

Layering Sounds

By Eddy Mentzel

For this session you will need a laptop, tablet or phone which is connected to the internet. Headphone's are advisable but not essential.

When we listen to music, we tend to hear it as one complete piece, rather than the individual parts which come together to create that finished song. A skilful songwriter is able to combine melodies and rhythms in such ways that we, as the consumer, hear them as one whole rather than separate elements being layered together. Sometimes a track can have many parts, for example 'Bohemian Rhapsody', other times there are only few, such as 'Someone You Loved' by Lewis Capaldi.

Being able to critically listen to piece of music is a great way to enhance your auditory skills, which are fundamental for all musical development. Listen to your favourite song and just take a moment to identify what instruments are playing. What layers of sound have been combined to make the full song? How are the melodies interacting with one another? Which instruments/sounds lead and which sounds support?

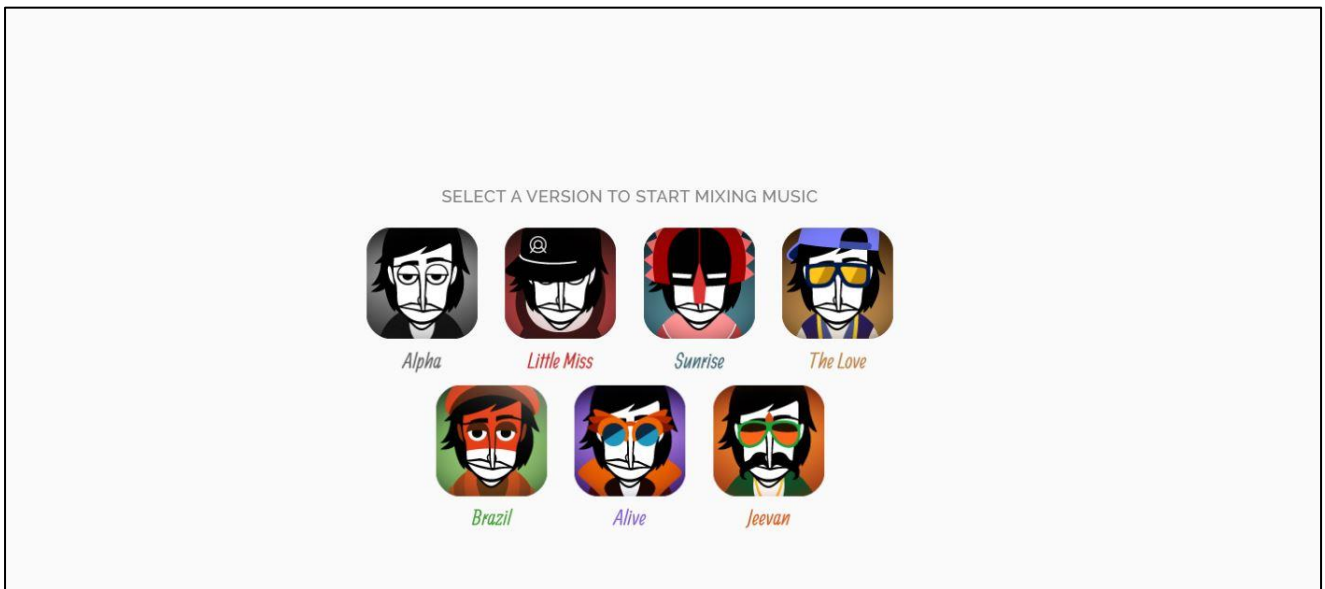
Understanding how musical parts can be woven together is an essential part of song writing, regardless of genre. Getting this correct can make the difference between creating a busy and uncoordinated piece of music or something more natural and effortless sounding. So, let's explore this a little further.

To do: Open <https://www.incredibox.com/> in your browser on your phone, tablet or laptop. If you have problems using the link search for '**Incredibox**' on Google and open the top result. You will be taken to a site that looks like this.

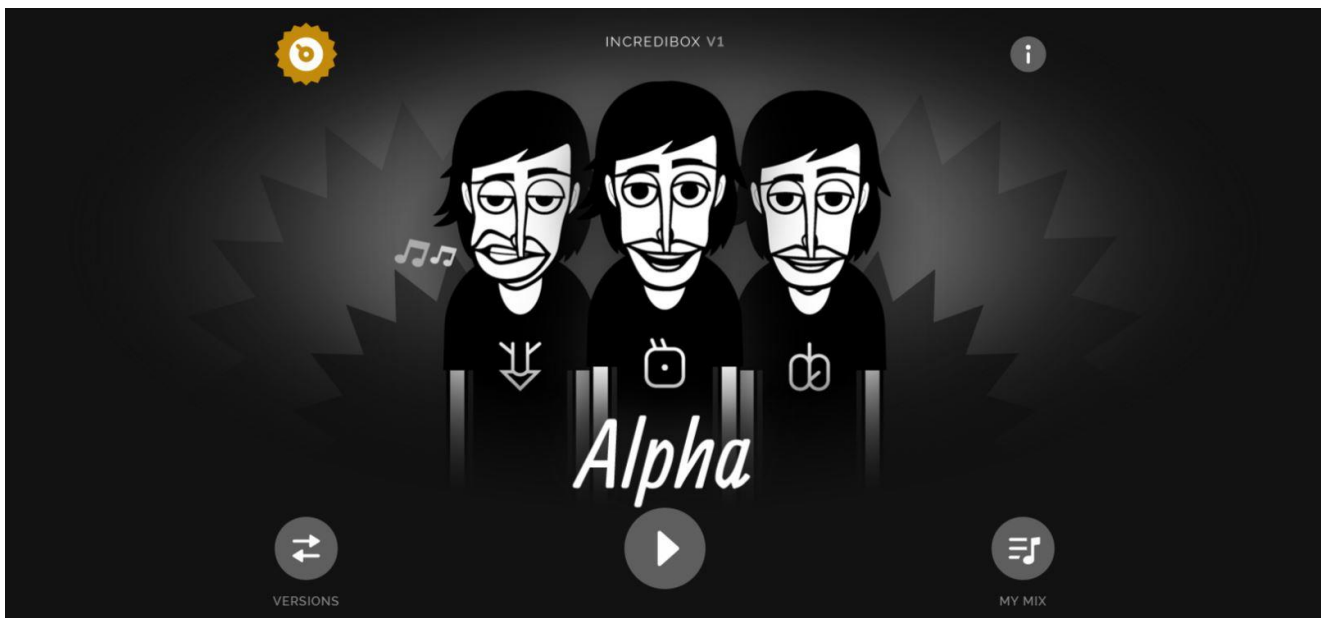


'Incredibox' is a great way to try combining different beatboxing rhythms and melodies. This is a fun way to refine your listening skills and to get used to hearing the individual parts and how they come together as a whole.

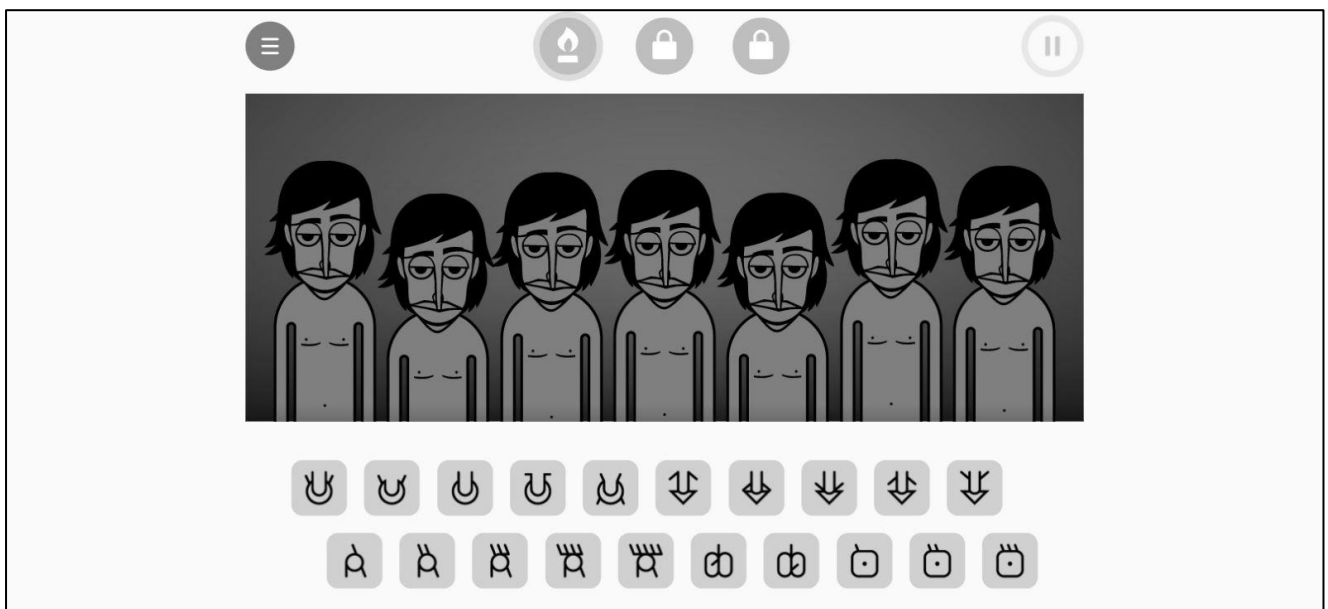
To do: Click on '**Try Web Version**'. You will then be taken to a page that looks like the one on the following page.



To do: Choose a character from the list. **Please note: it doesn't matter which character you choose as you will be able to go back and select another one later.** For this example, I chose 'Alpha'. You will then be taken to a page that looks like the one below.

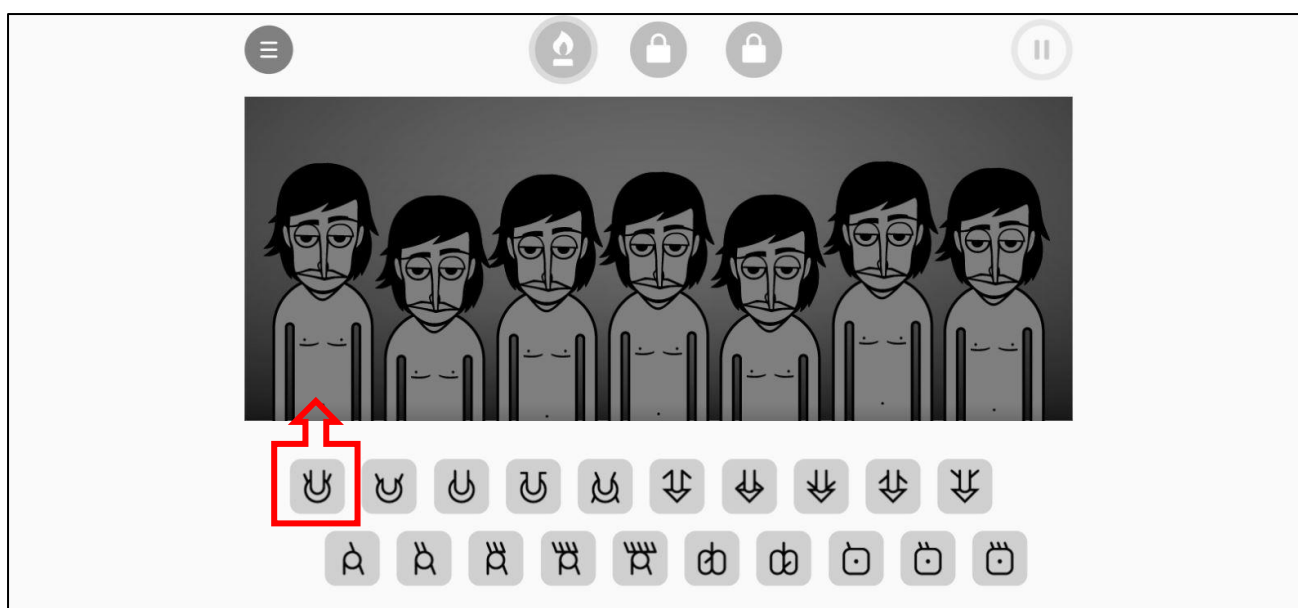


To do: Click the triangle 'play' button in the centre. You will be directed to the page below.



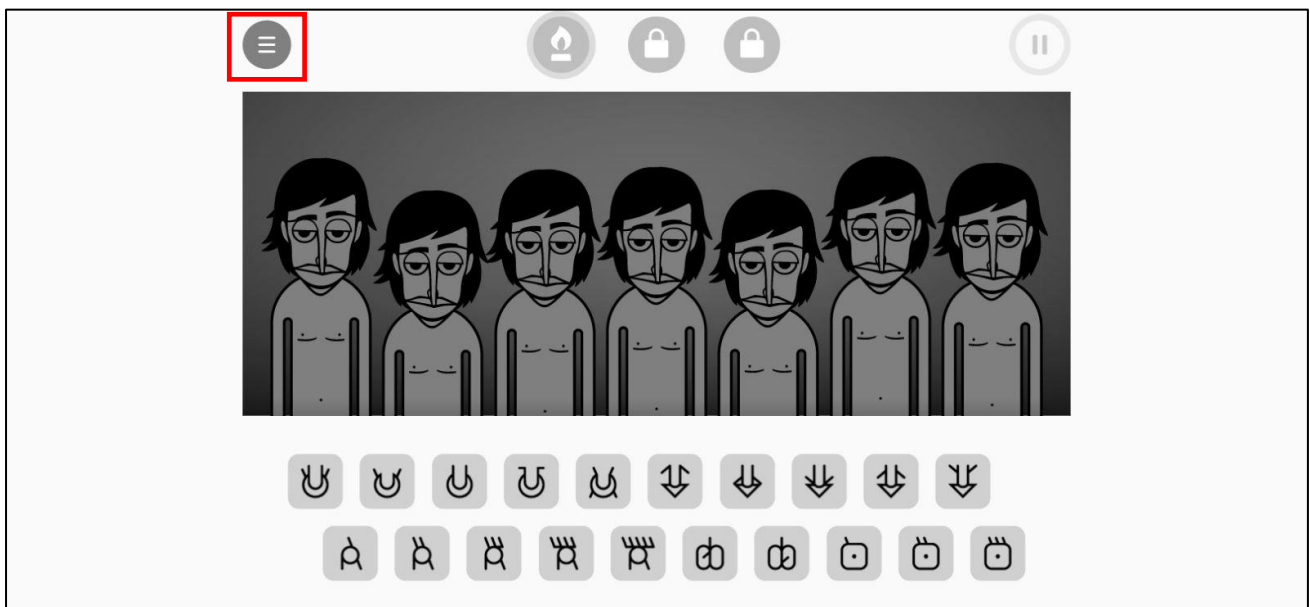
Each square at the bottom represents one layer of sound. You can listen to the sounds individually or combine them in whichever way you choose. This is a great way to experiment with simple layering of sounds and to hear if they add to the overall composition or over-complicate the music.

To do: Drag a square on to **one of the people**, as shown in the image below. This will start a music loop playing. Whilst this sound is still playing, **choose another square** and drag it on to one of the other people. You should now have two different sounds playing at the same time. You can then continue to add and take away sounds to hear how they interact together.



To do: Try layering just 2 or 3 sounds. Then try making more complex layers, with more parts. *Are there any particular sounds that sound great playing alone? Are there any parts which don't sound good on their own? What is the difference between these sounds that makes them work or not work?*

Quite often a musical part that has very little going on can sound great layered with other sounds but boring in isolation. This is because these sounds are designed to compliment rather than lead the song. Without them, however, the song would sound really empty. This is because if every part in a track is complex, melodically or rhythmically, they end up fighting for space in the arrangement. That is why great songwriters will often combine a lead melody, that is intended to dominate the arrangement, with quieter more minimal parts that support this part.



To do: Click the button at the top with three lines (as highlighted by the red box) and you will be given some further options. Within these options, clicking the 'home' button will take you to a page where you can then select 'versions' to change your character. Each character has a different selection of beatboxing sounds you can explore layering together.

And finally: Next time you are listening to some great music, pay some consideration to what parts are playing and how they are adding to the composition. Analysing music in this way is great for increasing your knowledge of common writing techniques and advancing your own musical development.