Composing with MIDI

MIDI: the challenge

Dennis
We sent Simon the TA225 course tune but we deliberately left out any tempo markings and any harmonies so he had a completely free reign as to what he did with the tune. But we did ask him to produce three versions. The first one should use just general midi sounds. The second one synthesised sounds and the third one we allowed him to have a completely free range as to what he did but we did hope he would include some live music as well.

Simon
I've decided to do a general midi version which is if you like an orchestral or film type versions and I'll just play you the results of that one.

I've used general midi instruments only in that and we can look at the score that, music if we get all the instruments together. It's a bit of mess it hasn't been tied up, but that's what it would look like as a rough but obviously the main idea is that this can now be saved as a midi file and someone else can open it on their system and hopefully get a similar result if not an identical result.

So in my second version of the tune I wanted to do something very different and I decided to do dance mix of it. It also is much better to do that sort of music with synthesisers as opposed to with sample players, so I chose that particular style because that's the type of sounds you expect to hear in dance music as opposed to obviously in orchestral music you expect to hear more realistic sound. Also the speed of that one is considerably faster so I double the speed of the music and kept the tune at half speed I you like, so it remains at about the same speed.

For my third version I wanted to do something different again. So I decided that I would try and do a jazz version of the tune. Now I decided to use looped drums because it's very hard to get jazz drums looped to sound right when you play them as midi instruments so that's a recording of someone playing brushes. I've used a sample of a bass instrument although I'm triggering it by midi and in fact the drum loop is triggered my midi as well. And also I've put two different types of piano sound. But what I'd really like to do is to add an acoustic instrument. So I thought we might use a melodica or melody horn in this case to play the melody on top. But of course I can play it live with the sequence but I need to somehow get those in together so I'll need to record it into the computer programme in order to be in sync.

And for that I'll have to play with the click, which is the yellow track that you can perhaps see at the top there. We need to use a microphone to take the sound that I'm gonna play on the melodica goes into the mixing desk through the sound card into the computer programme. But with the microphone in the room if I play the music and the all important click which will help me to synchronise the music then that will get recorded on top of this sound which I don't want to do, so I'll need to wear headphones and I'll need to turn off the speakers in the room. And the other thing I'll need to do is just to check that I haven't got too much volume in my headphone cans. So now I'm ready to make the recording, here we go. Once I've got the audio into the computer I can edit that as well if I need to.

What I'd like to do to make that sound better is to add some reverb.

Dennis
So now we've heard all three versions of the tune did you find any particular one more difficult to make?

Simon

I think the dance version one was the most difficult one to bring off as it's not a tune that you would necessarily think of making into that sort of music in the first place but they all have there own challenges in a way.

Dennis

Was any one technically more difficult to make?

Simon

The general midi one has got more in it. I think that's probably the most time consuming one because that took lots of tracks to sort out and record.

Dennis

Which of the three did you prefer?

Simon

I think it's the jazz versions although the GM version came very close 'cause I didn't expect to get it to sound as good as I did in the GM version but I think the jazz versions sounds the most authentic, it was the most fun for me to do. Now Dennis the boots on the other foot which one did you prefer?

Dennis

Well that's a very interesting question. The first thing that struck me actually was the speed. In fact I originally envisioned the speed a little bit faster but all three were very interesting and I'd enjoy, enjoyed listening to them all. But I think if you pushed me for a choice it would be the middle one the dance tune and the reason for that is, it, it can't be done conventionally like the other two possibly could and it really showed off midi and what you can do with midi and really showed off the technological side that we've been looking at.