



Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Music

MUSC2 Exemplar Annotation



The following example shows a possible approach to writing an annotation for a Brief B composition.

AS Level Music Composition

For my composition, I have chosen to write a song in a progressive rock/metal style, taking into account several influences. My main influences for this piece, however, were the bands Dream Theater, Foo Fighters and Muse. I chose to keep this song as an instrumental (without vocals) as several of my favourite songs use this style to great effect, such as *Hurry Up* by Paul Gilbert and *Overture 1928* by Dream Theater. I also chose to stay within a standard song format, but strayed slightly from the more common structure of introduction/verse/chorus/verse/chorus. I decided to introduce other sections, such as breakdowns and twin guitar lead sections, to keep this piece interesting and individual. The structure of this piece, as well as the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic features, are further explained in an annotated screenshot.

I have composed this song for a small ensemble, consisting of between 5 and 8 musicians. To achieve a variety of timbres, however, I have taken into account that members of a progressive rock/metal band will often cover more than one instrument, thus allowing for there to be four different keyboard parts (piano, organ, synth lead and synth strings) that could easily be played or triggered by the one musician. Moreover, there are three main guitar parts that would usually be covered by three guitarists, but it is common for progressive rock/metal bands to layer guitar parts in the studio and play a simplified arrangement live, and so I have included a clean guitar part and the possibility that all four parts could easily be arranged into two. It is also notable that it is only infrequently that the four guitar parts (or four keyboard parts) actually play at the same time.

I chose to record my composition on Cubase 4, a very popular software that many bands and musicians use to record their music. I did so to try and give across the image of a studio recorded song that would be included on a progressive rock/metal bands album. However, as I had limited time and resources, I chose only to record the guitar parts myself, and simply sequenced all the other parts. This still, however, gives across a studio produced effect thanks to the high quality of the synthesizers used on the other parts. All the guitar parts were played in by myself, using just a guitar (an Ibanez GAX75) and a computer recording interface. Normally I would record the guitar parts through a guitar amplifier and a quality microphone, however this would have been impractical given the time constraints. All the guitar parts were put through a software amplifier simulator so to achieve the tones I was looking for (in that distortion or overdrive were added to the three main guitar parts). Furthermore, a chorus effect was added to the clean guitar part so to give it a spacey, eerie timbre.

I chose to write this piece in the key of G minor, as I decided to tune my guitar down a step from standard concert pitch to give a darker timbre to the parts (as one of my influences, the band Mastodon, often do), and the choice of tonality was to add to this dark, moody timbre I was looking for. Moreover, with a guitar tuned down a step G minor features several accessible and easily useable chord and scale shapes, and this is essential to a guitarist's ability to compose and play a piece (certain keys and modes make for very difficult and sometimes less effective guitar parts due to the nature of the instrument).

The first motif of the piece features here on the clean guitar.

This is a variation on the first motif, in that the guitar and bass parts take the main chords and separate them between two guitars and the bass. Guitar 1 also adds an inverted pedal.

Guitar 1 varies further on the first motif by ascending instead of descending, using different inversions and removing the pedal.

The chorus introduces new melody in the guitar, bass and organ parts, with a slight reduction of the texture and dynamics so to add emotion.

The second main motif features here, between guitars 1 and 2, before being harmonized further by the guitar 3.

A simple drum pattern features here, to build tension

The synth string and bass parts follows the chord root notes featured in the clean guitar part, so to add dramatic effect.

The drum part features a rock backbeat, and has been sequenced so to imitate the natural feel of a five drummer.

The synth strings return here with a new melody, so to add new interest.

The organ parts imitate the outline of the chords portrayed in the guitar and bass parts.

The drum lines here follow the main melodies, with added fills so to add interest.

The clean guitar plays a melody previously heard in the strings, so to add interest. The timbre of the clean guitar gives an unusual, spacey sound.

The second half of the second verse is identical to the second half of the first, only adding a synth lead part.

The song breaks down here to a repeat of the intro, so to build tension leading to the twin lead section.

The twin lead section features guitars 1 and 3 playing a variation on the second motif portrayed in the intro and breakdown

Note the texture becoming maller through only accenting the first beat of every bar with the guitars and bass.

The drum part here mimics the back beat played in the first verse.

In the second verse, a variation on the theme of the first verse is created through the addition of a syncopated synth lead melody. This adds interest.

This fast, semi quaver based melody adds movement and a driving feel to the second half of the second verse.

The second chorus is identical to the first, only with the addition of a new motif in the synth string part to add interest and a sense of progression

The backing in the twin lead section is the same as the second half of the second verse, only minus the first guitar part as it is playing the lead part.

Guitars 1 and 3 play fast diminished lines using a technique known as two-handed tapping, so to move the piece from G minor into the dominant (D minor).

The twin lead progresses rhythmically and melodically, so to build tension leading to the modulation.

The second guitar, bass and synth strings rise dramatically to modulate up to the dominant.

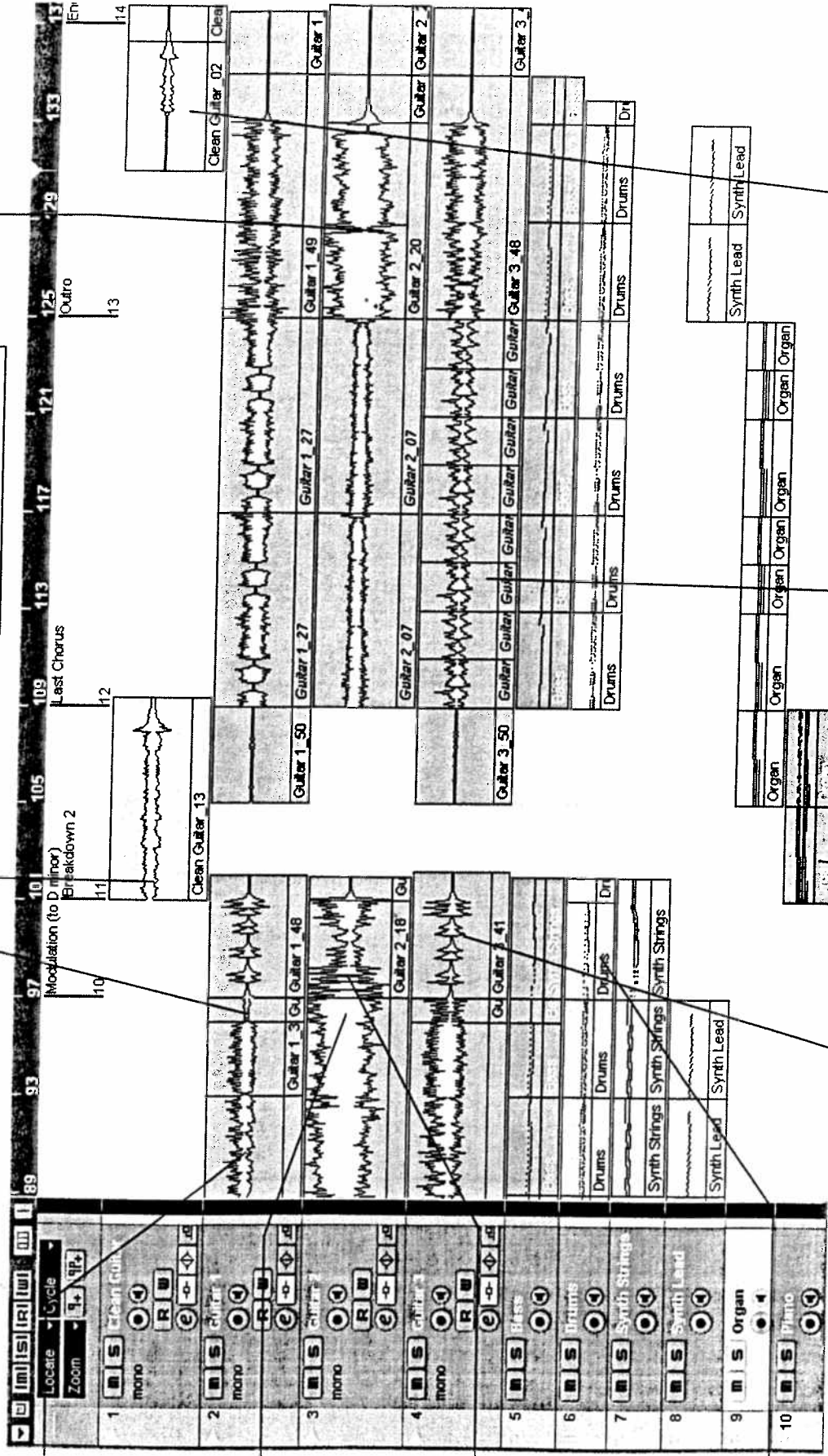
Here the second guitar and synth strings parts play in unison adding rough the dominant back to the tonic.

The drum parts here emphasise the main guitar and synth strings parts.

The lead guitar parts here play single sustained notes leading back to G minor from D minor.

The song breaks down again here, with a new variation on the chorus part played on the clean guitar.

The outro is a repeat of the last section of the twin lead section, featuring fast harmonised runs between the first and third guitar parts, leading to the final tonic chord for a solid ending in most of the parts.



The last chorus features the melody played on the synth strings in the second chorus played on the third guitar.

The piano and organ parts here emphasize the chords and melodies in the clean guitar part.

The song ends with an eerie repeat of the first clean guitar motif, so to give an uneasy, cold feel.

