

MORE TASKS

1 New tunes from old songs.

Check the music charts for this week; how many of those songs are re-makes of older songs? There's a good chance that you'll find an example.

Re-working an existing tune is very common. The tune might not obviously suit the artist but with a new arrangement it will take on a whole new identity. This might be done by using elements of the original recording (like Remixing - Chapter 3) or starting from scratch.

Can you find examples in your music collection of re-arranged tunes? Do you have 2 versions of the same song (by different artists)? List the differences.

Now find a tune and try your own new arrangement. Start by getting to know the tune really well – it's best to choose something simple that doesn't have too much arrangement in it already, maybe an acoustic song. It doesn't have to be something well known – you could use a song of your own or one by a friend or colleague.

2 What instruments do.

Find some recordings that include 'uncommon' instruments; maybe orchestral instruments (like strings, brass or woodwind), or ethnic instruments like pan flute, sitar or shakuhachi. Describe their characteristics and what they do best in an arrangement.

Now find synth or sampled versions of those instruments in a computer sequencer or on a keyboard and try creating music lines that suit the sounds. Do these instruments have a practical range (lowest and highest notes) outside of which they don't sound effective or natural? What sort of things do they do best in an arrangement?

3 Arranging with notation – score writing software.

Arranging is about generating musical ideas, but to communicate your ideas to other musicians, notation is still a useful tool. Can you name 3 software packages used by musicians to notate music? Is there one to which you have access? Cubase has a useful notation editor; experiment with turning some musical lines in midi into notation, print some out and see if you or your colleagues can perform them.

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4 Recreate an existing arrangement

Covering an arrangement you admire is a great way to get inside the music. By copying every aspect of the track you go through a similar sort of process as the original musicians and get a feel for their approach to making music.

You can do this in a live room with a group of musicians or by yourself on a computer with a sequencer. Listen to the track many times to get to know it, make yourself a chord and structure chart then start building up. If you are working in a computer programme like Cubase, import the original track as an audio file, match up the tempo and play along. That way you can easily check if you are copying the music accurately. This is a skill that can provide work opportunities.

There is work available in producing backing tracks, re-recordings or notation of existing tunes. There are many areas of the music industry that commission this sort of work, for example singers in pubs and clubs, karaoke companies, theatres and cruise ships. Where would 'Stars In Their Eyes' be without musicians being able to copy existing arrangements!

5 Build your own string arrangement

Pick a track of your own or part of someone else's that would suit a string arrangement.

Using a MIDI sequencer and some string samples or sounds, build up layers of string parts. Listen to real examples first, find out the role of each instrument and what register they tend to occupy.

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Sound Advice

MU Musicians' Union

MPG Music Producers Guild

AIM Association of Independent Music

PRS Performing Right Society

MCPS Mechanical - Copyright Protection Society

MMF Music Managers Forum

BPI British Phonographic Industry

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