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Composing/Arranging Familiar Songs in Choir with GarageBand

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Composing/Arranging Familiar Songs in Choir with GarageBand

Abstract

This practical multi-stage project description demonstrates to teachers how they can engage students in arranging and composing music related to the choral curriculum by using Digital Audio Workstations (DAW) like GarageBand.

Keywords

music composition, choir, garageband

Disciplines

Composition | Music Education

⇒ COMPOSITION PROJECT 1 ⇐

COMPOSING/ARRANGING FAMILIAR SONGS IN CHOIR WITH GARAGEBAND

Brent C. Talbot

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON[43]

In this multi-stage project, students arrange/compose music related to the choral curriculum using GarageBand[44], a digital audio workstation (DAW) product from Apple, Inc. Teachers select a familiar song (for example, "Bye Bye Blackbird") that has been introduced and rehearsed in choir. Teachers record the piano accompaniment or a bass line to this song using GarageBand, then save and upload the file to their choir course management system (e.g., Blackboard) for students to download outside of class. Students take this file and then create, perform, and record a new melodic variation

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43 I would like to acknowledge the feedback and edits provided by my friend and colleague Dr. Stephen Paparo at UMass Amherst and two former students: Alice Broadway at New Bedford School District in Massachusetts and Matt Carlson at Bermudian Springs School District in Pennsylvania.

44 The screenshots in this document are from GarageBand 10.0.3. This program is the most current version of one of the most widely used DAWs in secondary school music programs. It should be noted that other versions of GarageBand and other versions of DAWs (i.e., Audacity, AbletonLive, Pro Tools, Logic, Reason, MixCraft, CakeWalk, etc.) can be used to accomplish the same goals of this assignment.

and a new harmonic line that match in rhythm, articulation, phrasing, and style. Students save and export their arrangement as an audio file (.mp3), then upload it back to the content management site for the teacher to assess.

Through this assignment, all voice parts engage with melody and harmony. Students listen to themselves and gain a better understanding of their own voice by making evaluative decisions through the arranging/compositional process. They draw from and make comparisons to other recordings to which they have been exposed. This assignment can be limited to the melodic variation and one additional harmonic track, but extensions can include creating multiple tracks for more than one harmonic line and vocal percussion parts. Students can also delete the pre-recorded bass line provided by the teacher and compose a new one. More advanced extensions could include revisiting their assignment to change meter, tonality, and parts of the harmonic progression. Students can complete this homework assignment alone, in pairs, or in small groups.

PREREQUISITE MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE

Students must be familiar with the melody, tonal patterns, and bass line of a selected piece of music (for example, "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Simple Gifts," or "When the Saints Go Marching In").

MATERIALS

- Computer, iPad, or iPhone[45]
- GarageBand, a digital audio workstation (DAW) computer program from Apple, Inc. GarageBand comes preloaded on any Mac computer or can be purchased as an app for the iPad or iPhone.
- Headphones

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45 This assignment can be adapted to work for other DAWs on computers, tablets, and smartphones that are not specifically licensed through Apple, Inc. GarageBand is available for Windows.

Vocabulary

Melody, harmony, accompaniment, meter, tonality, texture, harmonic progression, tonal patterns, bass lines, digital audio workstation (DAW), track, key signature, time signature, bpm, tempo, and metronome.

Learning Objectives

*   Students will create, perform, and record a variation to a familiar melody over an established bass line.
*   Students will create, perform, and record one or more harmonic line(s) that matches the newly created melodic variation.
*   Students will use GarageBand to export an audio file (.mp3) that includes a pre-recorded bass line, a newly created variation of a familiar melody, and a matching harmonic line.

Time Frame

Teachers will need to take a portion of a few rehearsals to introduce the melody, bass line, and tonal patterns of a selected song. Students will need to be fully secure with this material before beginning the composing/arranging and recording project.[46]

Procedure

Before starting the composing project, teachers should search the web or the library for high quality recordings of the song that will be altered for this project. Students should be exposed to many different styles and arrangements of the tune before recording their own variations.

To prepare the initial recording, teachers will:

1. Plug in and use headphones.
2. Open GarageBand.
3. Select Empty Project. Then click Choose.

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46 Teachers should consider: (1) collaborating with media lab teachers, (2) providing tutorials to students for operating and recording multiple tracks in GarageBand, (3) searching on YouTube for helpful videos to upload to their course management systems.

Figure 1. *Starting a Project*

4. Create a new track (think of a *track* as a staff for a single voice/instrument part) by clicking the *keyboard* icon under Software Instrument on the left side of the screen. Then click Create.
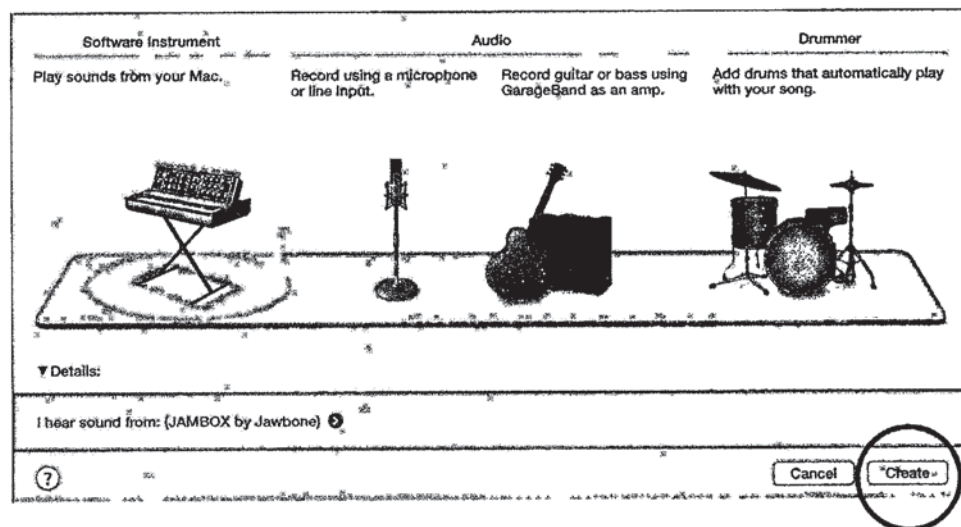

Figure 2. *Keyboard Location*

5. Select the type of instrument to record the bass line by clicking on the Library window on the left side of the screen (Bass, Drum Kit, Vintage Electric Piano, etc.).
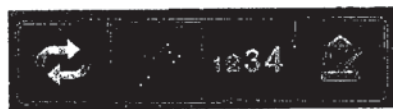

Figure 3. *Library Window*

6. Select the appropriate tempo, key, and meter by clicking on the bpm, key, and signature icons on the top of the screen.
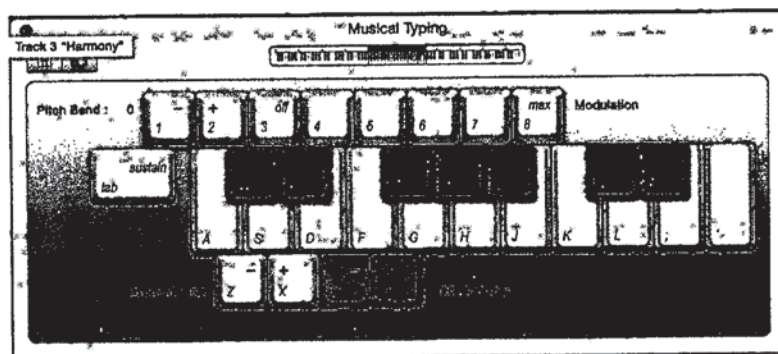

Figure 4. *Setting Tempo, Key, and Meter*

7. Be sure the metronome (bpm) icon is selected and is playing while recording to ensure that all tracks will align with accurate timing.

Figure 5. *Metronome Icon*

8. Teachers can play and record the bass line using a USB plug-and-play piano keyboard controller or the built in Musical Typing keyboard. To get to the built in Musical Typing keyboard, go to Window on the very top of the screen and select Show Keyboard. Once the keyboard displays on the screen, select the square icon with the letter A inside, located in the upper left hand corner of the keyboard window.[47]
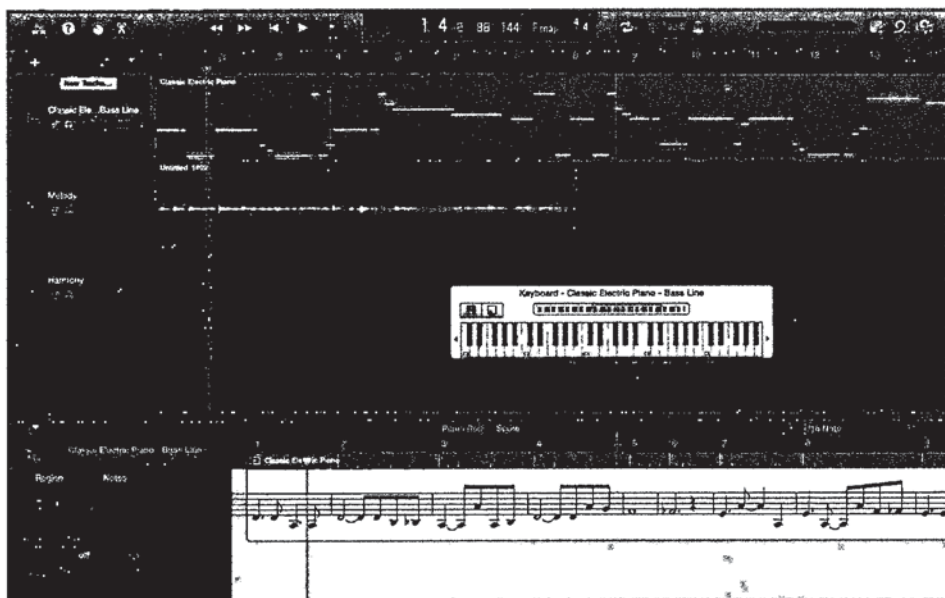

Figure 6. *Keyboard Window*

9. Begin recording by selecting the red dot on the playback display. Record as many times as you need to get as accurate a recording as possible. Hit the Space bar to stop the recording process. To delete unwanted work, click on the green track and push the Delete/backspace button.

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47 Selecting this icon will show which letters on the computer keyboard are used for playing notes. You can then use the computer keyboard like a piano to record music.

Figure 7. *Record Button*

10. Do not worry if the rhythm is not perfect at first. You can fix it by "quantizing" at the sixteenth note. To do this, double click on the green track. This shows the piano roll/score on the bottom of the screen. Then click on Time Quantize and select 1/16 Note.

Figure 8. *Time Quantizing*

11. When you have completed the recording process, save the file by going to File and selecting Save. Then upload this file to your choir course management system (i.e., Blackboard or Moodle).

STUDENT COMPOSITIONS/ARRANGEMENTS

To create their own arrangement/composition, students will:

1. Plug in and use headphones.
2. Download and open the GarageBand file the teacher has created.
3. Create a new track (think of a *track* as a staff for a single voice/ instrument part) by clicking on the plus sign in the upper left corner. Then select the *microphone* icon under Audio in the center of the screen. Then click Create.
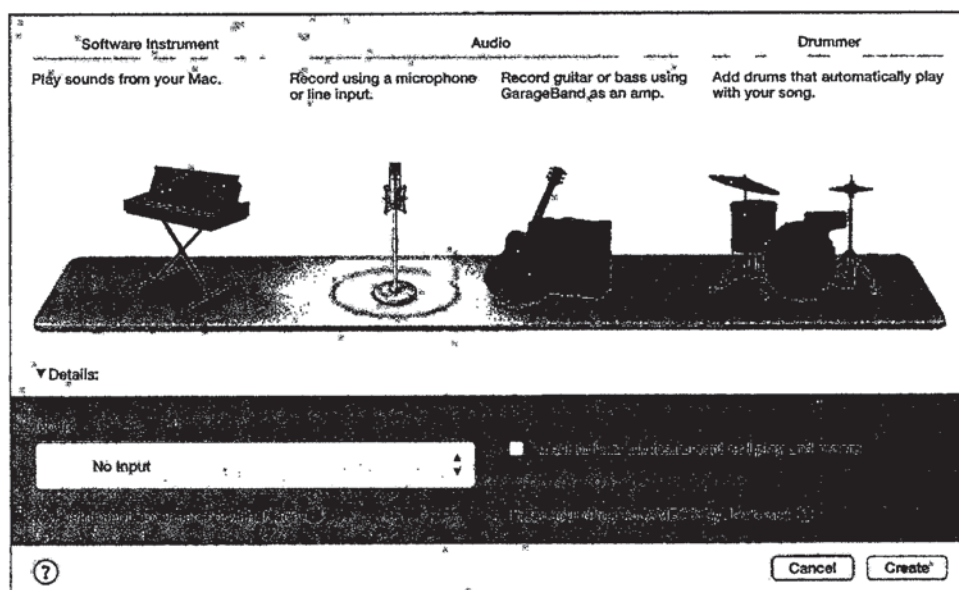

Figure 9. *Creating a New Track*

4. Check that the *metronome* icon is selected and plays while recording to ensure that the track aligns rhythmically with the teacher's original track.

Figure 10. *Metronome Icon*

5. Create a new variation to the familiar melody. Consider changing the rhythm, melodic line, phrasing, and style. To begin recording this new variation, select the red dot on the playback display.
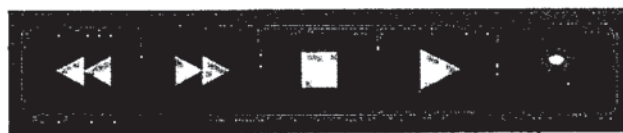

Figure 11. *Record Button*

Each time the students record, be sure they use headphones. This will allow them to record your voice alone without the microphone picking up the metronome and previously recorded tracks. Record as many times as is need to get as accurate a recording as possible. Hit the Space bar to stop the recording process. To delete unwanted work, click on the green track and push the Delete/Backspace button.

6. Create another track by repeating Step 6 of the procedures section above. This time the students record their voice, creating a new harmonic line that fits appropriately with their new melodic variation.

7. Save the file by going to File and selecting Save As. Rename the file, i.e., "LastName_SongTitle." Then upload this file to the Course Management System (i.e., Blackboard or Moodle) associated with the choir.

ASSESSMENTS

A rubric that provides specific feedback to the student will help each student to become more proficient in using the technology and in composing great music. Here is an example of a rubric using specific feedback on the complex task of composing:

4 = Advanced. Student demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the song. Student performs and records the melody with exceptional vocal quality

in a creative and musical way. Student's interpretation of the song is unique and includes variations to more than one of the following musical elements: phrasing, dynamics, key/mode, meter, rhythm, melody, harmonic progression, and voicing. These elements have been altered from the original model examples provided by the teacher. Student's recorded harmonic line fits perfectly with the rhythm and style of their newly created melodic variation and works appropriately within the harmonic progression.

3 = Proficient. Student demonstrates knowledge of the song. Student performs and records the melody with good vocal quality in a creative and musical way. Student's interpretation of the song offers something unique and includes variations to at least one of the following musical elements: phrasing, dynamics, key/mode, meter, rhythm, melody, harmonic progression, and voicing. These elements have been altered from the original model examples provided. Student's recorded harmonic line mostly fits the rhythm and style of their newly created melodic variation and works appropriately within the harmonic progression.

2 = Emergent. Student demonstrates some knowledge of the song. Student's vocal quality is developing. Student performs the melody in a somewhat creative and musical way. Student's interpretation of the song offers little different from the original model examples provided. Student's harmonic line somewhat fits the rhythm and style of their newly created melodic variation, but leaves room for much improvement. Student's harmonic line occasionally works within the overall harmonic progression.

1 = Insufficiently addressed. Student demonstrates little knowledge of the song. Student performs song with poor vocal quality. Student performs the melody in an uncreative and non-musical way. Student's interpretation of the song offers nothing that differs from the original model examples provided. Student's harmonic line does not fit the rhythm and style of their newly created melodic variation. Student's harmonic line does not work within the overall harmonic progression.

PROJECT EXTENSIONS

Students could delete the bass line track and create and record a new bass line using their voice, create and record a vocal percussion line, rearrange and record the song in a different meter, export song as an .mp3 and share it with classmates for peer-to-peer feedback, or showcase work at a school concert or performance.