

Make an EP in 30 Days Ableton Course

Day 11

Create a sound palette the easy way

Easy sound creation

Yesterday, we looked into some sound design basics to start creating & tweaking sounds. Although this can be important when you have a sound in your head that you need to approximate, getting great at it can be a long path.

Today we are going to take a different approach to creating your palette of sounds by allowing for some randomness & happy accidents. You'll be surprised what brilliant things can come out of this process.

Home recordings

Home recordings are such an easy way to get original percussion, ambient & filler sounds.

This can be done by grabbing a microphone & banging on things around the house or even easier, recording yourself doing mundane things around the house with your smart phone.

Try recording ambience outdoors, in the mall or at a local diner. The natural space & reverbs can add dimension to your music & the low-fi recordings can help add a bit of dirt as well, which can be a very good thing when layered with cleaner sounds.

The sounds you've missed

When attempting to create that *one* sound in your head, you often miss 100 fantastic sounds you made along the way, that might be even better.

With this tip, we are going to capture all of that accidental genius.

Synth jams

A fantastic way to get interesting sounds is to drag a synth and a scale effect onto a midi track, choose the scale you would like to work in & record yourself jamming on a synth for 30 to 40 minutes, cutting out the best bits.

This allows you to go wild & have every sound you create be key matched, so they will all work within your composition.

knobs

This works best when you have some physical knobs to twist & have some macros assigned to common parameters like filter, attack, decay, sustain, pitch, lfo etc. If you don't have a midi controller, just move knobs with your mouse while playing.

If you look in your instrument rack presets, you'll find great sounds with macros & effects already set up.



Macros

Instrument Racks

Record the jam

To set yourself up properly for your synth jams, make sure to:

1. Create a new audio track
2. Set the input “from” to your synth track
3. Arm both your midi track & audio track for recording
4. Press the record button at the top of the Ableton screen & get to it
5. There are no rules from here. Turn all the knobs you can & feel free to drag in new synths & presets during the process. Just have fun with no particular goal in mind.



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Layering

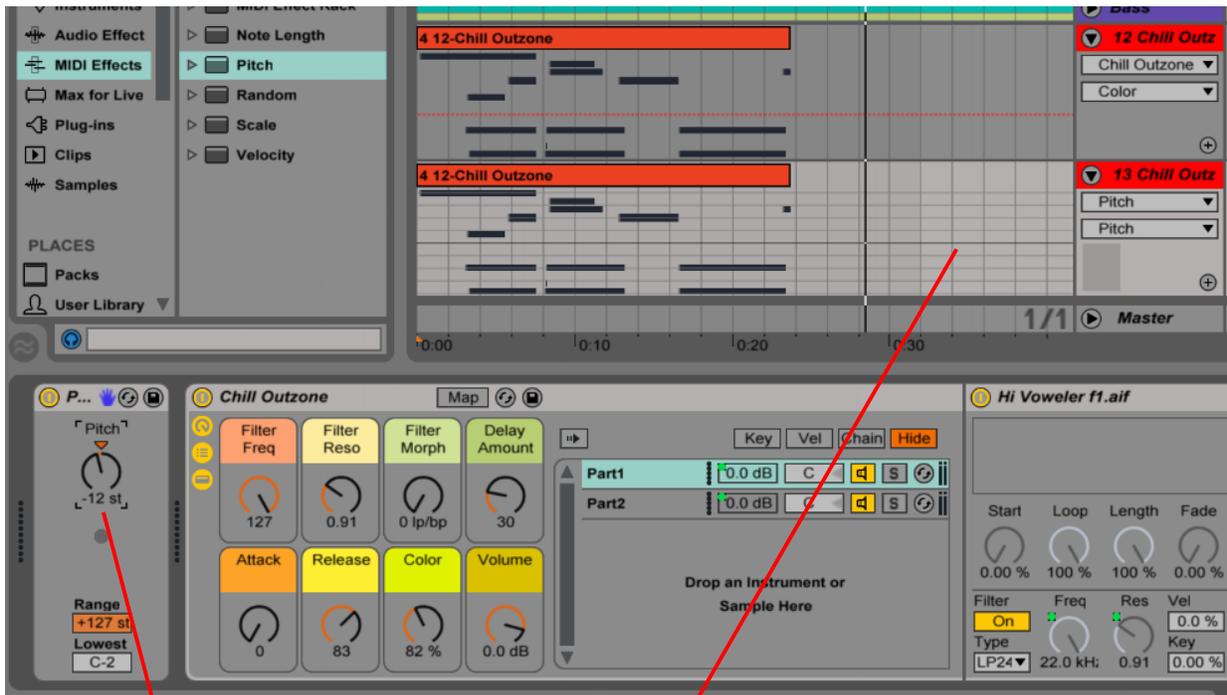
Many sounds that you love in a song are actually several layers working together to sound like 1 sound.

Layering sounds is a powerful way to get those richer, more complex ideas. Here are some tips that could help improve your productions in pretty noticeable ways.

Octave layering

Octave layering is a fantastic & simple way to give a sound more *weight* or *bite* very quickly.

I do this quite often when something is sounding a bit weak & it usually does the trick.



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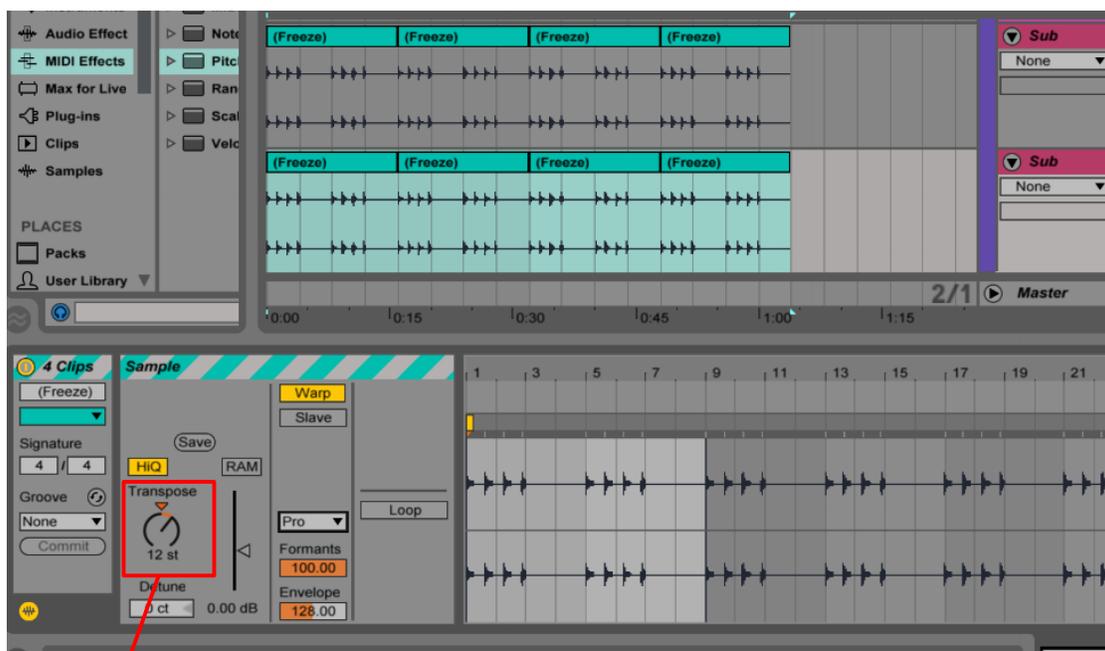
Octave layering

Octave layering is a simple process:

1. Duplicate your audio or midi track

2. For midi, drag in *pitch* from your midi effects & depending on the sound you want, bring the pitch down or up 12 semitones

2B. For audio, you'll want to find the transpose knob & raise or lower by 12 semitones



2B

Octave layering

3. You will usually want to lower the volume of your layer so it's a bit more subtle. A little can often go a long way.
4. You may also want to drag in an EQ8 to remove some lows or highs, so your parts mesh together better.
5. Lastly consider grouping the tracks & adding a light compression to the group track. The mix/gel preset works pretty well.

Frequency Layering

Frequency layering is when you create different sounds to represent the low, mid & high frequencies.

This technique is often used for Kicks & Bass but can be great for any number of sounds.

By focusing on each frequency range separately, it's usually easier to create 1 complex sound & then group those layers to add certain effects like compression, reverb or delay over the whole group.

Sampling

Many music producer's from the bottom to the top use sampling other songs to get nice sounding drum hits, bass, and short sounds to use in their own productions.

Sampling allows us to get the sounds we would have a tough time making from scratch, while focusing on what we are good at. It's a huge time saver & can boost your confidence knowing you are using sounds that are already proven to work in the clubs.

Sampling tips

The best way to get clean samples is from the intros and outros of songs, when things are more stripped down or at a break.

Other times you'll want to EQ out what you don't want, for example, EQing out highs to remove a hi hat from a sample, or vice versa. Sometimes it's a good idea to automate a filter.

Sample Packs

This section wouldn't be complete without mentioning the value you can get from a great sample pack. Often you can get samples made for your particular style of music that can really speed up your songwriting process.

This can be great for building your own drum kits with quality sounds & most other instruments you may be looking for.

With some eq, pitch shifting & other effects, you can really make these sounds your own.

Like I mentioned before, Splice.com has a very innovative way of giving you access to hundreds of thousands of samples.

Remember

Remember the goal is to create your own unique sound quickly with whatever is available to you. Don't slow yourself down with limiting beliefs.

Let the world be your sound palette!

Homework

1. Cut up recordings or octave layers for possible use in your song.