Easily Build Chord Progressions and Melodies Using Hookpad

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Community member and guest contributor Torben Andersen found this interesting website to help you get started making music if you're new to chords and melodies. Let's hear what he has to say about this interesting site.

This isn't specific to Studio One – nor is it very expert-y (one could argue it's quite the opposite), but we all have to start somewhere with making music.

The world today is one where the ability to create music is very accessible. Pretty much everyone has a computer in some form and then you just need to add a DAW, making you all kinds of ready to create the next Japanese Happy-Death-Pop-Fusion-Jazz hit (I'm fairly sure that's a thing).

This also means that a lot more people are trying their hand at it, often with no prior experience or knowledge – and I think it's safe to say that very few of these people are musical prodigies.

Some of these people will be able to actually make a decent career without really knowing much music theory, but others (probably most) will need to build an understanding of how to use these digital tools to create music that's actually good. This means that they will need some knowledge of music theory to help them get on the right track, and eventually (hopefully) get so good that they can forget what they have learned and just make music (at least that seems to be the ultimate goal).

The internet is, of course, a great resource for knowledge and one site has a really good offering for helping you out with trying to decipher the music you know, so that you can understand how it works and learn from it.

It also has a great tool for creating chord progressions and melodies - in a very quick and easy fashion - allowing you to test out ideas without much hassle. But before we get into Hookpad, which will be the main part of this article, let's quickly talk about two other key features of the site.

Theorytab

First of all... The site is called Hooktheory and it has a very interesting section called Theorytab.

Theorytab is basically a huge collection of music that has been analyzed by the users of the site, meaning that there's no guarantee that everything is 100% correct but, even with small mistakes, this is a wonderful resource.

For instance, take "Africa" by Toto.

This is partly what it looks like on the site. You are able to view the chord progression and melody for a particular section (whatever sections that have been created for the song), while you hear the actual song playing in sync using YouTube.

You also have the option to hear a piano rendition of it, if you want. You can also see what key and BPM the song is in, and even convert it to different keys/tempos.

The power of this is that you can see and hear how a song you know is constructed. What are the chords doing? What are the notes in the melody doing? How are they connected? You get to see "behind the scenes" of a song and what elements make it what it is. This can be pretty beneficial if you're trying to make sense of chord progression and melodies. Just

start going through songs you know, while listening and looking at the chords and melodies. It might not make sense straight away, but after a little bit you might start seeing how some of this is connected.

Many song segments are also classified by their complexity, so you can choose to start out with easy chord progressions so you don't overload yourself with too much information from the beginning.

This section of the site offers a few other features, like a chord progression database and the ability to find chord progressions in specific keys.

Hooktheory I – Get Some Knowledge

Hooktheory I is a book you can purchase on the site for $15. It's a digital book that you use directly on the website, as it uses a bunch of examples through Hookpad. There are also versions available for mobile devices through various stores, which are all shown on the website.

The book is the first one in a series and what it sets out to teach you is how to make good chord progressions and melodies by teaching you the basics of chord progressions and building on that.

It's a really good book for someone wanting to improve their chord progression and melody creation - something that is, after all, pretty vital for producing good music. The approach to teaching you about it is not as dry as it might otherwise be reading a book about music theory which, in part, is helped by the inclusion of Hookpad examples and small "tests" throughout the chapters.

It does an excellent job at explaining things through the use of real-world examples (songs you know), which for a lot of people will be much easier to deal with than just reading about it. It also teaches you how time signatures work and what impact they have on chord progressions and melodies, so that you understand how to use this element in making music as well.

You will also find out why some chords are used more than others, which chords are better after certain other chords, and what roles some of the chords fulfill.

If you want to learn more about building chord progressions and melodies without having to go through 200 pages of music theory, then I can only recommend giving this book a go.

Hookpad!

Now let's get to the nice tool that Hooktheory offers for building chord progressions and melodies, which is Hookpad. You have already seen Hookpad, at least the playback version of it, in the image of the website showing Toto's Africa earlier in this article.

Hookpad is essentially a tool made to easily and quickly let you build chord progressions and melodies via a Flash-based application on their website. It's also made in a way that people who aren't comfortable with every formula in music theory can work within some safe boundaries and not have to worry so much whether what they're doing is right or wrong. Pick a key, time signature and set your tempo. You will be given the chords you can use in the numeral system, which makes it easier to work with (as it's not dependent on what key you're in).

The first time you enter the Hookpad page they offer to show you a video, which will explain the basics of using it. It's not the worst idea in the world to sit through that, but I'm not your Mom, so do whatever you want!

The Hookpad page itself also offer buttons to read the manual as well as seeing the keyboard shortcuts, where I can really recommend looking through the latter.

First thing you'll be met with is this screen.

This is basically your work area and you can now start putting in chords (or notes, if you want).

For instance, one could quickly create a simple little chord progression...

S1E Article Example 01
As you might have noticed, the top bar (that gray one) now has “S1E Article 01” in the middle of it, instead of “Untitled”. That's because, naturally, Hookpad allows you to save your creations, and there's more options for that if you're a Plus subscriber (which costs $5 a month), like exporting to MIDI, notation, guitar tabs, and WAV files.

However, more importantly, we now have a chord progression as shown at the bottom of the screen, consisting of iii, vi, IV and V chords, which are then repeated.

Pressing play will, of course, let you hear what it sounds like and you can make changes if you feel like it.

For building melodies there's a nice little setting you can enable, making it a bit easier to see when you're dealing with stable or unstable notes, in case you're not down with which notes are in each chord (or it simply making you work faster). And if you don't know about stable and unstable notes, I can recommend the Hooktheory I book again, which also cover those.

Click the Settings icon and enable the “Show chord compatibility guides”. Normally these are shown when you hover over a chord, but enabling that setting allows you to see them at all times when you're putting in notes, making it a bit easier to work with.

That particular chord progression is very simple and it doesn't use any fancy chords, but you are able to introduce more advanced chords, as well as inversions of them, naturally. Below is an example of a chord progression using suspended, added and inverted chords.

S1E Article Example 02
The example also shows a melody, as you can see there's now notes in the row above the chords.

The last example here shows a more complex chord progression, using a lot of different chord variations, including borrowed chords. It also shows that you can work with more than 8 bars.

S1E Article Example 03
In all honesty, talking about Hookpad doesn't really matter much, what you instead should be doing is trying it out and see if it's something that's useful for you.

As with any tool this is not for everyone, but I personally find it an easy way to try out chord progressions and melodies quickly, especially because I'm not that comfortable with every aspect of music theory yet (far from it). Using this helps me create faster, but it also helps me learn more efficiently, since I'm working with a limited set of data, instead of having to know all the formulas for this stuff and so on. It's a bit of a shortcut, if you will, and after all what matters is not what you know, but what you produce.

It's also a good tool to get a chord progression and/or melody down if you find yourself without your DAW. Open your browser, go to Hookpad, make it, save it and open it up again when you get to your DAW.

The people behind the Hooktheory website have done a great job at making a lot of data available. They've made a great tool for making chord progressions and melodies easily and quickly, especially if you're in a position where you're still trying to learn music theory and make it all work for you. Because of that, we thought it would be worth sharing – then it's up to you if it's something you can use or not.

HookTheory website

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Posted by Studio One Expert Team

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