

Cubase: Chord Track, editing and a clean master

Set the project up once, let the Chord Track carry the harmony, quantise like a musician, and export a master you can actually send.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Four lessons, in order. Read the lesson, do the steps in your own project, then use the check at the end before you move on. The video walkthrough on the course page follows the same four chapters.

LESSON 01 - 13 MIN

Project setup, tempo track and the Chord Track

Cubase rewards setting things up properly more than any other DAW, and its Chord Track is the single best harmony tool in a mainstream DAW. Add it first: it holds the progression as chord symbols, independent of any instrument.

Once the chords exist on the Chord Track, everything else in the project can follow them - MIDI parts, arpeggios, even audio via VariAudio in later versions.

DO THIS

- 01 Project -> Add Track -> Chord, then enter your progression as symbols (Dm, Bb, F, C).
- 02 Set the tempo track to Fixed until arrangement is done; switch to Musical mode only when you want tempo changes.
- 03 Set the project sample rate to 48 kHz and record format to 24-bit before you record anything.
- 04 Save as a template once the routing is how you like it.

CHECK YOURSELF

Your progression is visible as chord symbols above the timeline, not just as notes inside a part.

LESSON 02 - 15 MIN

Voicings, Chord Assistant and Chord Pads

The Chord Assistant will suggest the next chord from the circle of fifths, from a tonal proximity list, or from a genre-aware model. Use it as a second opinion, not an author: it is very good at telling you which chord is unexpected but still legal.

Chord Pads then let you play those chords from single keys, with voicing and tension controls per pad - the fastest way to audition an inversion set without editing MIDI.

DO THIS

- 01 Open the Chord Assistant on the last chord of your progression and audition three suggestions.
- 02 Set the Chord Track's Voicing library to Piano and adjust the voicing range so chords stop jumping octaves.
- 03 Send the Chord Track to Chord Pads and play the progression live to feel its rhythm.
- 04 Use 'Follow Chord Track' on your MIDI part with Single Voice for basslines and Chords for pads.

MAKE IT YOURS

Add a tension of 9 to the pre-chorus chord only. One coloured chord beats a whole coloured song.

Editing: Key Editor, quantise panel and Logical Editor

The quantise panel in Cubase does far more than snap-to-grid: iterative quantise moves notes a percentage of the way to the grid, which is how you tighten a performance without flattening it. Sixty percent, twice, beats one hundred percent once.

The Logical Editor is the part most producers never open, and it is where the hours go back: 'select all notes below C2 and lower velocity by 15' is a two-second rule, not ten minutes of clicking.

DO THIS

- 01 Set quantise to 1/16, iterative on, strength 60%, and apply twice to your keys part.
- 02 Use Length quantise to 'Legato' on a pad part so the chords stop gapping.
- 03 Build a Logical Editor preset: pitch below C2 -> velocity subtract 15 -> apply.
- 04 Save the preset with a name you will recognise in six months.

CHECK YOURSELF

Your quantised part still has audible push and pull when soloed against a metronome.

Mixing basics and export

MixConsole with Channel Strip on every track means you rarely need a third-party plugin to get a clean balance. Work in this order: level, high-pass, one subtractive EQ move, compression only if the part moves too much.

Then export properly. A 24-bit WAV at the project rate is your master; the MP3 is a copy for listening, never the file you send to a distributor.

DO THIS

- 01 Set every fader to unity, then balance with the kick as your reference at about -12 dBFS peak.
- 02 High-pass everything except kick and bass at 80-120 Hz.
- 03 Cut, don't boost: find the muddy band around 250-400 Hz and take 2-3 dB out of the pads.
- 04 Export -> Audio Mixdown, 24-bit WAV, then a 320 kbps MP3 from the same render.

MAKE IT YOURS

Bounce a version with the lead 1 dB louder and pick the winner tomorrow, not tonight.

Session checklist

Print one per session. Tick as you go; anything left blank at the end is your next session's first job.

- ☐ Tempo and key set before any notes were written
- ☐ Progression written down as chord symbols
- ☐ Chords voiced by hand, not left in root position
- ☐ Groove checked with the melody muted
- ☐ One new sound at each section change
- ☐ Rough export listened to on a phone or laptop speaker
- ☐ Project saved with a name that says what it is
- ☐ Next session's first task written at the top of the page

NOTES
