# GETTING UNSTUCK

## FOR DANCE MUSIC PRODUCERS

VALUABLE TIPS, SECRET TECHNIQUES, AND A BETTER WAY TO FINALLY FINISH YOUR SONGS.

Little LEGENDS

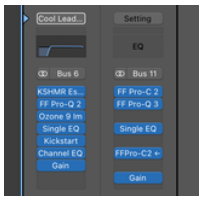Finishing a Song

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# GET ORGANIZED

It will make your production life much easier.

**Getting organized, in this sense, is referring to keeping your session clean and ready to go as soon as you sit down. This includes your sounds and samples as well as having easy access to all of these things right away, without hesitation.**

- ORGANIZE SAMPLES: Start out by creating a folder on your desktop home screen called "Favorite Samples". Fill this folder with sub folders that help you identify and quickly access every sound. For example, in my favorite samples folder I have: Atmospheres, Drums, Fills, FX, and Stabs. Then inside some of these folders, I have sub-categories. For example, in my "Drums" folder, my sub-categories are: Claps, Kicks, Cymbals, Snares, Snaps, Top Loops, and Groove Elements.
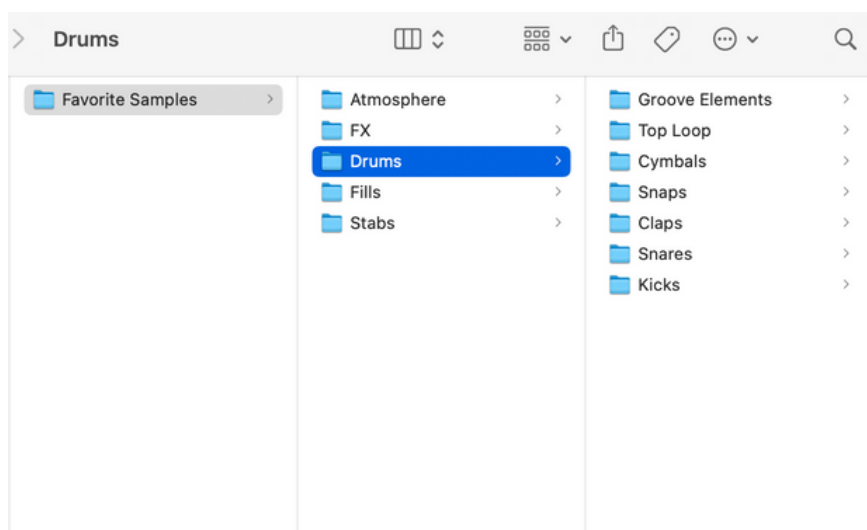


- ORGANIZE PRE-SETS: Same thing applies here, but you can organize your presets within your synth of choice. In Serum, hover over "Menu" in the top right corner. Click "Show serum presets folder". When the folder opens, click on "Presets". In this area, create a new folder and call it "Favorite Presets" or something along those lines. You can now make folders such as "Bass", "Leads", etc. or you can just drag and drop your favorite samples directly into this folder. Click on the pre-set sound name section and choose a preset in your folder. You can now scroll through all of your favorite pre-sets just using the arrows.

- USING THE SIDE-BAR: We personally use Logic Pro for producing, but this trick can be done in any Digital Audio Workstation (DAW). In Logic Pro, hit the icon thats on the very top right of the screen. It should be a logo that has a music symbol, as well as a folder and file symbol. Locate your organized sample folder that we made earlier. Right click on the folder, and hit "Bookmark *Your Folder Name*". There we go! Now every time you hit the bookmark logo under that screen, you have easy access to all of your sounds.
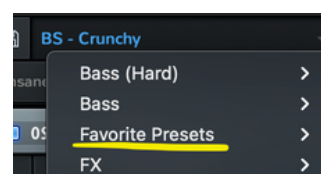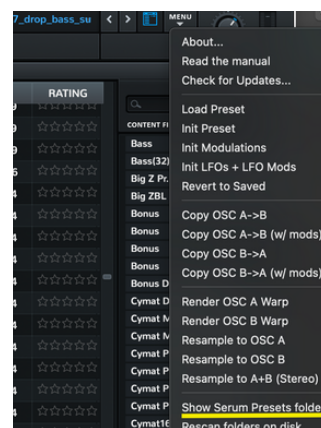
# START FROM A TEMPLATE

## It's easier when everything is already set up for you.

**A TEMPLATE IS GOING TO GO A LONG WAY WITH SAVING TIME AND HELPING YOU GET OUT OF THOSE "FEELING STUCK" SITUATIONS <u>RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING.</u>**

- **Set up Markers:** The easiest way to start your template is to set up markers of where your verses, builds, bridges, drops/choruses will be. The absolute easiest way to do this is to listen to a few tracks in the genre of music you're producing and see what their layout is by counting the beats. Every 4 counts would be equal to 1 bar. We produce dance music, so our typical layout looks like this:
    - 4 Bar (intro)
    - 8 Bar (Verse 1)
    - 8 Bar (Build 1)
    - 16 Bar (Drop 1)
    - 8 Bar (Verse 2)
    - 8 Bar (Build 2)
    - 16 Bar (Drop 2)

  After finishing the layout of your track, it's easiest to understand if you color code each section based on which part of the track it is. In Logic Pro, click the ⬚ symbol. Right click, and you can select "Create a Marker". You can now hold down "Option" and "C" on your keyboard to select a color for each section.

- **Set-up Your Instrument Buses:** Start by creating a new track for every major instrument group that you think you'll have in your future songs. Let me show you our major groups:
    - Drums
    - Chords
    - FX
    - Atmosphere
    - Basses
    - Leads
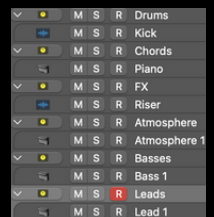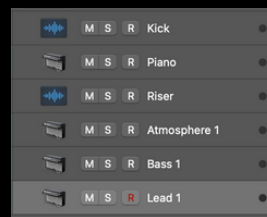
  Now you should have one instrument track for each group in your song. We haven't created the buses yet, we just have the tracks. You can name these tracks any element you wish that coincides with each section. For the first track, I'll name it "Kick" because a kick is in the drums section. I might name the next track "Piano" because a piano falls under chords. Do this with each created section you've got. NOW, right click on each track and hit "Create track stack" and then hit "Summing stack". Now you will have this instrument neatly tucked under this bus channel, which will keep everything super clean and organized. Now, go ahead and name each bus channel under the category they fall under (As shown in our bullet point list example).

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# SAVE CHANNEL STRIPS

## It helps lock in your favorite settings.
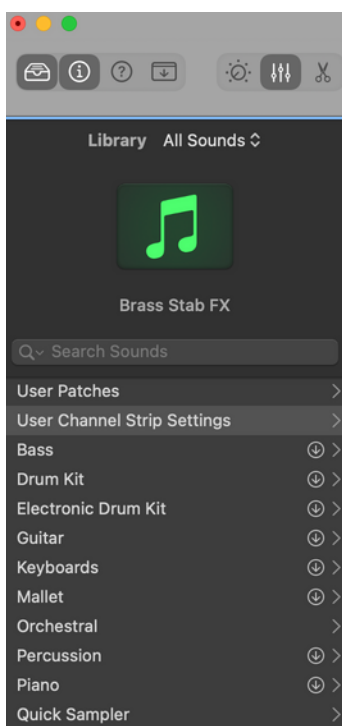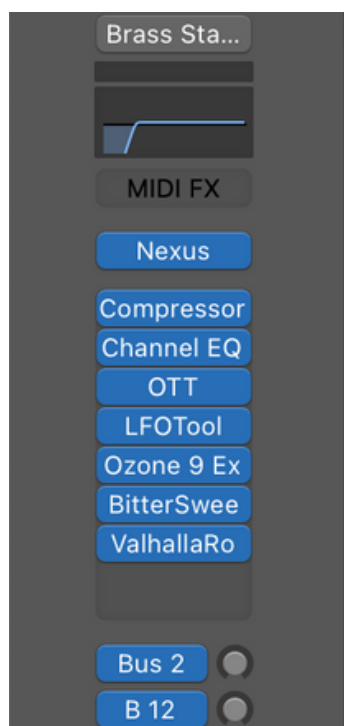
**SUPER EASY TO ACCESS**

### SAVE ONE FOR INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

After processing is finished on a specific sound, it will sound different than the original. You can save these channel strip settings so that you can duplicate this same exact sound next time you start a session. This is very easy to do. After you're finished with all of your processing, just right click over the settings icon on the strip and hit "Save Channel Strip Setting As". Name your channel strip. This is perfect for when you have that "Aha!" moment.

Saving a channel strip offers many benefits and things you can use it for later. Check out the list below for why I save my channel strips.

- Recreate an exact sound
- Having a processing channel set-up for a similar sound (i.e. maybe you're using a different synth)
- Using it as a starting point for a song

### SAVE ONE FOR A GROUP

Just like you can save a channel strip for a singular sound, you can actually do the same exact thing in order to set up a bus or an instrument group. This helps in many different scenarios. Sometimes, maybe you want processing and compression on a bass group already taken care for you. At the least, you can use the channel strip as a starting point for how you're going to process your final sounds.

The way that I like to set up a group bus is by having all the plug-ins on the channel saved, but not necessarily turned on. This gives me a huge advantage when trying to process a group of sounds because now I no longer have to remember every plug in that I've used before. I can have a starting point of where to go and go down the line and adjust everything manually to get the perfect processing.

# USE A REFERENCE TRACK

Most people hear this advice, but severely undervalue it.

Using a reference track is everything. It can help with sound selection, organization, mixing, and thats only the beginning. I'm not saying to copy a track, but what I am saying is to let it inspire you. Feel free to use multiple reference tracks for different reasons! If you're listening to music and you find a song that moves you and makes you think "I wish I could produce a track like that", save it and come back to it later when you're in a session. You just might end up making a track like that.

## ✓ ORGANIZATION

The simplest way to use a reference track is as a guide point for how to lay out your own track. Since a lot of tracks in specific genres have very similar or the exact same layouts, this one isn't hard to do. Find a song that inspires you and take the layout structure of it for your own track. Maybe the verse has 16 bars, followed by an 8 bar build, and an 8 bar drop. Use this information and set-up your markers like we discussed on page 2.

## ✓ SOUND SELECTOIN

When you're listening to a track that you like, what sounds stick out to you? Which sounds are your favorites? More importantly, what do you like about these sounds? Is it the way they fit with the other instruments or maybe the tone of them? Take these questions into thought as you use your reference track. Pay attention to all of the elements in your reference track and write down what they are. In a dance track, I would probably write down things like "Kick, bass, sub bass, chords, etc". This also includes anything that helps add to the track that might not stick out at you immediately, such as small atmospheric elements or fx.

## ✓ TECHNIQUES

Another cool thing about using a reference track is that you might hear different types of techniques that a producer uses that you can use in your own productions. Back when I first started producing, I used to hear little "whoosh" sounds that would suck me into the next part of a song. I was curious and wanted to use these in my own productions. What I discovered was that this "whoosh" sound was the producer reversing an element and placing it before the sound thats about to come in. This is a very common tool that producers everywhere use, and I use them in every production now. You can also listen for other things such as the way that the producer uses different elements in a track, how they build suspense, and how they grab a listeners attention

## ✓ MIXING

Mixing is a beast on its own, but it's always a great idea to use a reference track when mixing your own track. The advantages of this are pretty apparent. When mixing your track with a reference, here are some things to pay attention to.

- Volumes of instruments
- Wideness and depth of sounds
- Volumes of sections of the track
- EQ matching between the two

- The brightness or dullness of sounds
- The compression of different groups
- Amount and size of Reverb/delay used
- Overall Quality of sounds used

# BREAKDOWN EVERY TRACK ELEMENT

"What are all of the pieces that I need to put together to make a full sound?"
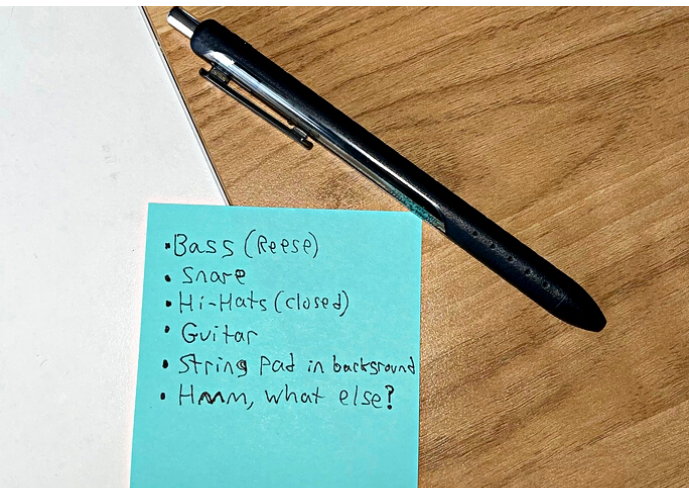
The two big things you need to know in order to make the sound of your track sound complete is **LAYERING SOUNDS** and **FINDING THE CORRECT ELEMENTS** that belong in your track. Below you'll find some major tips on how to do each of these things.

## LAYERING SOUNDS

- Find one main sound you really like. Then find sounds that SUPPORT this main sound. (In the frequency spectrum, in the stereo field, etc.)
- Use every layer for a purpose. Don't just throw a bunch of layers together and call it a day. If you need a bit more low end from a layer, find a layer that does that
- Watch your Attack, Decay, Sustain, Release (ADSR) for each layer. If the ADSR is too different, it will be very hard to make these layers sound like one sound. These can always be adjusted in your synth of choice
- Send all of your layers to one group bus
- Use compression on this group bus to help bring your sounds together! A little Over the Top Compression (OTT) wouldn't hurt either depending on the sounds
- Bring down all your layer volumes, then bring up your main layer to the volume that you like. Next, bring up each layer one by one in order to fill in that main layer

## FINDING THE ELEMENTS

- Find one of your favorite songs in the same genre as you (Refer to page 4: Use a Reference track). Use this reference track and write down every single element that you hear
- After you've written down all the elements in your reference track, imagine them each serving a purpose in the track. A bassline might be repetitive in order to keep the track moving along. The kick might be constant to keep you dancing. Risers might help take you to a new section of the song. Every sound serves its own purpose. Breakdown what these purposes are
- Once you've found the purpose for each instrument, you can jump into a session of your own and use these same purposes in your own track! Is the sound used for groove? for an accent to another sound? To add atmosphere? This is the secret to making your track sound full and complete

About the Author

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Bobby is the guy behind the alias Little L3GENDS. He has over 15 years of musical experience, including music production, piano, guitar, and theory. Little L3GENDS has amassed over 2 Million + streams across platforms. He's also play alongside artists such as R3HAB, Lost Kings, Elephante, and Two Friends.

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