Hands-on Activity: Band-in-a-Box (PG Music, Inc. for PC and Mac)

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Band-in-a-Box (BIAB) is a unique program that has been around for some time. It's uniqueness is in its ability to algorithmically simulate a tremendous repertoire of musical styles for accompaniment, melodies, and solos all from user provided chord progressions. It's interface is not the most elegant, but with some patience and experimentation, there's lots to discover beneath the surface.

Goal: This tutorial is design to introduce you to the variety of ways music can be created within this unique program. The steps below are not meant to be inclusive; the documentation provides enough prompts so you can reconstruct the activity later.

A. Generating a melody and solo from 12-bar blues progression

1. Set key (F), tempo (90), length (1-24) and repetitions (1)
2. Enter chords, one per bar, for 12 bars, then use copy paste for next 12 bars.

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|| F | F | F | F7 | Bb7 | Bb7 | F | F | C7 | Bb7 | F | F ||

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3. Set style (STYLE button) to "63 All Blues: Blues Jump--Blues Shuffle"
4. Save file as "BluesStudy"
5. Select Play to auto-compose accompaniment.

6. Click on the NOTATION button and then any of the row of buttons (B D P G S M S) to see the notated score for Bass, Drums, Piano, Guitar, Strings, Melody, or Solo)

7. Let's let BIAB generate a melody for us. Click on the MELODIST button. In the MELODIST dialog window do the following:

   • Pick 110 Ballad - Vibes
   • Click the button MELODY, not CHORDS, ALL, or CHORS & MEL.
   • Uncheck "Allow Style Changes"
   • Click OK at the bottom
   • (to erase a melody and start over, go back to MELODIST and click the KILL MEL. button and then start over with another melody style)

8. Turn on NOTATION and select the Melody (M) button to view the melody it composed. Go back and try several other melody styles: 13 Swing Wes Grove, 191 Scott Joplin Sustained, 173 Piano 3rds Soundtrack, and more.
9. Experiment with changing the instrumentation. See buttons on left above the keyboard for B D P G S M S and pull down the MIDI instrument list to select a new choice.

10. Now try the SOLOIST feature (be sure to save your work so far).
    • Go back to the original Melody Style 110 Ballad - Vibes.
    • Click the SOLO button
    • Select and try: #19 Blues (Even 8ths) Jz Guitar, #18 Tenor Sax Slow Ballads, #49 Barney K Blues Guitar, #52 and more.
    • Play with many of the Soloist settings like those under Solo Mode.

Save your work; we'll use this project later.

Step C: Creating an accompaniment for a folk tune with chords

1. Set key (D), tempo (90), length (1-8) and repetitions (3)

2. Type in chords (e.g., D, G, A7, etc.)
3. Set style (STYLE button) to Old Time (Country/Folk => OLDTYME1) Say "no" to reduce chord durations when asked)
4. Save file as "myEnglishDance"

5. Select PLAY to auto-compose accompaniment. Notice that it creates different accompaniment variations for each repetition.

6. Click on NOTATION button and preview auto-composed parts for [B]ass, [D]rums, [G]uitar, and [P]iano while the music is playing. Check the [] Mono box between Rest and Clean check boxes.

7. Enter "edit [N]otation" mode by clicking on the [N] button (find it located in the lower left, between the OPT and PRINT buttons). Then click on the [M]elody button to see the melody score.

8. Pick an instrument for the Melody like flute (74) or fiddle (41). You can use the pop-down menu to select the instrument quickly.

9. Click on the rhythmic subdivision lines to enter notes; notice it is always trying to guess ahead on the rhythmic durations—you don't have to enter rhythms! You can click and drag any note up and down or over to change its pitch or timing.

    Here are a few keyboard tips:
    • Erase a note: Hold the DELETE key and click the note
    • Use Command + Z to undo any mistake you just made
    • Accidentals: Shift key = #   Control key = b   Command key = natural sign
    • Edit dialog for any note = click on note with Option key down

10. Play arrangement with melody; play looking at auto-composed parts for rest of accompaniment.
11. To copy melody over all three choruses, choose MEL menu and select "Copy melody over all choruses"

12. Experiment with switching styles like Ethnic (KLEZMER2.STY), Classical (MOZ44LH.STY), Latin (MERENGUE.STY or CARIBEAN), or Nora Jones (CR_NORA.STY, okay to say yes to change to 3/4 with swing feel). Use the Alphabetic Listings. HINT: Say "no" if it asks to double note values.

Other Features to Try

☐ Try the EMBELLISH melody option (See checkbox EMB on far right) as well as the SOLO options from the first Activity above.
☐ Save as a MIDI file and import to GarageBand and/or Sibelius or other music application.
☐ Check out the Drum simulation display
☐ Click on buttons or check out various menu options (lots of them) out of curiosity just to see what they do (be sure to save your work before doing this!)

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PC and Mac BIAB Comparison (provided by PG Music)

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The differences between Band-in-a-Box 12 for Macintosh, and Band-in-a-Box 2009 for Mac/Intel can be explained with the New Features list here: http://www.pgmusic.com/bandnewfeatures.htm

As for the differences between the 2009 version of Windows and Macintosh:

Some of the Windows features that are not in Macintosh are: record audio, supports VST, lead sheet, piano roll, MIDI Style Wizard, and Audio Harmonies.

Some of the benefits to the Macintosh version that are not in the Windows version are: The Intel-only requirement means this is a major benefit for speed, output each instrument to a different source, rendering to Audio is fast and easy, and requires very little, if any, technical assistance.