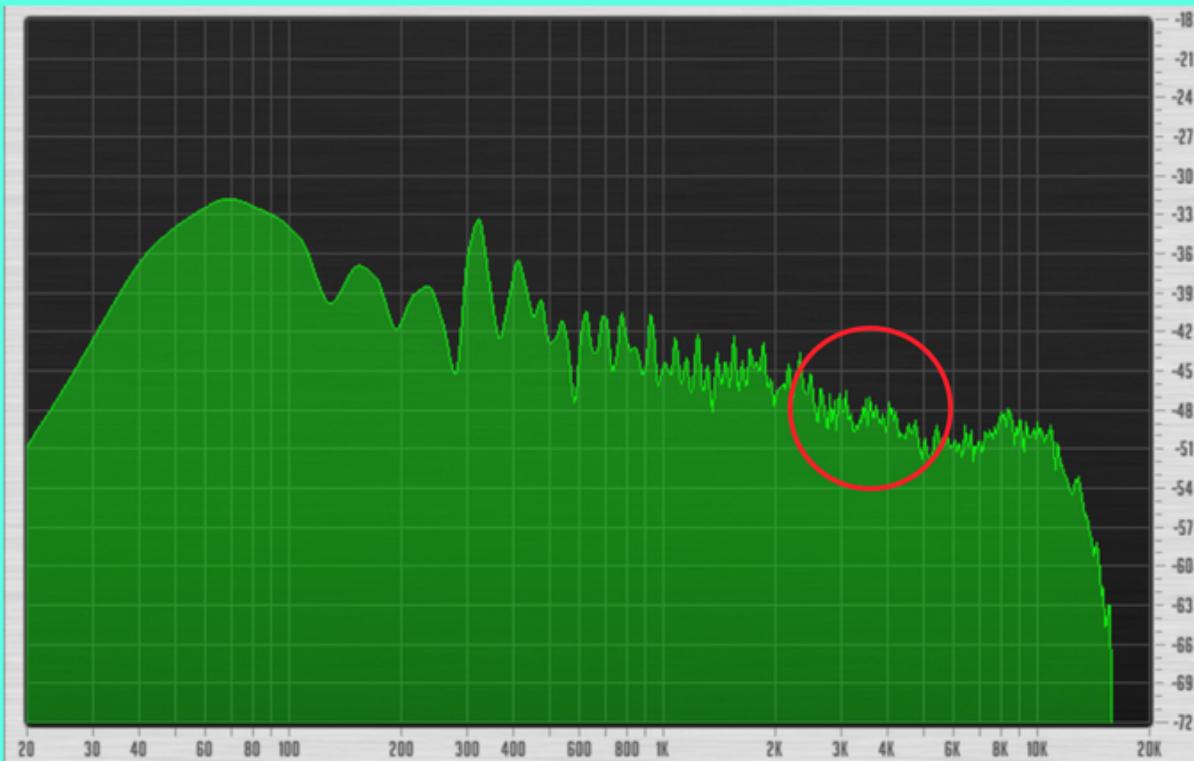
OTT TIP



When using OTT, consider making a dip around 2.5 kHz. This is where the High and Mid frequency bands overlap and can create harshness in your mix.



MIXING TIP



Be particularly careful around **3.4 kHz** as this is the **frequency to which the human ear is most sensitive**. If your mix sounds too harsh or piercing, see if any of your instruments have problem frequencies in this area.

UNDERSTANDING DEPTH



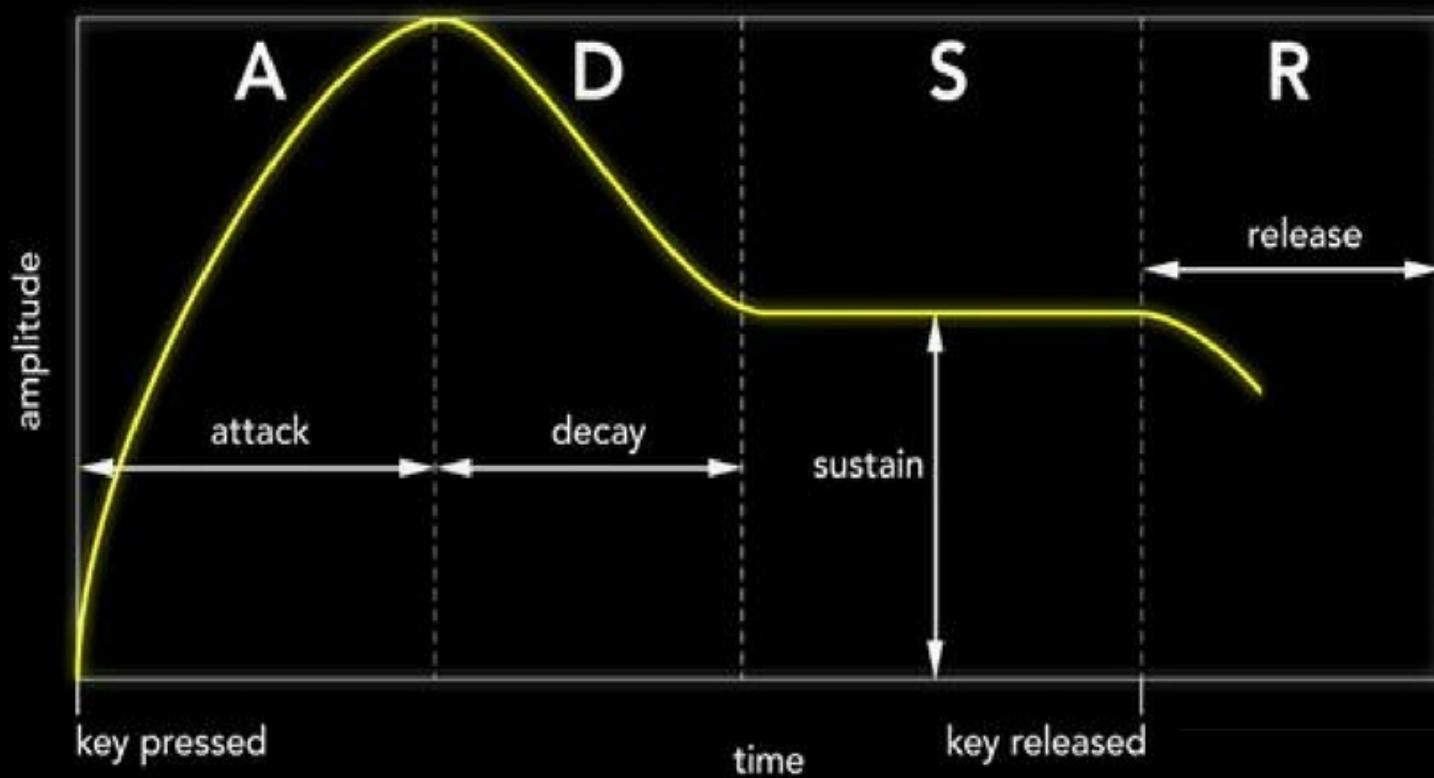
Sounds that are close to us **contain more high frequencies** than those far from us.

To push an element back in the mix, try using an **Low Pass filter**, then automate this filter to open as the sound moves closer to the listener.



Sound Academy

ENVELOPE SHAPING



Attack - the time take for the note to reach maximum level

Decay - time it takes for the note to go from the maximum level to the sustain level

Sustain - the level while the note is held

Release - the time it takes for the note to fall from sustain to zero



TYPES OF EQ



VOCALS TRICK

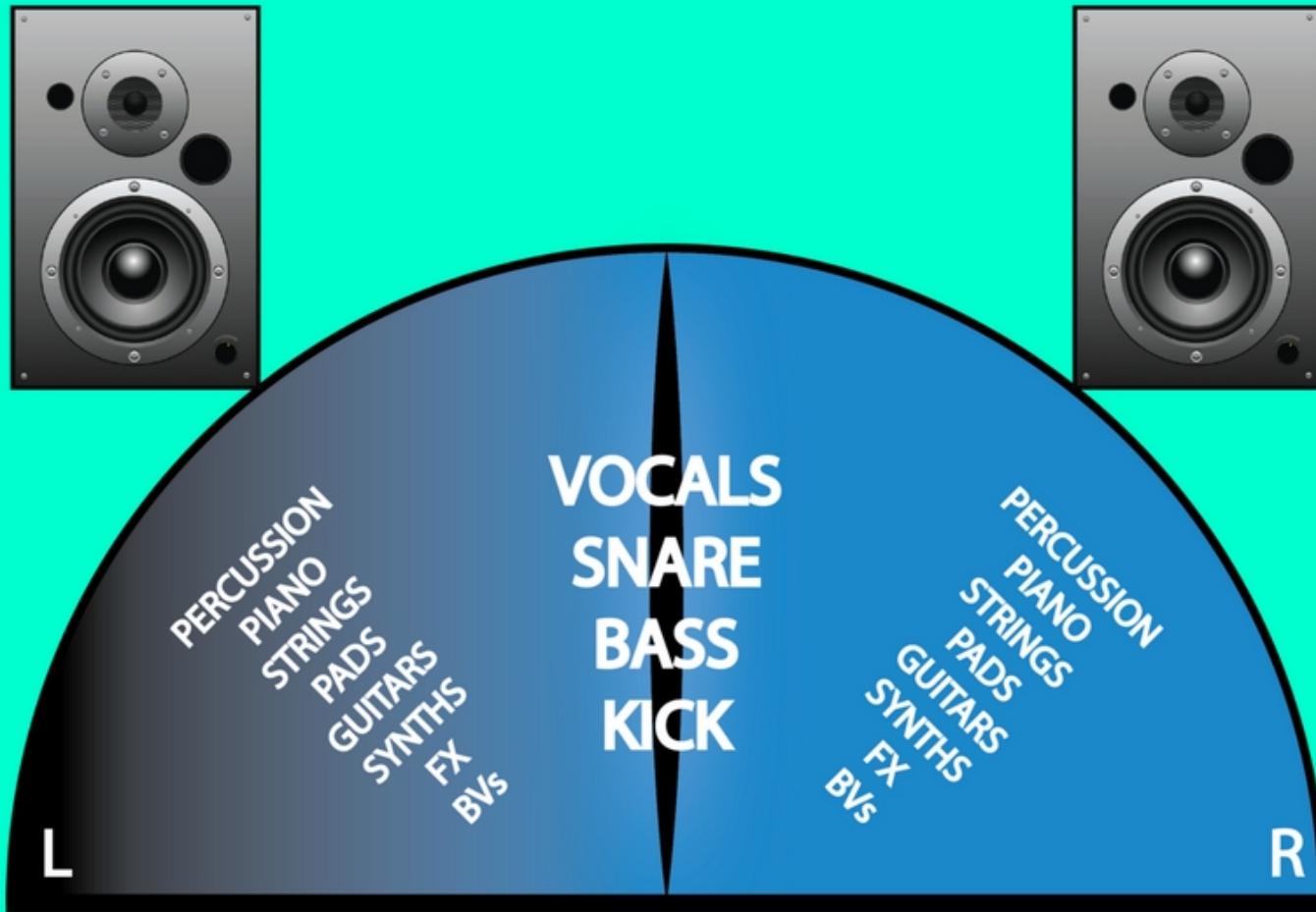


To add weight to vocals, duplicate the vocal track, filter out the highs and high mids. Distort. Then blend in with original track.

HOW TO FINISH MORE SONGS



Creating a Full Mix



To create a full mix, you must cover the front, middle, far left, far right, and very back of the stereo field.

VOCAL REVERB TRICK



When adding reverb to your vocals, **you want to make sure the reverb doesn't affect the clarity of your vocals**. To do this create two channels, one dry with no reverb and one with a fully wet reverb. Add a compressor to the fully wet channel and sidechain it to the dry signal.



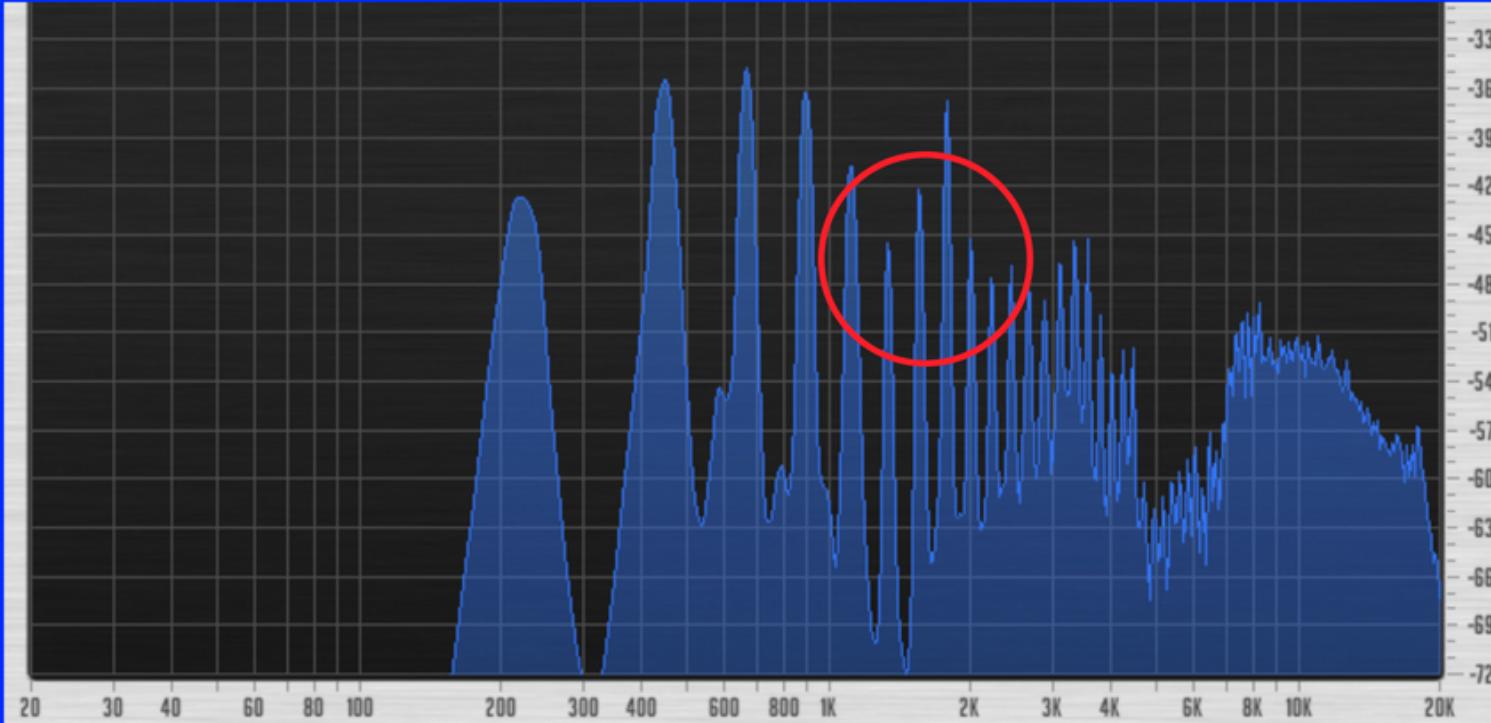
COMPRESSION TRICK



To have your sounds gel better and pump together, **try using slight bus compression on all your groups**. Use ~20ms attack, quick release, 2:1 ratio, and aim for about 2-3 dBs of gain reduction.

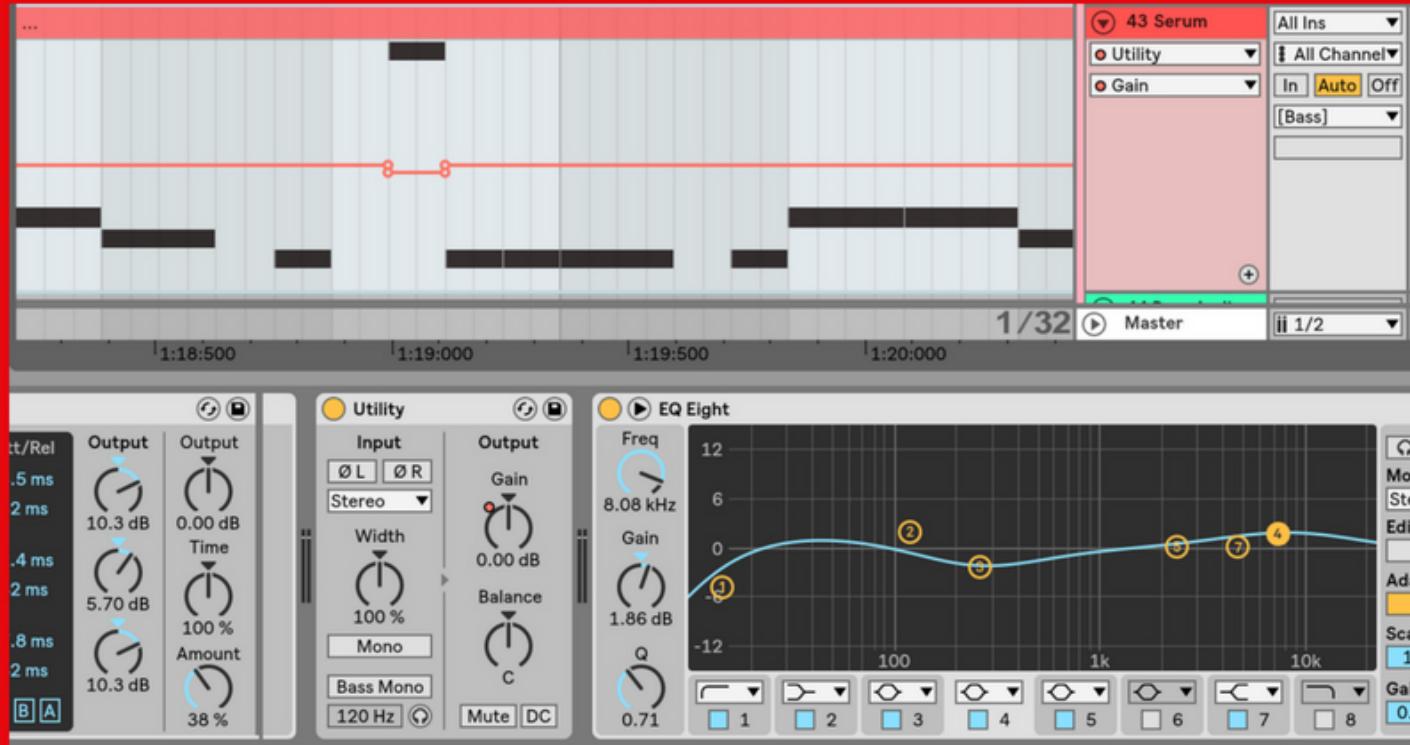


VOCALS TIP



The most important part of a typically vocal lies between 1000-2500Hz. Using an EQ to subtract frequencies in this range from other competing instruments can help your vocals stand out.

BASSLINE TIP



If any notes in your bassline go up more than 6 semitones, **you may need to do some corrective volume automation**. This is because as the notes increase in pitch, their volume often increases as well. To fix this, **simply decrease the volume by 1-3 dB on those higher pitched notes**.

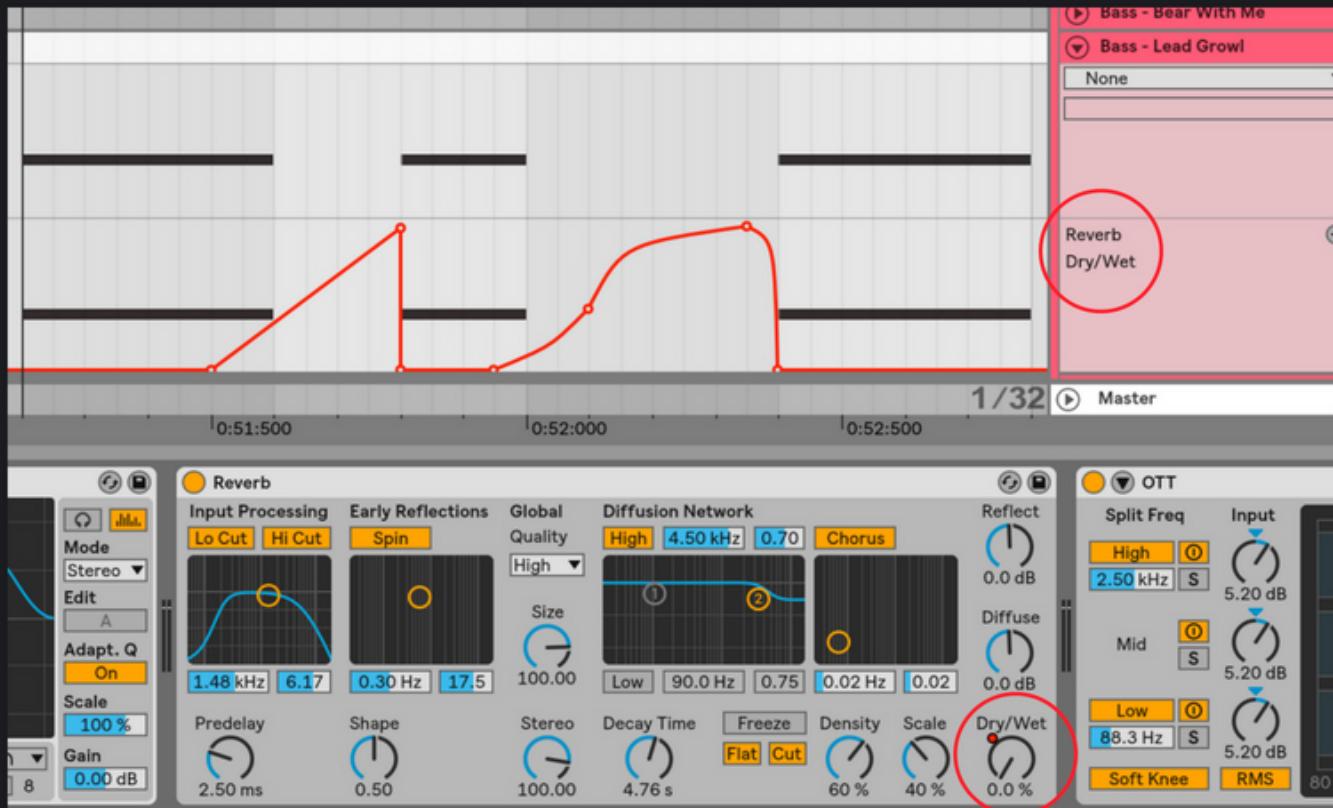
WIDENING TRICK



Mid/side EQ can be used to create a wider sound when necessary. If your sound feels too mono (but actually is stereo) try boosting the sides at around 5000Hz to make it feel wider and more stereo.



REVERB TRICK



To fill space between notes in your melody, try creating reverb "throws". This is when you automate the Dry/Wet of a reverb up and down between notes. This helps you fill space between notes without cluttering up your mix.

LAYERING TRICK



To add fullness to a synth or pad, try **layering in the same sound at a lower octave**. One way to do this is to convert all MIDI to audio, duplicate the audio file, and pitch the duplicate down 12 semitones. From there, you can EQ the duplicate to remove any unneeded frequencies.

COMPRESSION TIP



To beef up your synth stacks, **try using multiband compression**. This helps balance the frequency content of your synth layers while also tightening and adding perceived volume to your stack.

DRUM LAYERING TIP

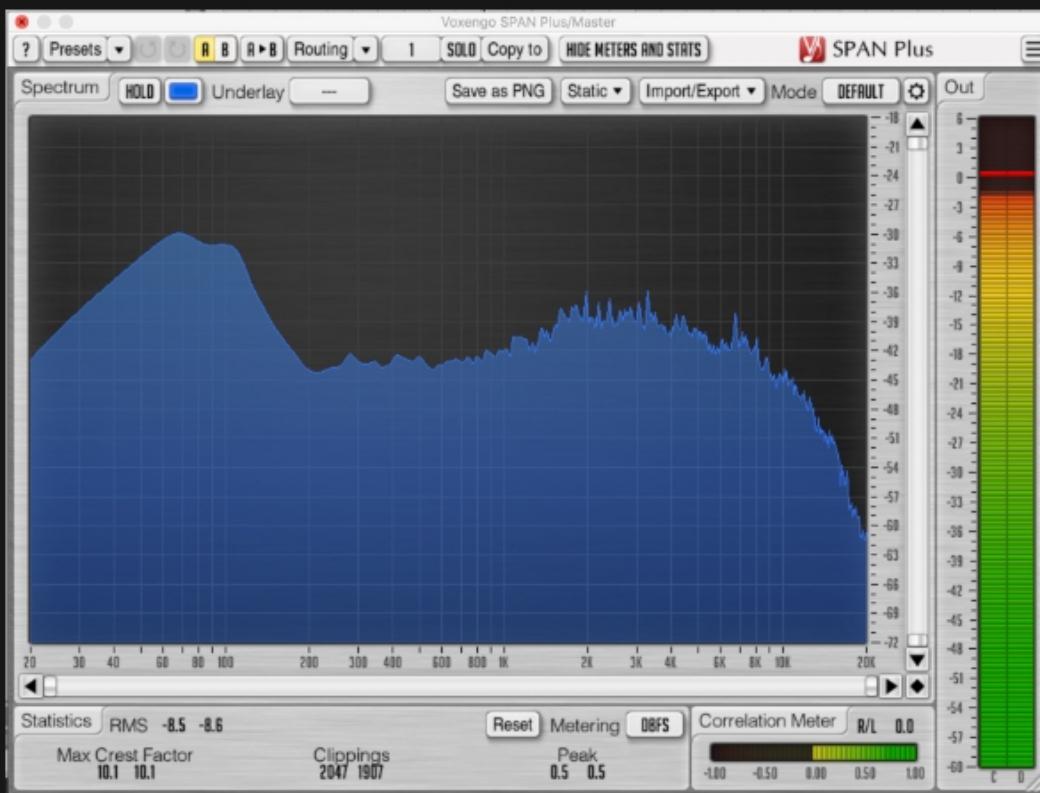


Send each drum layer to a bus and add a transient shaper. This gives each layer the same attack and helps glue the sounds together.



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MIXING TIP



Use a spectrum analyzer like Voxengo SPAN to reference the mix of your song against that of your favorite tracks. Compare the levels of each section of the frequency spectrum to determine where your mix might need more or less energy.

EQ TRICK



To make any sound more tonal,
boost the fundamental frequency
with an EQ.

BASSLINE TRICK



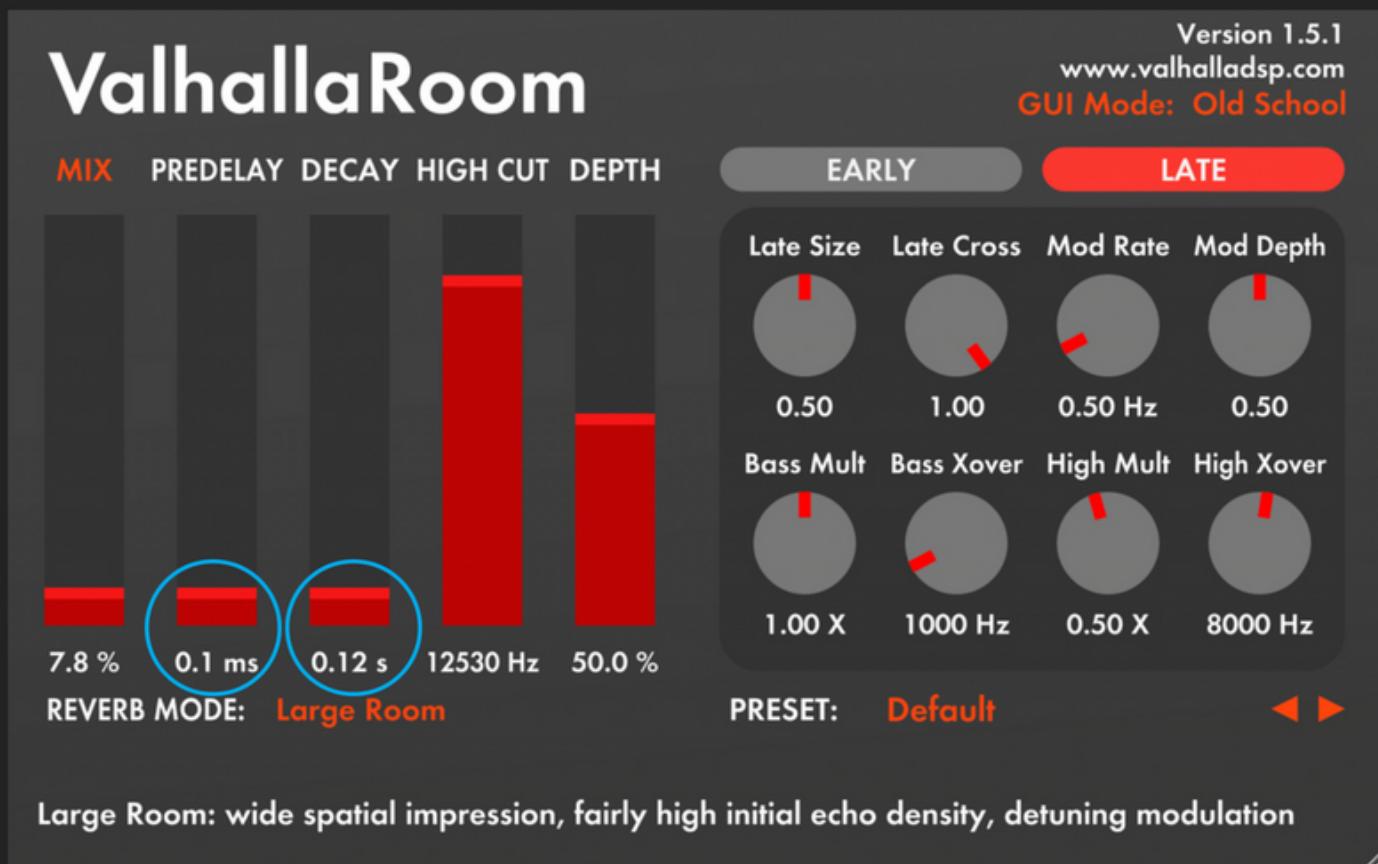
To make your bassline more interesting, **try adding pitch bends**. One easy way to do this is to set your synth to mono and use the glide (or portamento) function. You can then add quick, short notes toward the end of any existing notes for your bassline to pitch up or down to before playing the next note.

WIDENING TRICK



A great way to add width to any sounds in your mix is using a return channel. First use a stereo imager to widen the signal. Then isolate just the stereo signal and use an EQ to remove the lows. Finally, sidechain the signal to ensure it doesn't interfere with your kick.

REVERB TIP



To add presence to any sound in your mix, try adding some reverb with a very short Pre-Delay and Decay.

ABLETON TIP



Using sidechain compression with Ableton 9 and 10's native Compressor can often create distortion and unwanted artifacts. To combat this, try using the Ableton 10 Compressor.



CALCULATE REVERB & DELAY TIME

$\frac{60,000}{\text{BPM of your track}}$

=

Reverb or
Delay time
(Quarter Notes)

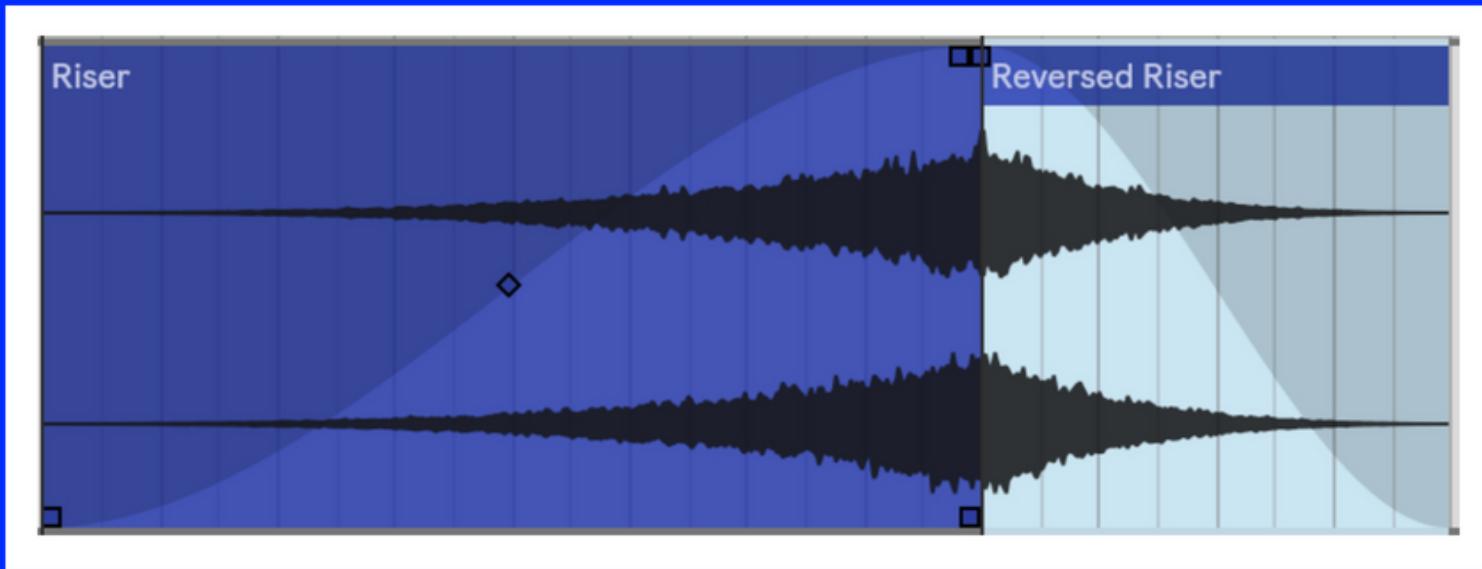


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ELEMENTS OF SONG STRUCTURE

- Expectation
- Repetition
- Variation
- Progression
- Momentum

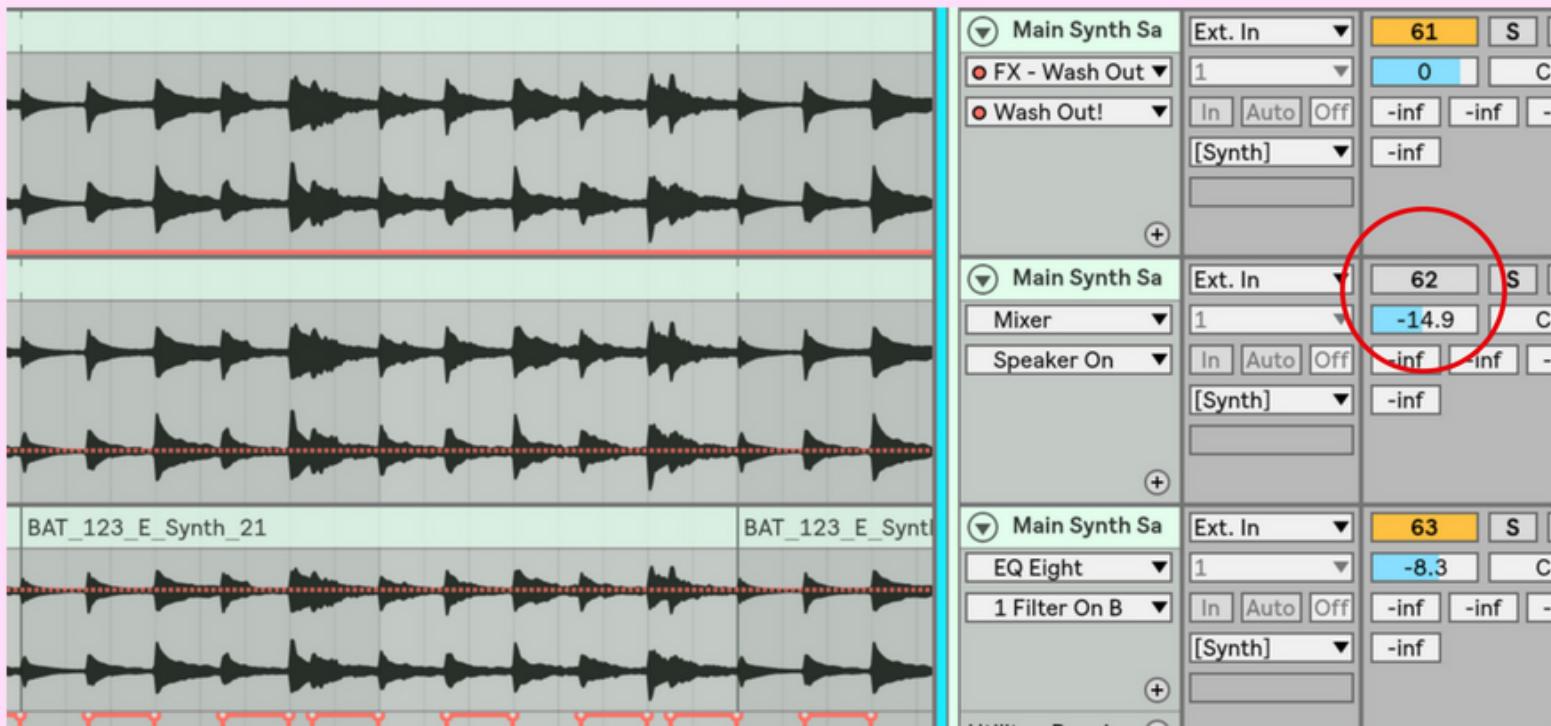
FX TRICK



To make the sections of your track sound more cohesive, use your risers as downlifters as well. To do this, simply duplicate the riser and reverse it. You can then adjust the length and volume to taste.

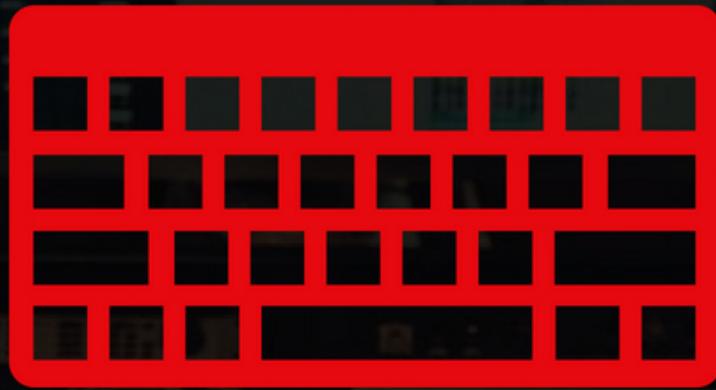


LAYERING TIP



When layering, you should be **muting and unmuting each individual layer** to hear how it adds to the overall sound. If you can't hear a clear difference when a layer is muted, **delete that layer**. It is just taking up space in your mix and stealing attention from the other layers.





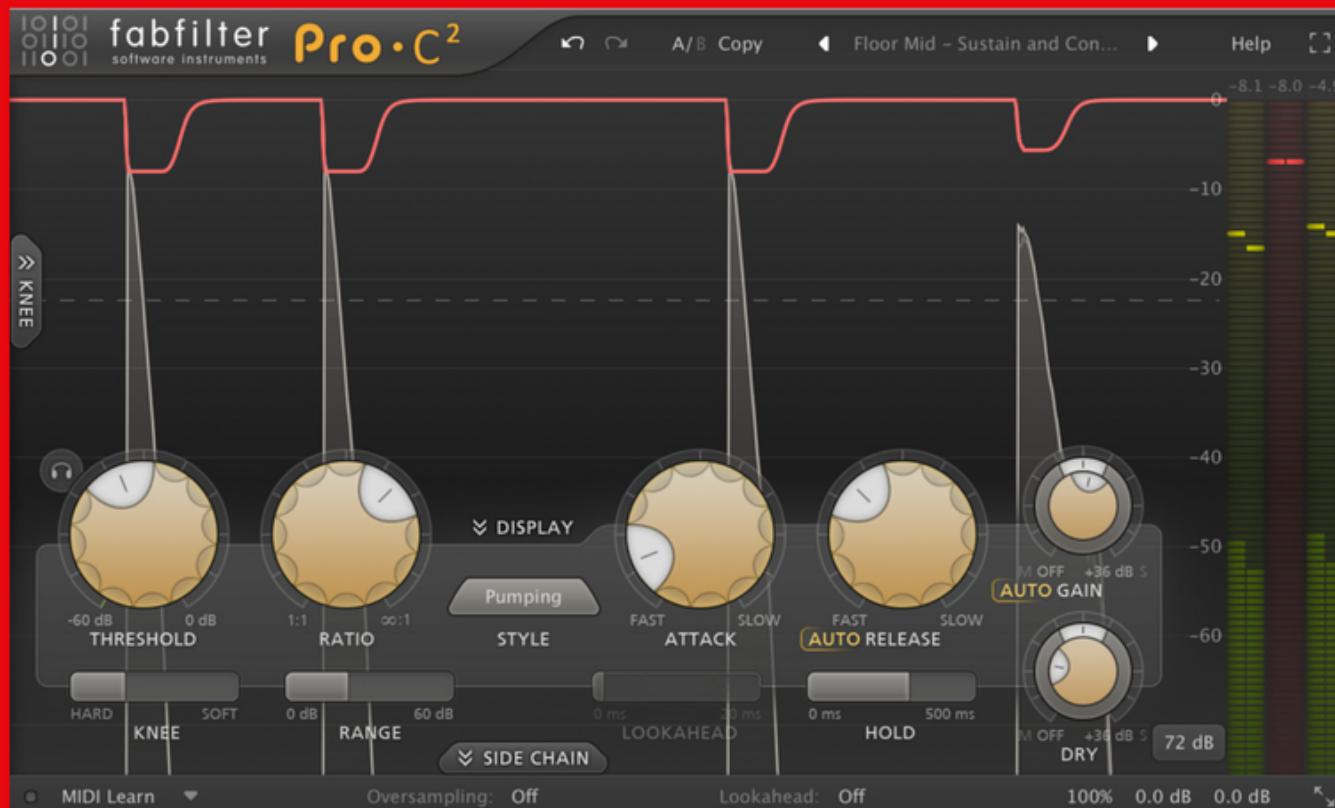
KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

Learn the keyboard shortcuts within your DAW. They can speed up your workflow by up to 30x.



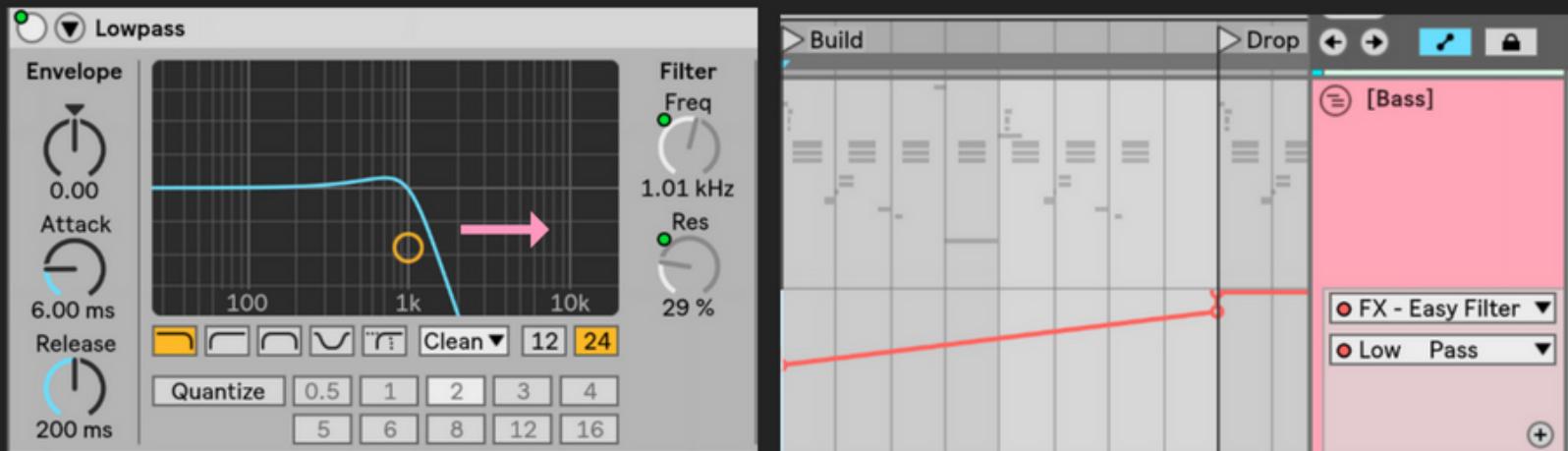
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MIXING TRICK



If a lead, bass or percussive element is sticking out of the mix too much, **considering using some compression rather than turning down the volume and losing energy**. A quick attack time on the compressor will help control the initial transient of the sound without lowering its perceived volume.

BUILDUP TRICK



To help introduce your listener to the sounds used in your drop, **try filtering them in with a low pass filter**. This can be a great way to add low end energy to your buildup and create tension in your song.

MASTERING TIP



For more transparent limiting, its best to use two limiters instead of just one. The first to catch the peaks, and the second for additional loudness.



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MUSIC THEORY

Doubling Notes in an Octave



Duplicating notes in an octave is a great way to add harmonies to your chord. By doubling the notes in your scale an octave up or down, you can create thicker, more harmonic sounds. The best notes to double are the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes in the triad, as they are what gives the chords their identity.

SNARE TIP



To make your snare sound more crisp, pre-shift your sample a few milliseconds. You can do this manually by moving your audio sample slightly in front of your kick, or using the Delay function in Ableton as shown. Doing this will help make your kick and snare sound more organic.

DRUM LAYERING TIP



To add width to your snare, **try layering another snare on the sides**. To do this, find a new snare sample that will work well with your first snare. Then add a simple timed delay to the new snare with a 1 ms delay on one side and a 15 ms delay on the other (**Haas Effect**) to widen the sound. You can then use some **parallel compression** to help glue the two snares together.



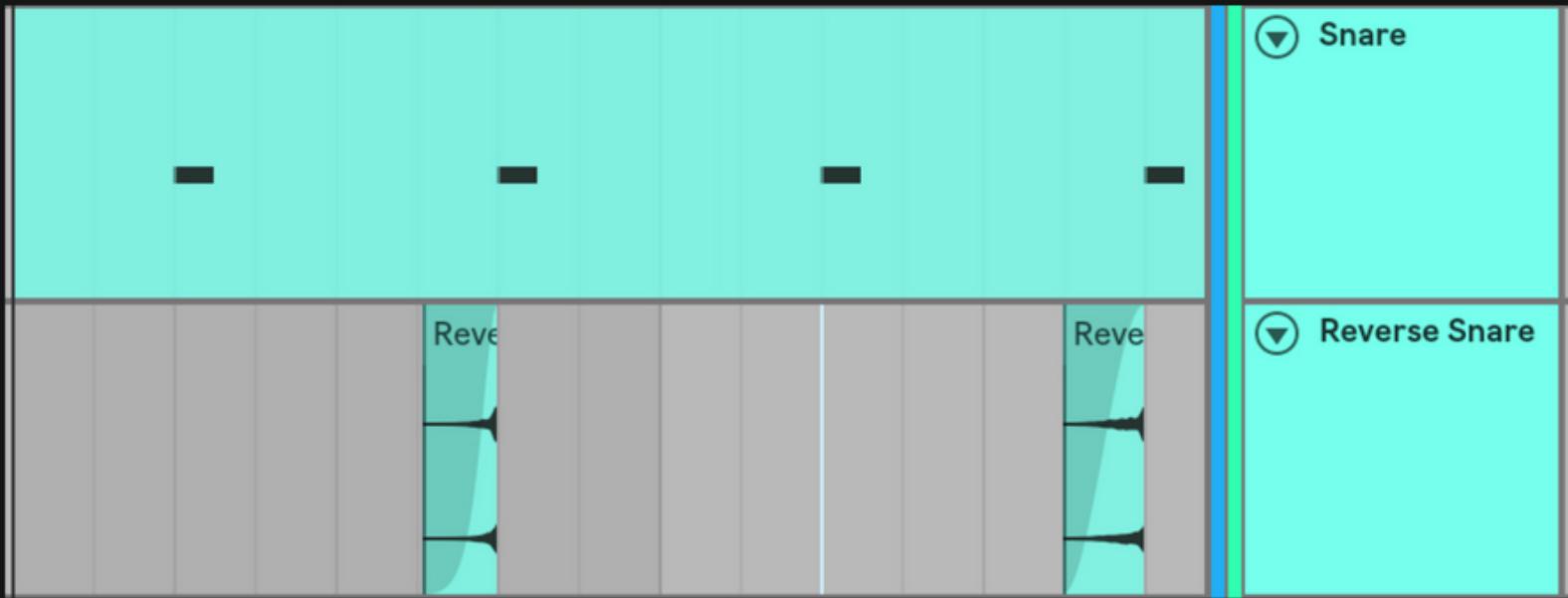
MIXING TIP



If your low end is sounding muddy, it could be because the lower frequencies from other instruments are **clashing with your bass and sub frequencies**. To fix this, add a low cut to remove the low end from any instruments that don't need it.

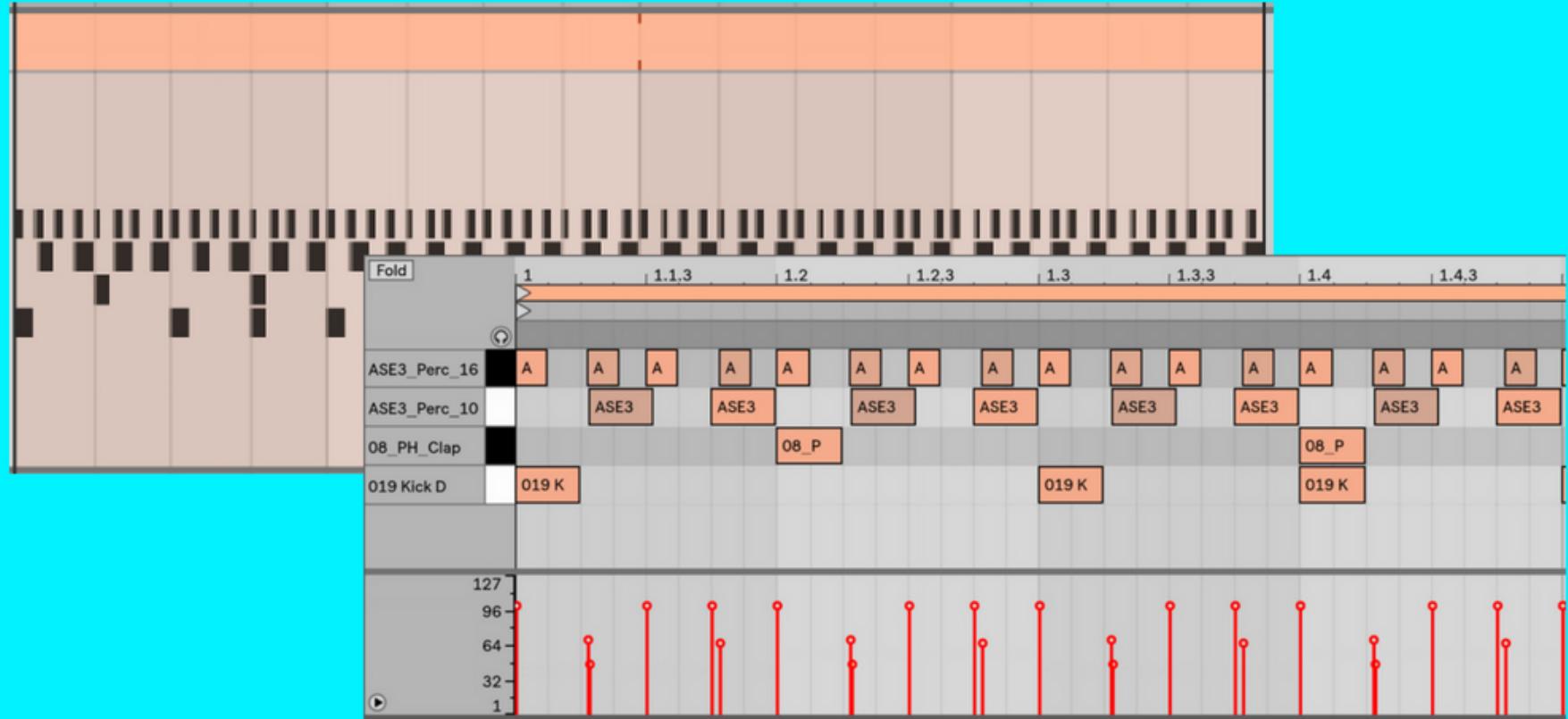


SNARE TRICK



To make your snare pattern more interesting, try adding reverses. To do this, record your snare audio in a new channel. You can record with some additional reverb if you want a longer reverse. Then, reverse your new audio clip and place right before every other snare hit.

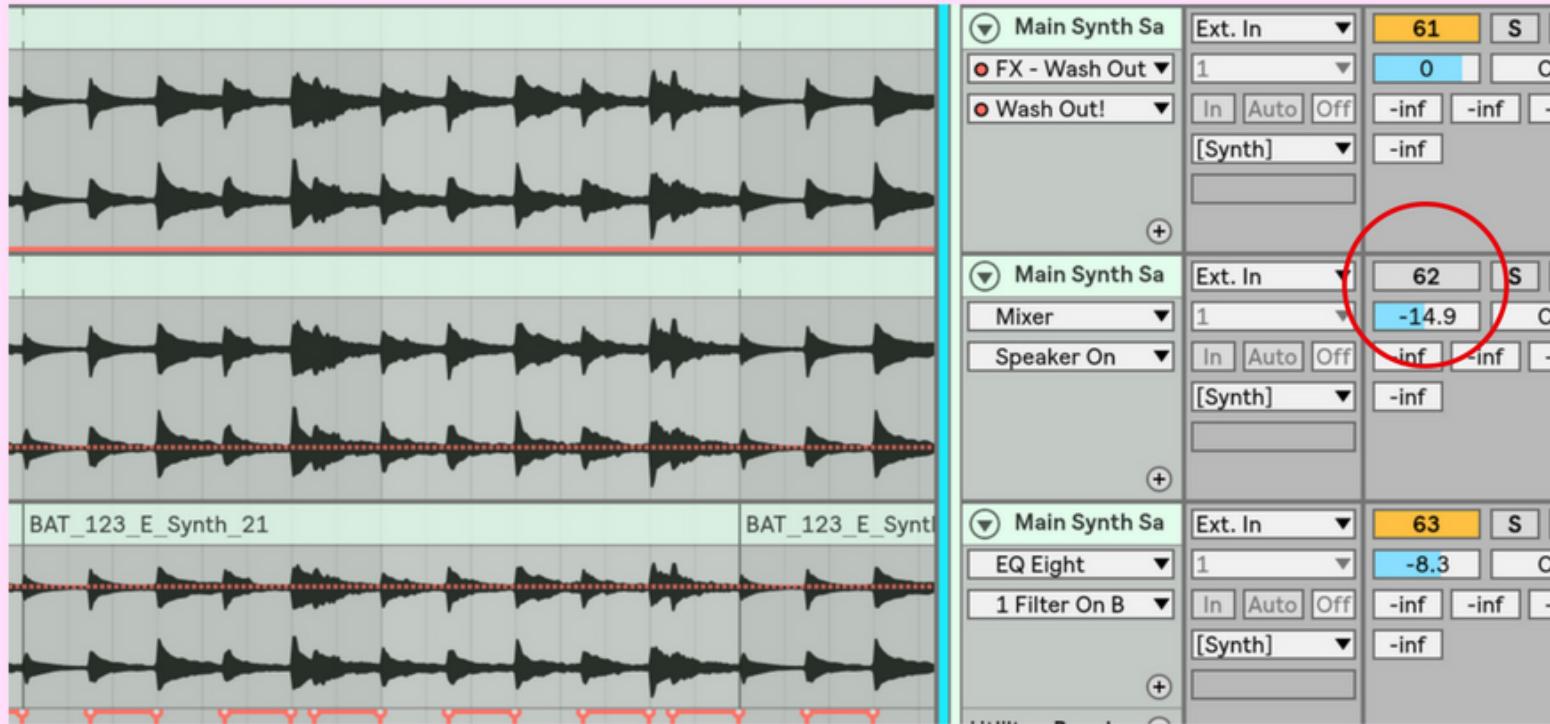
MIDI DRUM TRICK



To make your drums sound more organic, vary the velocity and starting point of different notes in your drum pattern. This can help your drum loop sound more interesting and unique.



LAYERING TIP



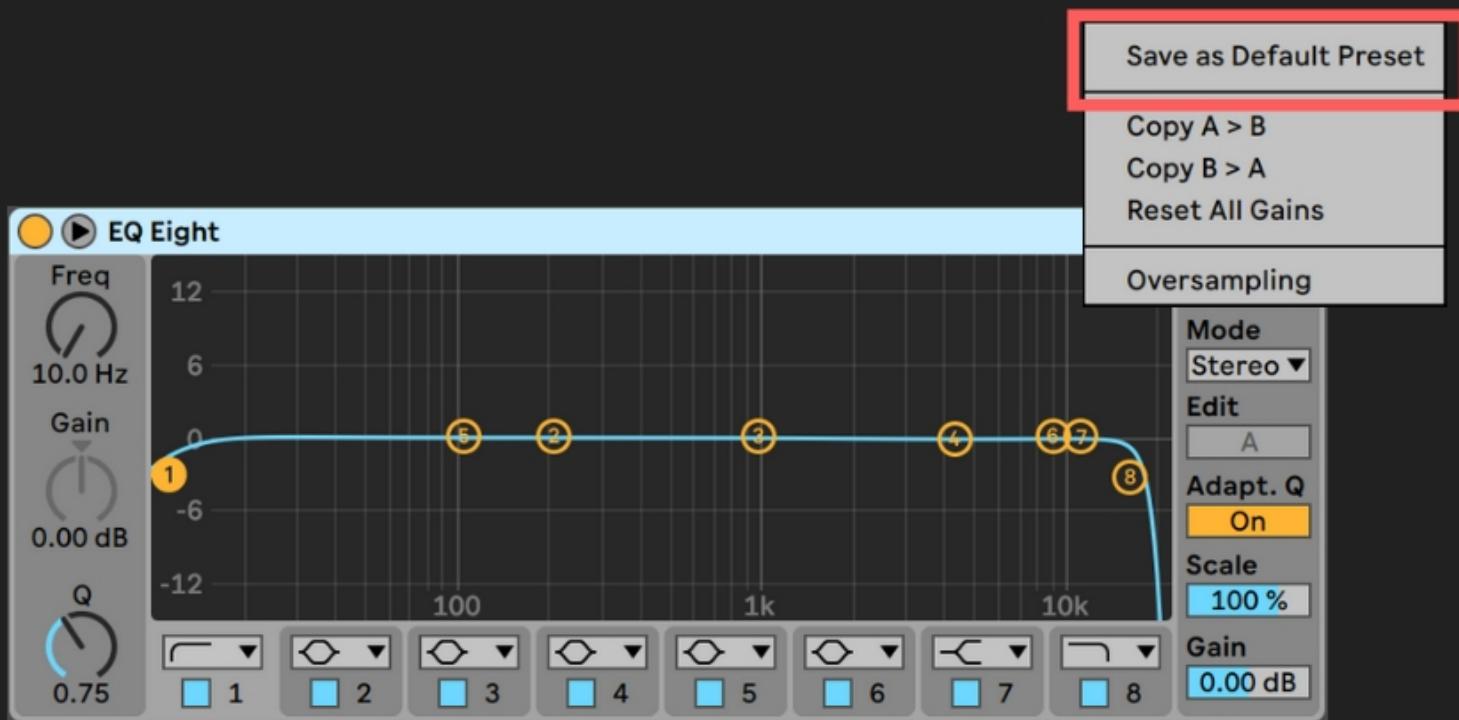
When layering, you should be **muting and unmuting each individual layer** to hear how it adds to the overall sound. If you can't hear a clear difference when a layer is muted, **delete that layer**. It is just taking up space in your mix and stealing attention from the other layers.

MASTERING TIP



If you have to boost or cut more than 2-3 dB when mastering, its better to fix the problem in the mix itself.

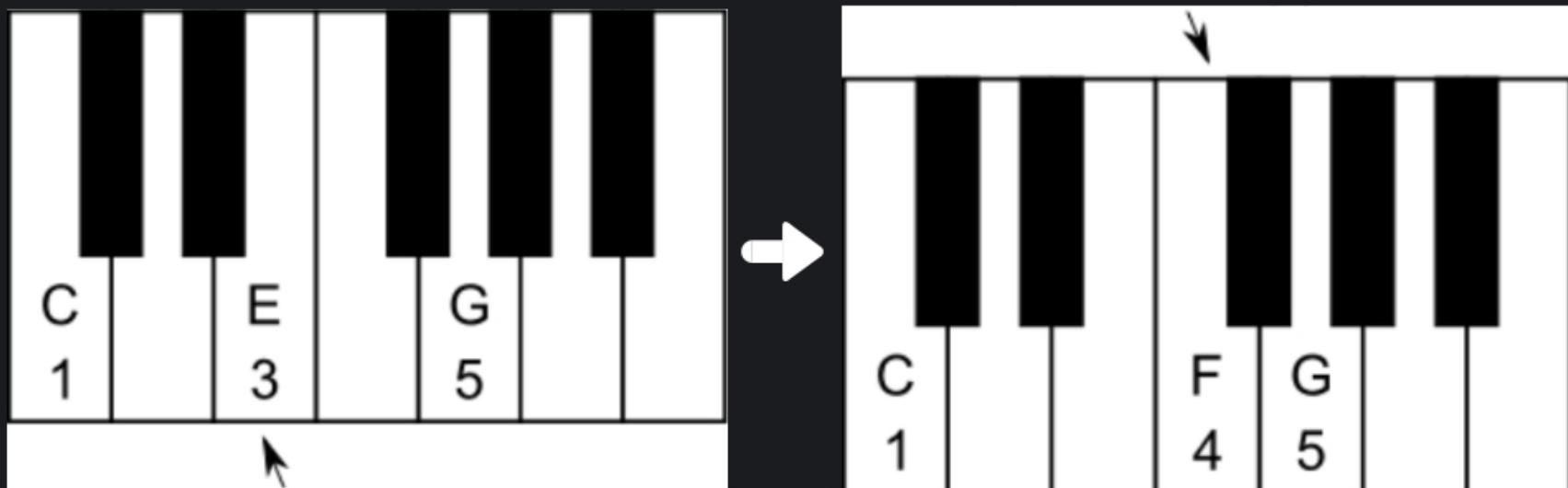
WORKFLOW TIP



To help speed up your workflow, right click on any Ableton plugin and save that preset as the default. This way, each time you use that plugin, it will automatically be set up to your chosen preferences.

MUSIC THEORY

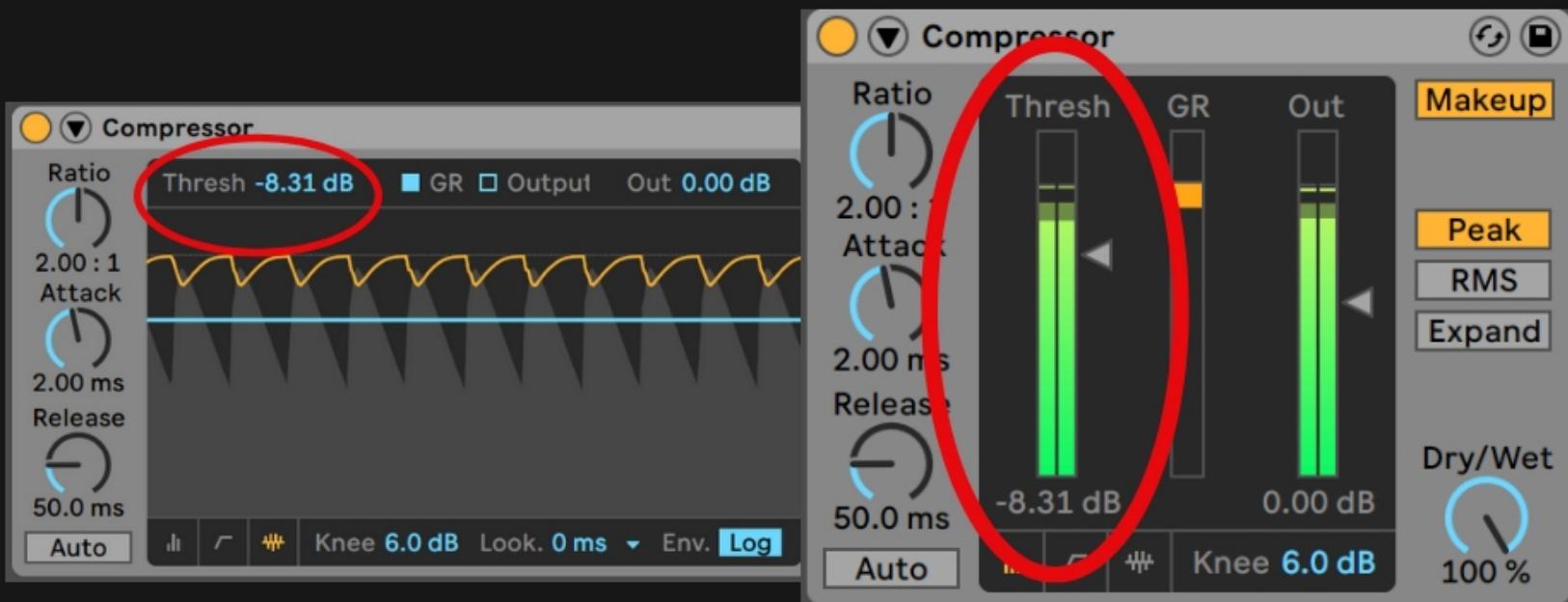
Suspended Chords



Try moving the middle note in your chord up or down one note in your scale. This will create a **suspended chord** which can help make your chord progressions more unique and interesting.

COMPRESSION

THRESHOLD



When the signal is louder than the threshold, the compressor will activate and begin doing its work on this sound. In this diagram, the threshold is set to -8.31 dB, meaning every time a sound is louder than that, the compressor will turn on.

MUSIC THEORY

Diminished Chords



Try using diminished chords during your build-ups, as they give an ominous and dark feel, which can help build tension before the drop.

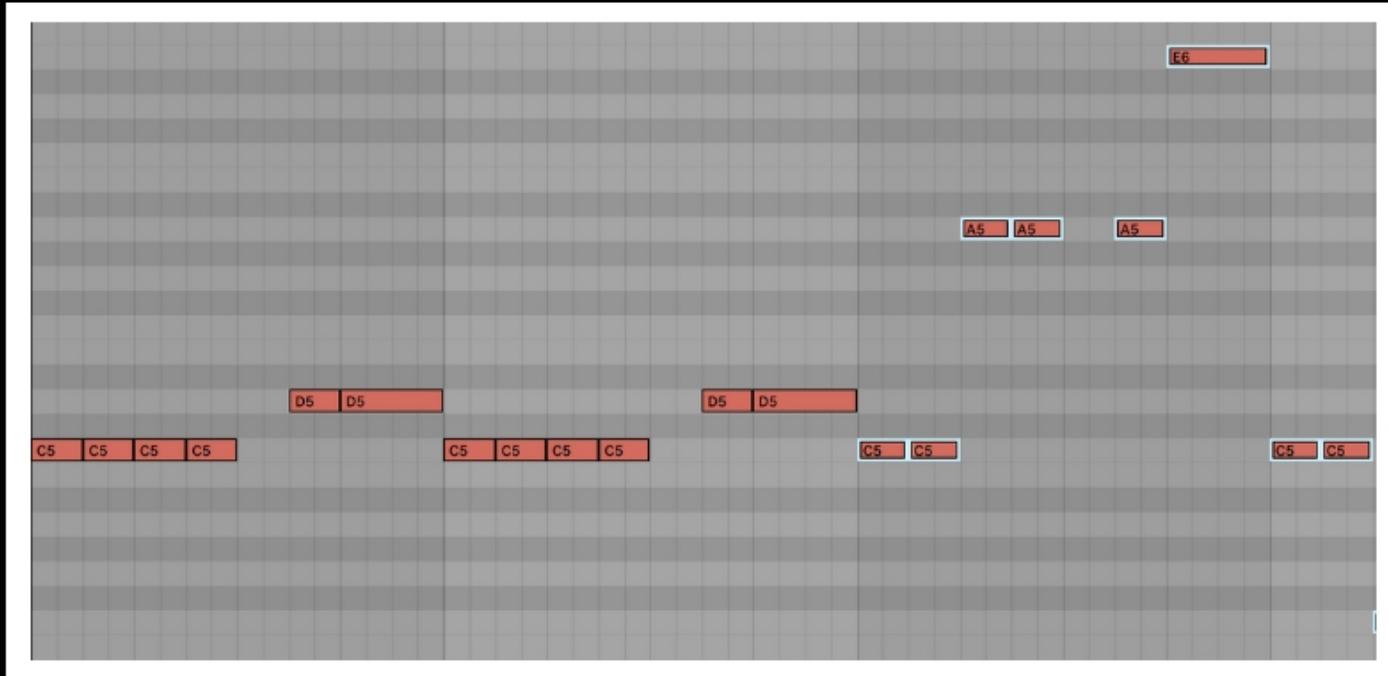
MUSIC THEORY

DOMINANT CHORDS



In music theory, **the dominant chord is the fifth chord of the scale**. For example, in the scale of C, the dominant chord is G maj. Going from the dominant to the tonic is a great way to release tension in your song.

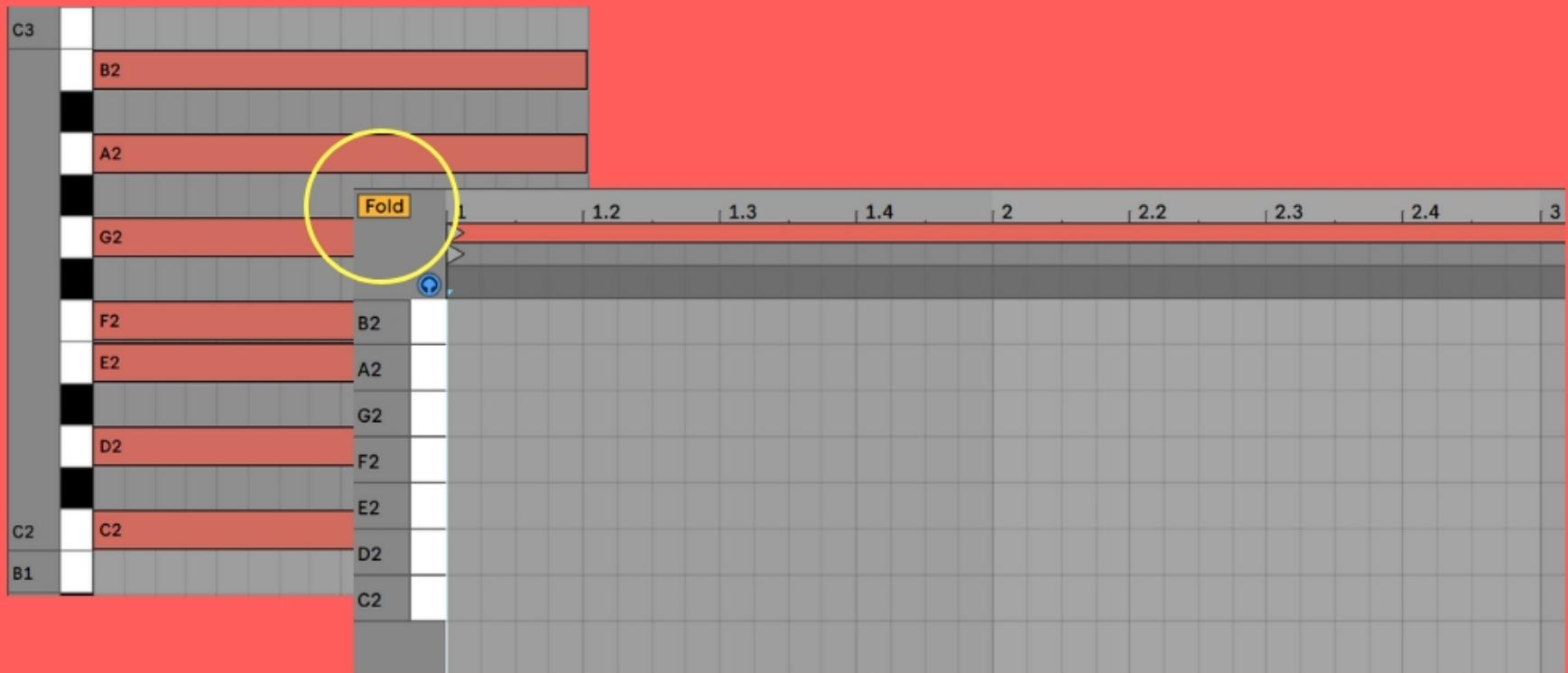
MUSIC THEORY



Melody Range is the distance between the highest and lowest note of a specific melody.

Range is an important factor to consider, because **too wide of a range can make a melody harder to sing along too, and too small of a range may have trouble sounding interesting.**

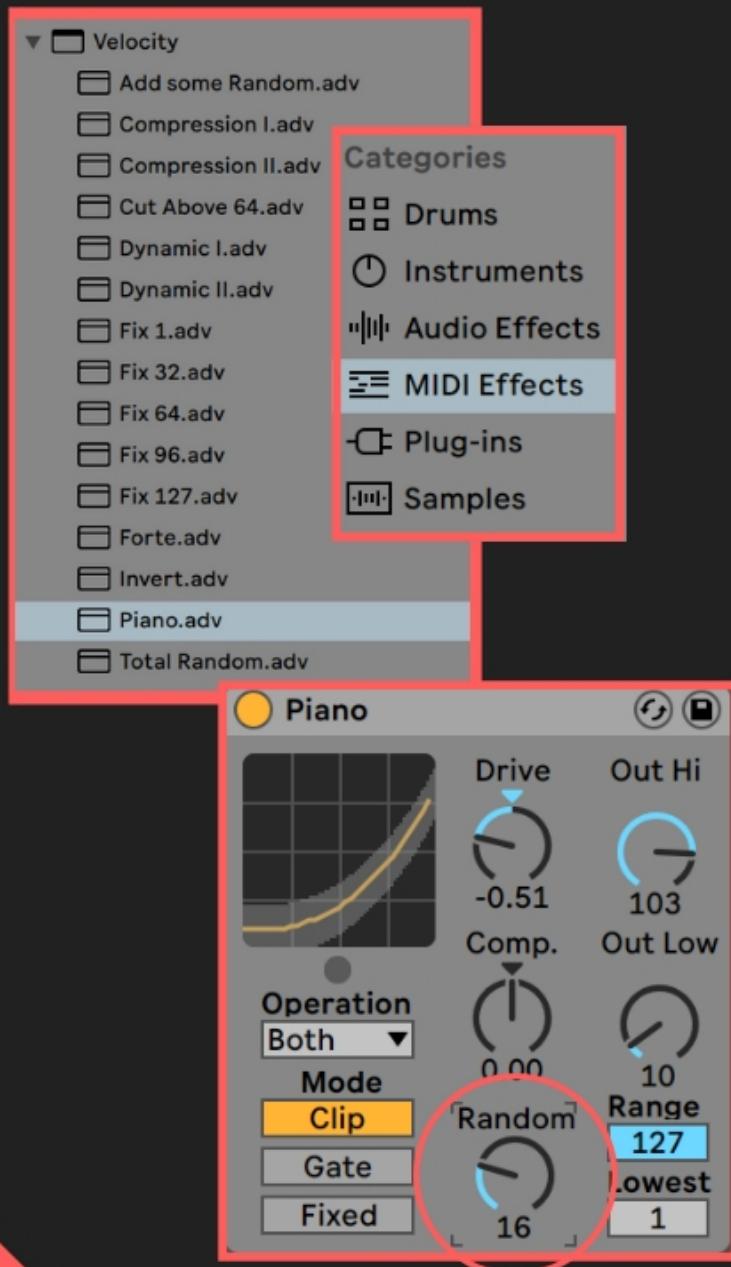
ABLETON TIP



If you are having trouble keeping your notes in key, try using the "Fold" feature in Ableton. Simply fill in all the notes of your scale in your piano roll, and click the "Fold" button. This will hide all of the notes not in the key of your song.



ABLETON TIP



Try using the Random feature in Ableton's MIDI Effects. This will randomize the velocity of your MIDI track, which can help create a more organic sounding instrument in your track.

MUSIC THEORY

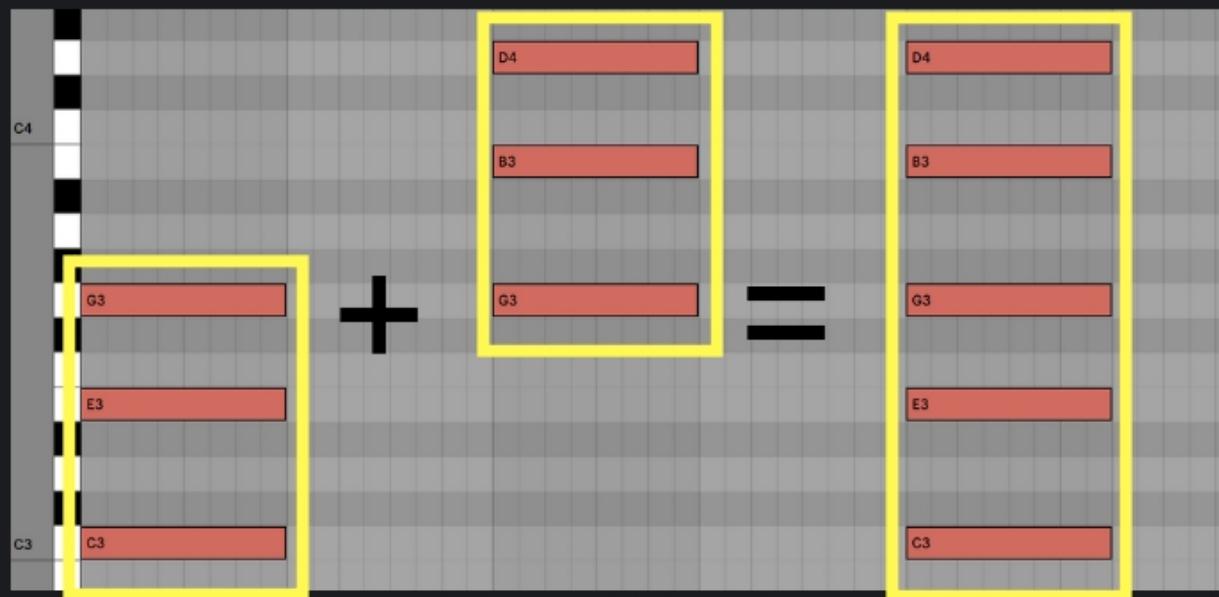
Chord Inversions



Simply adjust the chords using the same notes playing in the "wrong order." This can help ensure the lowest note matches the bass line. Also, this can help allow a smoother transition between your chords. **A chord progression will sound best when the notes make few big leaps between them.** Inversions can help tighten the gap in height between chords in your piano roll

MUSIC THEORY

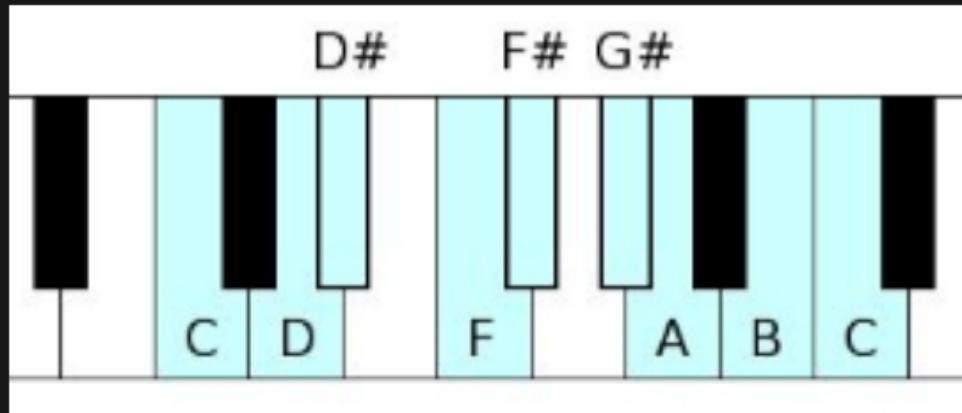
POLYCHORDS



An easy way to form complex chords is to layer together standard major or minor chords. A polychord is simply **a chord that incorporates two different chords**. In this example, we combine C maj and G maj chords together to make your combined chord sound more full.

MUSIC THEORY

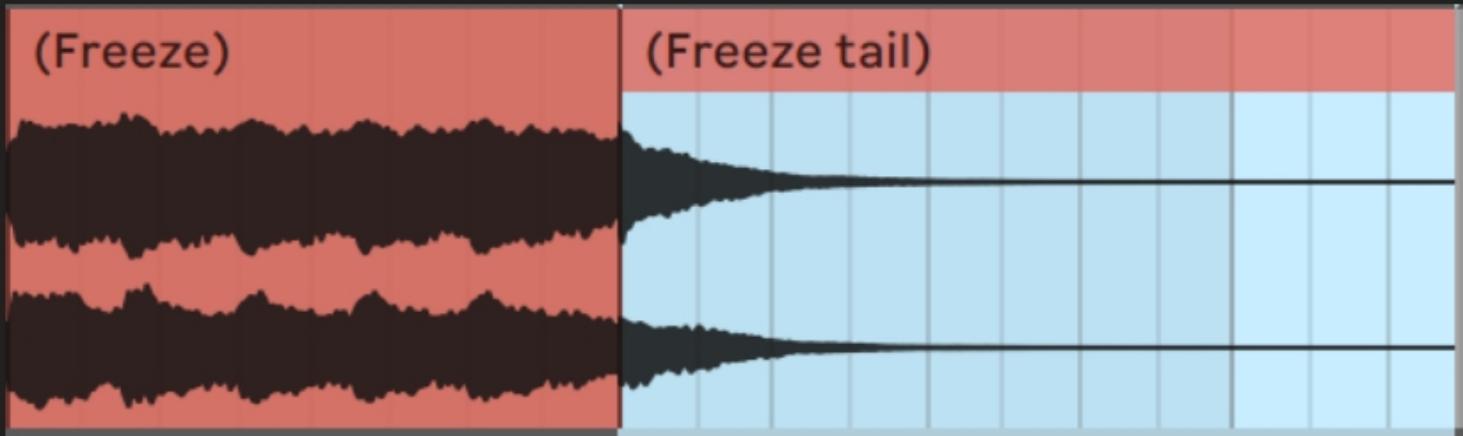
OCTATONIC SCALE



The octatonic/diminished scale is an incredibly versatile scale, often used to improvise over seventh chords, and **provides some dark, ominous sounds.**



MIXING TIP



By converting your MIDI tracks to audio, **you are able to gain control over your reverb and delay tails.** These will quickly cause muddiness in your mix if not properly managed.

MIXING TIP



When working with multiple bass layers, try to only have one sound with sub frequencies below 100 Hz. This can help clean up your low end and ensure your different bass layers aren't clashing with one another.



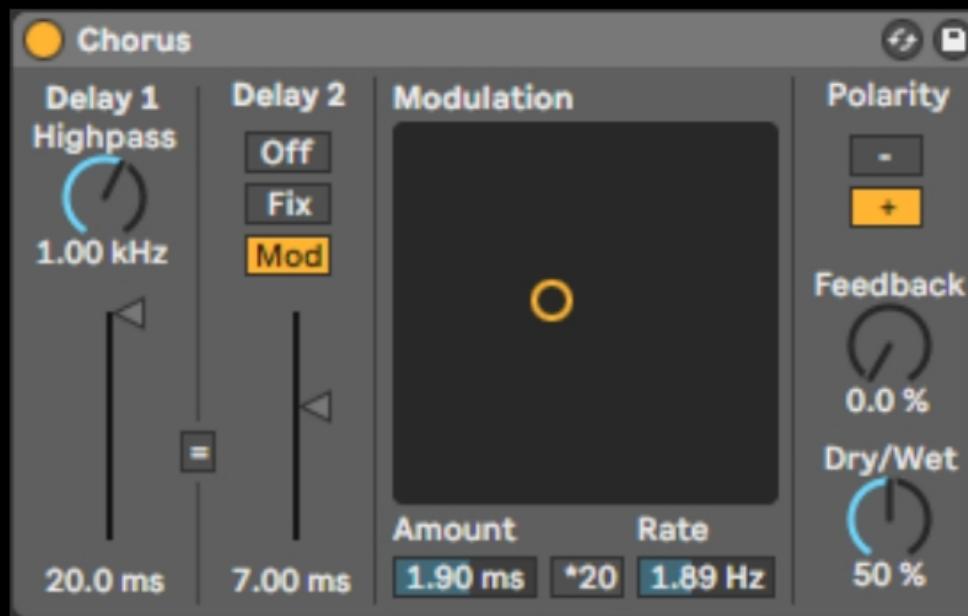
EVIL VOCALS



To create big, monstrous Halloween vocals, first pitch your sample down 5-12 semitones. Then add a large hall reverb to your channel, somewhere between 10-35% wet. Finally, add some mild saturation to really give your vocal and reverb some character.



CHORUS EFFECT



To widen or thicken any sound, try using a Chorus. A Chorus can accomplish this by splitting your signal into multiple “voices,” modulating their pitch and timbre, and delaying those voices slightly from the main signal. The result is a full and shimmering ensemble of “voices,” simulating the sound of multiple instruments playing the same part.



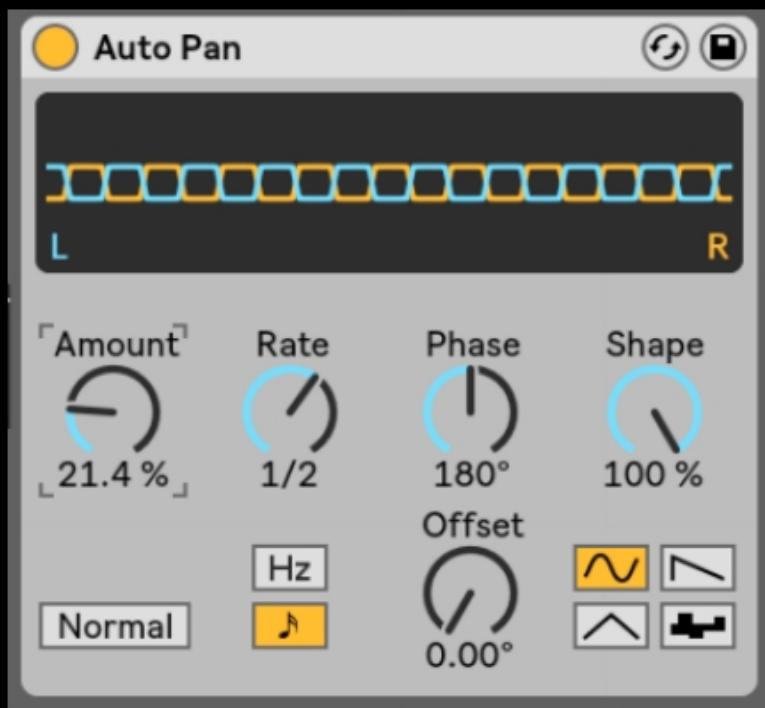
MIXING TIP



Try using a notch or bell curve EQ to free up space in your mix and remove any unwanted frequencies. For example, there can be a lot of mud in a mix at around 200 Hz, so you can add an EQ cut in this area to remove energy from any sounds that do not need frequencies there.



PANNING TIP



To add variation and interest to any repetitive sound in your mix (i.e. hats), try **adding some slightly panning**. In Ableton, you can use Auto Pan to have each hit take place on different sides of the stereo field.



HAT'S TRICK



To make your hat/percussion pattern more interesting, alternate the width of each hit. Find a mono hat sample to set in the center of your mix, and layer a wider hat above it every other hit.



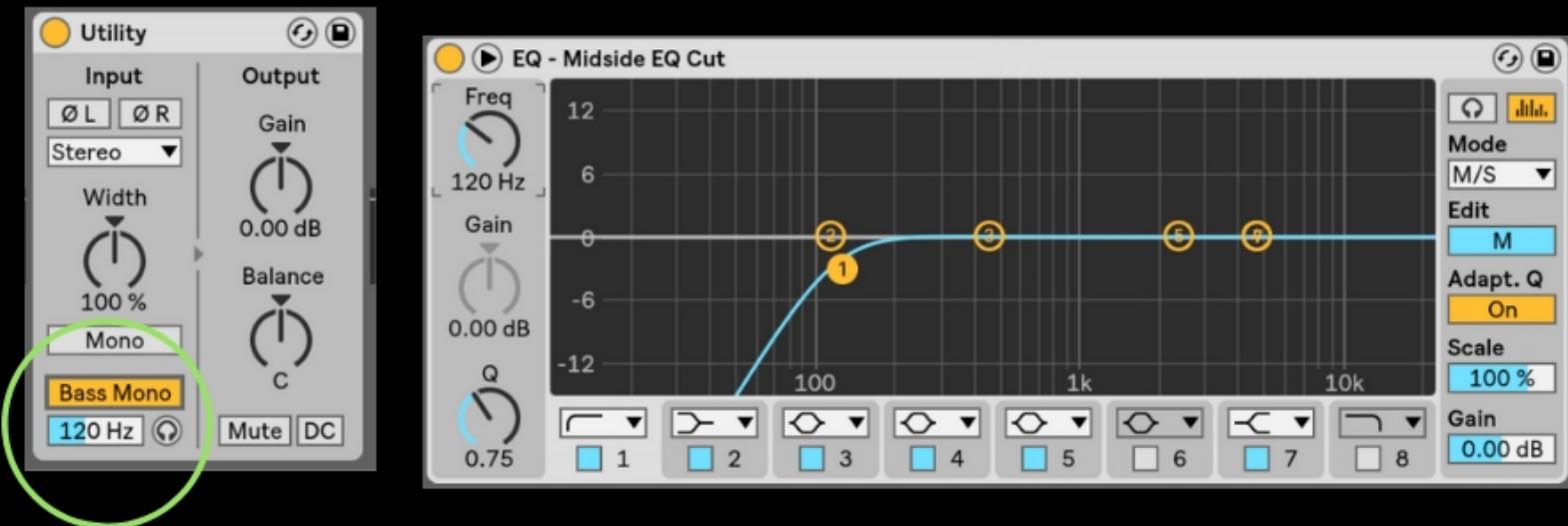
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ABLETON TIP



To easily convert any MIDI to audio, freeze your MIDI track, create a new audio track, and then drag the MIDI clip onto the audio track. This can help free up your CPU without having to flatten the MIDI and lose the MIDI and plugin data.

MIXING TIP



When mixing your track, set your frequencies below ~120 Hz to mono. It will help you create a tighter mix while maximizing available headroom. Sub bass is also an omni-directional sound, which means that you cannot tell which direction it is coming from.



MIXING TIP



Be careful with your mid-upper frequencies between 2-6 kHz as almost every instrument has frequencies in this range. Too much information in this area of the frequency spectrum can make your mix sound thin and weak.



HI-HAT TIP



Try taking a hat/percussion loop from a sample pack and chop it up to create a new loop of your own. Samples and loops like these are there to accelerate your workflow and creativity, so don't be afraid to "break the rules" when creating your own loop.



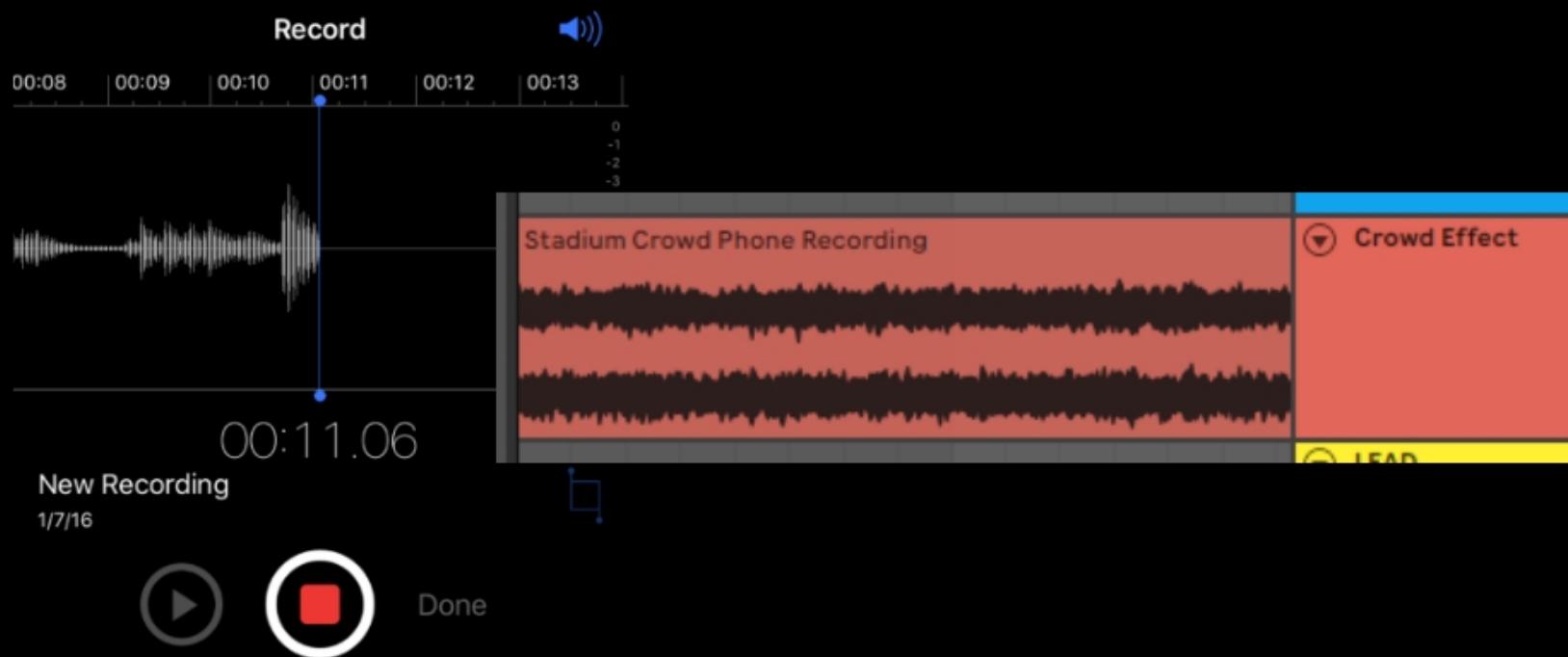
MELODY TIP



Try adding your favorite arpeggiator plugin to the chords in your track. This can help you create interesting and unique melodies for your song. This effect works best with plucks and other percussive synths.



FX TRICK

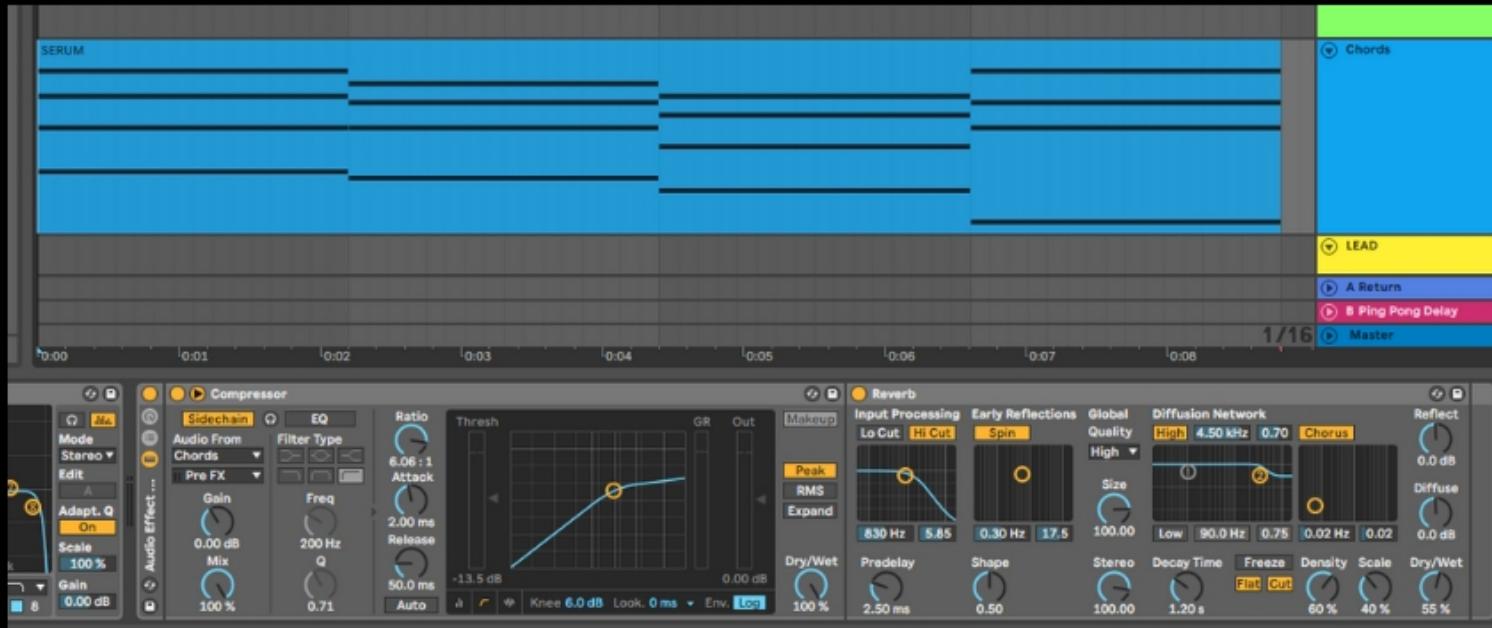


Next time you are in a loud, crowded space (train, bar, stadium, etc.), try recording the audio from the environment on your phone. Using these samples in your tracks can add space to your mix and make your track feel more full. Plus, you will be using sounds that no one else has!



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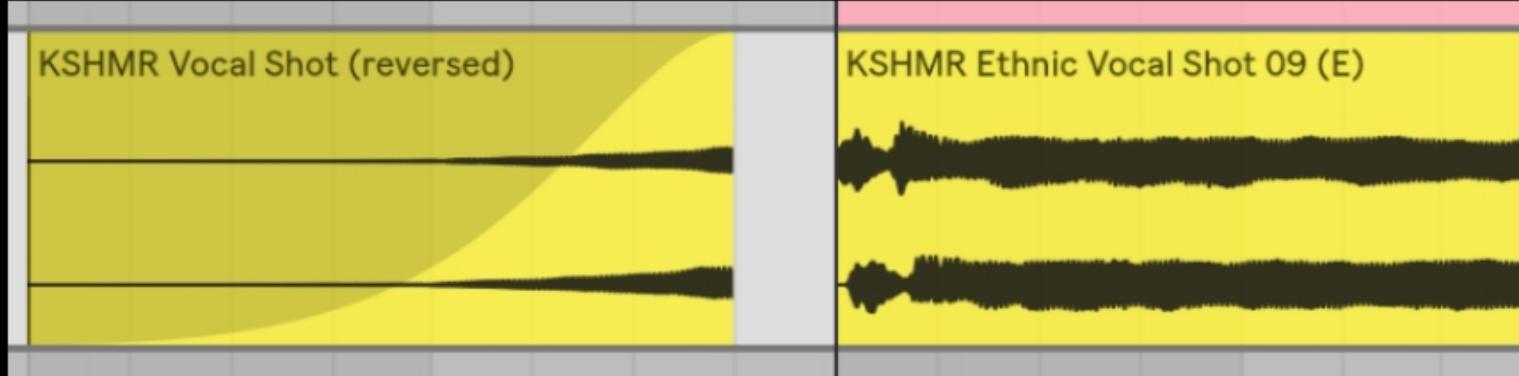
SIDECHAIN TIP



To gain more control over your reverb/delay in your mix, sidechain your reverb/delay to your synth instead of just your kick. This can help make sure you don't lose the intensity of your chords. You can experiment with sidechaining to other layers besides just the kick.



REVERB TIP



Try adding a lot of reverb to your instruments and resampling the reverb tail to create new instruments and effects. Most commonly used are reverses/sweeps (as shown above), pads, and atmospheres. Doing so can help give a spaciousness to your song, while also making everything sound cohesive.





PROTECT YOUR EARS

As a producer, your ears are your most important asset. Don't forget to wear hearing protection at shows and festivals this summer.



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