



Unit Three: Music Production

In this unit, you will learn all about the art of music production. We begin with a look at the planning of a recording in Lesson 9. In Lessons 10 and 11, you will learn how to run a productive tracking and mixing session that will help you to create a great recording. In Lesson 12, you will learn about the basic principles of mastering and the secrets which can make your finished recording shine and sparkle.

Preproduction

After completing this lesson, you should be familiar with the following concepts:

- Successful recordings require careful planning and good communication skills because of the many people involved in creating a quality recording.
- Contact lists allow you to keep contact information organized for all of the people who will work on your project, and conversation logs allow you to keep track of who has been contacted, and what each person has agreed to do.
- It is important to clearly communicate your ideas about what is expected of musicians and other people working on your project.
- Rough sequences are created and recorded to CD's during preproduction. These demos give musicians an idea of how you want your song to sound when it is finished. All musicians should also receive a score before coming to the recording session unless you want them to improvise a part.
- You should prepare as much as you can for recording sessions to ensure the success of your project.

Glossary for this Lesson:

Contact List - A list containing the names, addresses, phone numbers, E-mail addresses and other pertinent contact information for all of the people who will be involved with a particular recording project.

Conversation Log- A record of discussions you have had with people who will be working on a particular project. The date and time of your discussion along with the salient points of your discussion should be included.

Demo- A rough recording which is used to give musicians an idea of how your song is supposed to sound. You can erase parts of it that you don't want to use in the final recording.

Drum Loop- Drum or percussion sounds which play over and over again in a rhythmic pattern. These sounds are created by a sampler.

Markers- Small flags in a sequence which indicate where different sections of a song begin. They allow you to easily navigate to different parts of the song.

Preproduction- The process of preparing for recording sessions during which a production schedule is created, musicians are booked, scores are prepared, and a demo recording is created and distributed to musicians who will be performing on the project.

Production Schedule- A document which is used to plan out

Sampler- A specialized synthesizer which is able to play drum loops.

Telephone Log- Another name for a conversation log.

Preproduction

Before the first MIDI track is armed, before the first words are sung, one of the most important parts of the production process takes place. **Preproduction** is the first stage in the music production process. It is during this stage in the process of production that the recording is planned out start to finish, and it is this stage which will determine how successful all of the other stages of production will be.

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Deadlines are usually something that everyone dreads. If it means turning in a paper or returning a DVD on time, deadlines are not usually pleasant. However, deadlines also have another function which is very important; they help us to get things done. Without the threat of a late fee, most of us would be slow to return rented movies or borrowed library books. However, often in the world of music, there are no particular deadlines, especially when working on your own personal projects. You can, of course, set your own deadlines. To plan the course of a production, you create a production schedule. A **production schedule** is merely a document which tells what you plan to do, and when you plan to do it. It can be as simple or elaborate as you wish, but one thing is very important: you must stick to the deadlines you set for yourself. There are many musicians and artists who have a great amount of talent and potential, but will never accomplish anything in life because they never get around to actually doing anything. It doesn't do you any good to have enough ideas for ten albums in your head if you never get around to recording even one song. Below, you can see an example of one week of a production schedule for an album. This production schedule divides up the week and a reasonable amount of work is planned for each day. You don't have to note all of

the things you plan to do each day on your production schedule. You only have to note the things you are doing to work on a particular project. Some people like to write in the hours of the day into their production schedule to better manage their time. Other people like to write out a to-do list for the week. There is no right or wrong way to set up a production schedule. You should structure it in a way that makes sense to you and helps you manage your time.

3-2-1 CONTACT

Many times when we work on a recording, several different people will be involved in the process. While a simple project might only involve one or two other musicians along with ourselves, more complex projects may involve ten or more musicians, engineers, assistants, producers, graphic artists, photographers, hairstylists, costumers, a video crew, mastering engineers, promotional personnel, and others.

Production Schedule

October 4:

Preproduction for "Waiting for You" Vocal Tracking Session for "Isobel 9" and "Desperate"

October 5:

Preproduction for "Words" Background Vocal Tracking Session for "Waiting for You" and "Lost in the Green"

October 6:

Guitar Tracking Session for "Words" Sequencing for "Isobel 9"

October 7:

Mixing Session for "Isobel 9" Sequencing for "Waiting for You"

October 8:

Vocal Tracking Session for "Waiting for You" Sequencing for "Desperate" and "Lost in the Green"

October 9:

Bass Tracking session for "Never 2 Late" Mix Session for "Waiting for You"

October 10:

Mixing Session for "Desperate" and "Lost in the Green"

The list of people working on a project can easily grow to fifty or more! Your ability to communicate your plans to others helps to determine the success of your project. It is very important to be organized when deal-

ing with other people. You should keep a list of all of the people working on your project along with their contact information. You can see a **contact list** above.

Some people also find it very helpful to keep a **telephone log** or **conversation log** in which they write down all of the things discussed in a conversation. You can see an example of a log on the next page. Just like a production schedule, your system of keeping track of contact information can be as elaborate or simple as you wish. It is very important, however, that you keep track of this information somehow. There is nothing worse than preparing for a tracking session and waiting around for a musician for hours only to discover that due to unclear communication, one of you has the wrong date!

Whenever you make an appointment for a recording session with someone, be sure that you are very clear about what you hope to accomplish at that session. If you are speaking to a musician, be sure to tell them what will be expected of them so that they can be prepared. A guitarist, for instance, would bring a very different instrument to a heavy metal session than to a country session.

MIDI TIME

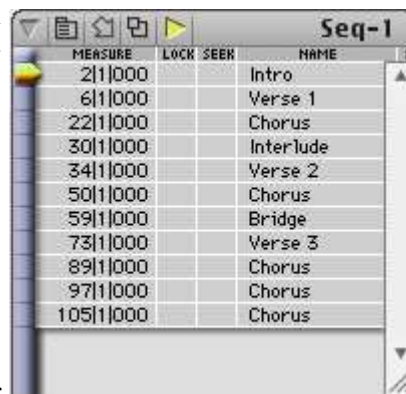
A lot of preproduction involves sequencing. We generally want to lay down a few MIDI tracks before the first recording sessions. These rough tracks don't have to be perfect. In fact, you may end up throwing them all away before all is said and done. These rough tracks give all of the musicians an idea

Contact List

Chuck Coolicks	Guitar	(414) 555-1234	(414) 555-8436
Bob Boomchuck	Drums	(414) 555-8793	---
Sarah Screecher	Singer	(262) 555-6278	(262) 555-3765
Terry Tinxkey	Piano	(414) 555-1263	(414) 555-2363
Larry Lownote	Bass	(414) 555-5333	(262) 555-2353
Gary Goldenears	Mastering En	(262) 555-3907	---

of the kind of groove you want them to create. One of the easiest ways to share your vision for the song is to find a drum loop which matches the feel of the song. A drum loop is a recording of some drum sounds which are played from a specialized kind of synthesizer called a **sampler**. These drum sounds play back over and over again in a rhythmic pattern called a **drum loop**. You should also add enough synthesizer parts so that a performer can hear where the harmony changes in the piece.

Make sure that you have all of the parts of the piece sequenced correctly. You might also want to



place **markers** in the sequence so that you can easily see where sections of the piece like verses and choruses start. Markers are just small flags that allow you to mark certain places in a sequence. You can instantly jump to any marker by double-clicking it in the markers window (left). Using markers will save a great deal of time and frustration during recording sessions. You create markers by dragging the marker which is at the far right of the tracks window to the measure where you want a marker. You can name markers by double-clicking them.

THE DEMO

A **demo** is a demonstration recording which is used to show musicians what the song is supposed to sound like, and how it goes. While demos aren't a replacement for written music, they can really help some performers. After you finish the rough MIDI tracks, you can make a recording of them on a CD

CONTACTS		Person <u>Chuck Coolicks</u>
CONVERSATION LOG		Office <u>(414) 555-1234</u>
		Cell _____
DATE TIME	DISCUSSED	
9/20	Interested in playing on "Waiting" Album Projects. Not Available on	
10:15a	Wed. Mornings. Call in Two days to setup tracking session dates/	
	times	
9/22	Scheduled session for 10/5 at 10:30a.m. For "Lost in the Green"	
3:43 p	Will bring electric guitar and open-back amp for jazz sound. Would	
	like a demo CD. Mail as soon as possible.	
9/27	Confirmed arrival of demo CD.	
10/4	10:30 a.m. session confirmed tomorrow. Chuch will bring electric	
5:38 p	guitar for session. After listening to demo, thinks sitar might	
	sound good too. Will bring to session.	

which can serve as your demo recording. By burning a few copies of this disc, you can share this demo with the musicians who will be playing on the final recording so that they know how to better prepare to play on your song. Demos are particularly helpful for singers, who can practice along with them.

To help singers along, you may want to create two versions of the demo. In one version, you (or a different performer) perform a rough vocal take. This take doesn't have to be technically excellent; it should just allow your singer to get to know how your song is supposed to sound. Later on, you can mute the rough vocal take so that it doesn't end up on the final recording. You can also include a version of the

demo without your rough vocal so that the singer can practice along with it.

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Another thing you have to prepare ahead of time is printed music for all of the musicians who are going to play. Scores must be finished well in advance of the recording session to give the musicians the chance to practice them if they need to. Less experienced musicians tend to require more practice time, while seasoned professionals may not practice at all before the session unless you pay them to do so.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

On the day of a recording session, do everything you can to make sure that you will not only have fun during the session, but also create great recordings. Get plenty of sleep the night before, and plan to arrive at the studio

well before musicians do. You need to prepare several things right before the session.

First, all necessary cable runs need to be made. Set up the equipment you will need for the session, and check all of the musician's headphones and microphones. Try to do everything you can to help the session run smoothly, including double checking all cable runs, making sure you have enough hard drive space on the DAW, and providing power strips for musicians with electric instruments.

You might also want to have some refreshments available for performers. Fresh fruits (especially bananas which help singer's voices), chips, soda, and bottled water are excellent choices.

Let's Review

1. What is a production schedule, and why is it important?
2. Why should you keep a contact list and a conversation log? What must you be careful to do when working with other people on a project?
3. How can you communicate your ideas about how your song should sound to musicians?
4. What can you do to your sequence to help you find sections of the song during a session?
5. How should you prepare the studio for a recording session? What do you need to bring to the session, and how can you help to insure that the session will run smoothly?

Words To know:

Contact List	Drum Loop	Production Schedule
Conversation Log	Markers	Sampler
Demo	Preproduction	Telephone Log

Experiments:

1. Create a blank production schedule that you can use to plan out the recording of your single. As you learn more about the production process in the next three lessons, continue to add to your production schedule so that when it comes time to begin the recording process, you will be very organized and ready to record.
2. Create a contact sheet and a telephone log which you can use to keep track of your conversations and the contact information for the people working on your project.
3. Prepare a demo recording of your song by creating a MIDI sequence. Your teacher can help you to use a sampler to add drum loops to your sequence.
4. Prepare scores for all of the musicians who will be playing on your recording. Be sure that they are both clear and accurate.
5. Create demo CD's for all of the musicians who will be playing. Be sure to note when you distributed them on your contact log!