



CASE STUDY

SIMON MAY

How would you describe your job?

Composer/producer. (Simon wrote the theme tune to EastEnders.)

How do you usually start creating a piece of music?

Chord sequence or lyric idea.

Which 2 pieces of musical equipment are most important in your work?

Piano and MIDI recorder.

What, for you, are the 2 most important elements in a well-crafted piece of music?

Melody and arrangement.

If you consider you work within a genre, do you take influence/ideas from outside that genre?

Yes.

Do you like to collaborate with others in your composition, arranging and recording?

Yes.

If you were to offer one piece of advice for writers working in your area of music what would it be?

'No' is spelt Y-E-S.

photograph supplied courtesy of **SIMON MAY**

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

LINKS

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www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres Find Internet access that's close to you.

HELPFUL LINKS ABOUT WORKING AS A WRITER OR COMPOSER

- www.prsfoundation.co.uk**
Performing Right Society Foundation
PRS based charity to encourage, promote and sustain new music. Funding available.
- www.britishacademy.com**
British Academy of Composers and Songwriters.
Trade association for the UK songwriting and composing community.
Excellent site, lots of resources including information on songwriting competitions.
- www.pcam.co.uk**
Society for Producers and Composers of Applied Music
UK trade association for producers and composers of music for advertising, television and film
- www.bmr.org**
British Music Rights
Promotes the interests of composers, songwriters and publishers
- www.alchemyaudiolab.com**
Music, sound design and post-production services. See how the professionals do it.
- www.bbc.co.uk**
Radio 2 'sold on song site';
Radio 1 One Music site;
There are many BBC resources which are helpful!

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

- Pop Music: The Text Book**
Toby Bricheno, Peter Nickol, Julia Winterson
Publisher : Peters Edition Ltd
ISBN : 1843670070
- Jazz : A crash course**
Simon Adams
Publisher : Simon & Schuster
ISBN : 0684858347
- New Sounds: The Virgin Guide to New Music**
John Schaefer
Publisher : Virgin Books
ISBN : 086369375X
- How to get the sound you want**
Michael Prochak, P. White
Publisher : Sanctuary Publishing
ISBN : 1844920658
- Electronica dance music programming secrets**
Roger Brown, Martin Griese
Publisher : Prentice Hall
ISBN : 0130836966

MORE TASKS

1 Underscore spoken word

Use a sequencer or multi-track recorder to create a piece of music to underscore a spoken narrative. You could create your own spoken track, using a poem or extract from a book. Or you could find an example of a speech or narrative on the Internet.

- 1) Record or import a spoken word track into your audio recorder.
- 2) Summarise what the spoken word track is about.
- 3) Plan what your music is going to add – the moods, emotions and drama – and decide where the ‘turning points’ are (where your music will move to a new section).
- 4) Experiment with chords, sounds and melodies.
- 5) Develop a pool of musical ideas (themes) that support the spoken word.
- 6) Finish off your composition with arrangement ideas.

In order to undertake the underscore project, you should be competent at using an audio recorder, such as Cubase.

In order to create some suitable music for an extract of spoken word you need to have a clear understanding of the message. Think of this as music for a radio drama - or a movie, even though you are just working with sound! Summarise the message, moods and emotions, not just the obvious ones, but sub-plots, things that are hinted at in the tone of the spoken word. After all, you can say ‘show me the money’ in a friendly manner or a dark, threatening way.

Plan what your music is going to add. Very often the music provides what the words alone cannot say – hidden meanings hinted at in the tone, underlying tensions and feelings. It is likely that there will be various changes in the mood of the spoken word – perhaps swinging between optimism and despair, or love and hate, or anger and calm. Identify where these (often subtle) changes are and treat these points as new sections in your music (like the change between verse and chorus in a song). Probably the simplest way to structure your music is to record it to a click at a constant tempo, so choose a tempo that satisfies you and note how many bars there are in total and how many bars there are for each of the sections you’ve planned.

MORE TASKS

Now down to the music! Experiment with musical ideas, just like you would writing a song. Try various chords, melodies, grooves and sounds to build up a pool of ideas. In experimenting with musical ideas to run alongside spoken word, you will quickly develop knowledge of how music can reflect (and manipulate) emotions. From the simple difference between major chords (bright, positive, optimistic) and minor chords (dark, sad) to the tension and release offered by clashes – combinations of notes that don’t sit together obviously.

When you have a bunch of ideas that seem to sit well with the spoken word, you should look at the structure of the music – this will be dictated by the timing of the drama. If you are recording in a sequencer you don’t even have to start at the beginning, but start at a point that inspires you, then move on to another until you’ve filled up the spaces! It’s a bit like doing a jigsaw – do the obvious bits first, then fill in the gaps.

2 New genres

You could argue that if you only write music to fit neatly within the parameters of a particular genre, then you are never going to create something genuinely new or unique. In practice, we often feel an affinity for more than one genre and our music takes on a broader range of characteristics that just one particular style – a hybrid.

Choose a genre that is far removed from your own style. Listen to at 3 least pieces of music from that genre and identify the main features. Now try to incorporate some of those features in your own music.

So, for example, you might marry some country-style slide guitar with an urban groove, or some r’n’b guitar riffs with an indie-style acoustic rock song. Experiment – there are no rules – and unique music often evolves from strange combinations! A new and appealing style might come out of it!

3 Ring tones

Pick 3 songs from your music collection. What would be the ‘ring tone’ for each song – the short but instantly identifiable element? Record these then see if your friends can identify each song.