TEN TIPS FOR LEARNING TO COMPOSE ON MUSIC SOFTWARE

Catherine Meeson

OVERVIEW

Maybe you are already a songwriter or composer maybe not?. What can computers possibly offer you? A great deal. This is an insight into setting up basic equipment and ones Intentions to write music or compose via computer. It covers areas such as purchasing equipment, research, installation, experimentation, time signatures and tempos. Intentions, creating folders and structuring what emerges, refinement and editing, throwing out the rule books to find your own ways and means of composing. Enjoy the journey it will surprise you, the only limits are self imposed.

TIP ONE: RESEARCH MUSIC SOFTWARE

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

It is essential to get something you can understand and work with. Different products do require different skill levels but the fundamentals are the same. It is possible to download trial versions online. One can also connect with "How To" tutorials on You Tube as well as private training organisations online to learn the basics.

TIP TWO: PURCHASE AND MAKE READY YOUR EQUIPMENT

There are many software products on the market. Your computer needs to have lots of hard drive space and good Ram. Do you need to purchase a soundcard? You'll need an audio interface between the computer and instruments such as keyboards, guitars, microphones etc. In order to compose one also needs the necessary cables, monitors or headphones. It

does not need to be upmarket, just start with what you can afford. If you are an official student you may be able to get discounted software.

TIP THREE: INSTALL YOUR SOFTWARE

LEARN TO USE IT

The programs are relatively easy to install and come with built in tutorials and projects to learn the ropes. Set up your workstation and do some of the tutorials. Nothing beats the practicality of hands on experiential learning. It is worthwhile purchasing Industry magazines such as Computer Music to get an overview of software and programming methods for music. One also needs to set up the signal flows for audio and midi, follow the instructions . Computer music covers many aspects of music technology and production as well as some musical basics.

TIP FOUR: THROW OUT THE RULES

ALLOW THE CREATOR WITHIN TO EMERGE

A state of readiness is essential and it can be useful to have a ritual of preparation to affirm this is the space & time, these are my tools and I am ready. Ready to allow the Creator Within me to emerge naturally trusting what we know about music, our style, voice, methods and ways of working. We all need a bit of guidance and structure. We all need some know how, the rest is up to you and The Creator Within. No new art emerges into time without the daring of pioneers on the frontiers.

TIP FIVE: CREATE A WORK FOLDER

OPEN A NEW PROJECT

Load some virtual software, check your midi and audio inputs and outputs and play the keys. You have sound, congratulations. I learnt the hard way the folly of not clearly identifying folders and work. It is also very useful to keep a written composition journal for Ideas, sounds you like, their location, any adjustments you make to presets (the sound settings as they come). Save work.

TIP SIX: ESTABLISH YOUR TEMPO AND TIME SIGNATURE

You may begin with an idea, melody or none. Whichever way you begin get a sense of the tempo you want, the pace, and tap it out to match the rhythm and set your metronome. This is the bones, the structure. Is it an odd time signature or a mix? Make sure you set this also. Save work; this is crucial for editing your work later. But if you prefer free time, go ahead and play/ record.

TIP SEVEN: CLARIFY YOUR INTENTION

Do you begin with an Intention, is this commissioned work? Is it a concept, an idea, response to an image or movie.? Is it a melody you are trying to reproduce? Have you got a rhythmic pattern to lay as the foundation in the arrangement ? (drums, guitar, keys, percussion) It could also be the delivery of vocals, you may start with words and then scan for sounds? Clarify your intention. Think about your instrumentation. You may work in a beginner's mind with nothing; accept the moment and pure creativity. With what do I begin? Save work.

TIP EIGHT: BEGIN EXPERIMENTING

Get at least one layer down with your sound choices and instrumentation. Commit to the composition. It could be a vocal line or a guiding melody, a guitar part. One records with the metronome so all other instrumentation and arrangements choices will synchronise and be in time. People work differently here, one may record in segments and arrange say 8 bars at a time. Or record a whole instrument take. But because the process 'is creating', it may be a case of good old improvisation and experimentation, with editing to refine the emerging ideas. Save work.

TIP NINE: STRUCTURE AND DEVELOP YOUR IDEAS

Working with instruments or sound by sound, decide on your sounds and record your takes. They can be 85 % here, you can edit and fine tune sorting out lots of little things like not enough attack, volume, dynamics, note length too short (midi) a few bum notes in a bar (cut and paste and crossfade) etc. Get 'the body' of the composition out. Establish the length of the piece and the structure Intro, verse, chorus, verse etc. This will vary

depending on your style/ genre of music. Maybe a movement is more appropriate terminology or sound collage, or section A, b etc.

TIP TEN: REFINE, EDIT AND COMPLETE

Once your composition structure is down, all the ingredients are there to be baked. You may or may not have much work to do. But here we refine and make little adjustments, making it the best we can within our skill level and resources. It will also depend on creative intent/ purpose of the work. We may add further fx, equalisation, automation (specific adjustments to desired parameters in and out.) compression limiting or a host of other things to finish out work making it ready for mastering. You will take your work to another level with mixing/ mastering and production by external bodies unless you have the skills your self. Good luck.

RESOURCES

http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/revolutioncomplete

http://www.musicradar.com/computermusic

You Tube has thousands of tutorials about many music software packages.

ABOUT CATHERINE MEESON

Catherine Meeson is an Ambient Artist, singer songwriter composer and sound healing researcher. She has released an album of Ambient soundscapes called 'Revolution Complete' under the pseudonym 'Avatara and The Eternal Presence Orchestra'. She is working on her next album Atmospherica. A Multimodal Artist who also paints, draws & writes. She studied Creativity coaching with Eric Maisel , holds an Advance Dip in Music Performance, Transpersonal Counselling Dip and is currently studying Transpersonal Art Therapy. She is passionate about the potentials of all The Arts, Healing and spirituality and the transformation that the arts bring as a kind of alchemical practise. She holds workshops at the community level.