

Trance Music Production Techniques

Four-to-the-floor!

The first, and very important element of Trance music is a powerful, thumping four-to-the-floor kick drum. Musically this is very simplistic however the production can be a little more challenging to get right. The kick needs to have ample low frequencies but also enough presence to cut through the thick texture of a Trance track.

Lets have a look at my kick drum part:



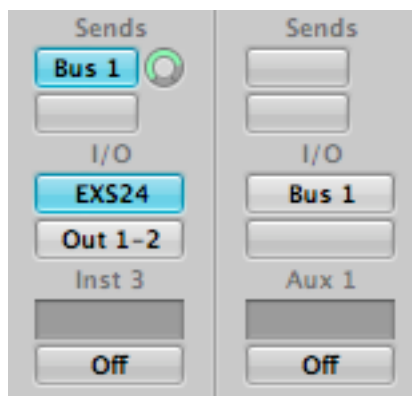
So I have used the 'Euro Dance Remix' kick from the EXS24 sampler. This kick has the right sort of qualities but still needs a bit of work in order to sound just right. First it needs compression, so as you will know by now, compression will limit the dynamic range and help prevent the levels from 'clipping'. Next is the EQ, this is very important. Remember to use your ear and you may need to adjust it once your track is finished so that the kick works within your final mix. The image to the left shows the sort of EQ changes you might want to make. So there's a big boost of the frequencies above 5K, this is to add presence to the kick and help it 'cut' though the mix. There's also a reduction of mid



frequencies, this is to help clean up the sound. Finally there's a reduction of the very lowest frequencies, these frequencies will most likely be used within the bass line, so to help reduce the chance of a muddy mix these have been cut out of the kick.

Send your kick to a bus

This is the first stage of a process called **side-chain compression**. This technique helps create a really thumping mix typical of many dance music genres. It works by sending the signal from the kick drum to compressors, most importantly to the compressor on your bass line. The compressor is triggered every time the kick drum is heard, causing the bass line (or other parts) to 'duck' under the kick drum. This not only creates a powerful, throbbing beat, but also helps you achieve a loud mix without clipping.



So, to the far right of the screen, above the fader of your kick drum, you will see two small grey boxes labelled 'sends'. Click on the top one and choose 'bus' and then 'bus 1'. This will create an Aux track that will be displayed next to your kick drum track. You should notice under where it says 'Bus 1' it will say 'Out 1-2'. You need to click on this and change it to 'no output'. Next you need to send some signal to your Aux track. You will notice that next to the 'Bus 1' send on your

kick drum track there is now a small dial. Click and move the dial to at least half way, you may need to come back and change this level later.

So now you are sending the kick drum signal to an aux track. You will not hear anything sent to your aux track, it is purely a signal that will come in handy later on.

The bass line

Listen to some trance tracks, take note of their bass lines then listen through Logics preset bass sounds and pick an appropriate timbre. Now add a compressor to your bass line. Below shows the sort of settings you could use.



Notice that next to where it says 'Side Chain', there is a small drop down box. Click on this and select 'Bus 1'. So now this signal from your kick drum is being sent to the compressor and controlling it. So every time your kick drum plays, it will cause the compressor to activate and dip the level of your bass line, causing a

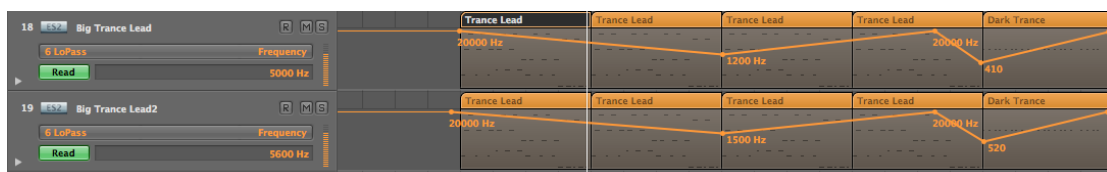
throbbing effect. You can increase the amount of this effect by decreasing the compressor threshold or by increasing the amount of kick drum being sent to the compressor (remember that little dial next to the send on your kick drum track!).

There are many other plug-ins that you could apply to your bass line that will be typical of trance music, such as a little bit of **reverb** and perhaps more importantly, a **stereo delay**. Stereo delay will cause your bass to bounce from speaker to speaker after the initial note is heard. You may find all your synth lines in your trance track will have both reverb and stereo delay. This is because both of these effects help create a big and full textured sound typical of the Trance genre.

Automation

Trance music is often very repetitive and one of the ways trance producers help keep interest is by constantly evolving the timbre of synths and by gradually introducing and removing parts. This can all be achieved by using automation.

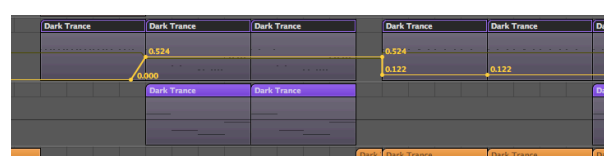
Low Pass Filter Automation: This technique creates a more interesting way to blend parts in and out of your track rather than just increasing and reducing volume. First load the **low pass filter** plug-in. This can be found in the EQ category, then 'single band'. This is one of the simplest filters so is very easy to automate. Remember pressing the 'A' key is the shortcut to bring up automation in Logic.



The default automation is set to volume so click on this and change it to 'loPass' and then 'Frequency'. As this is a Low Pass filter, any frequencies above the automation line will be cut. So to make a part gradually reduce its high frequencies, start with your automation line at the maximum level (20Khz) and draw a ramp down. You can experiment raising and lowering this to achieve a constantly evolving and falling sound.

(Listen to my trance arrangement from 0:54 and take note how the broken chord synth line gradually gets softer and then stronger again).

Automating synth parameters: As well as automating plug-ins, you can automate qualities of the synth itself. This image shows one of my bass parts and



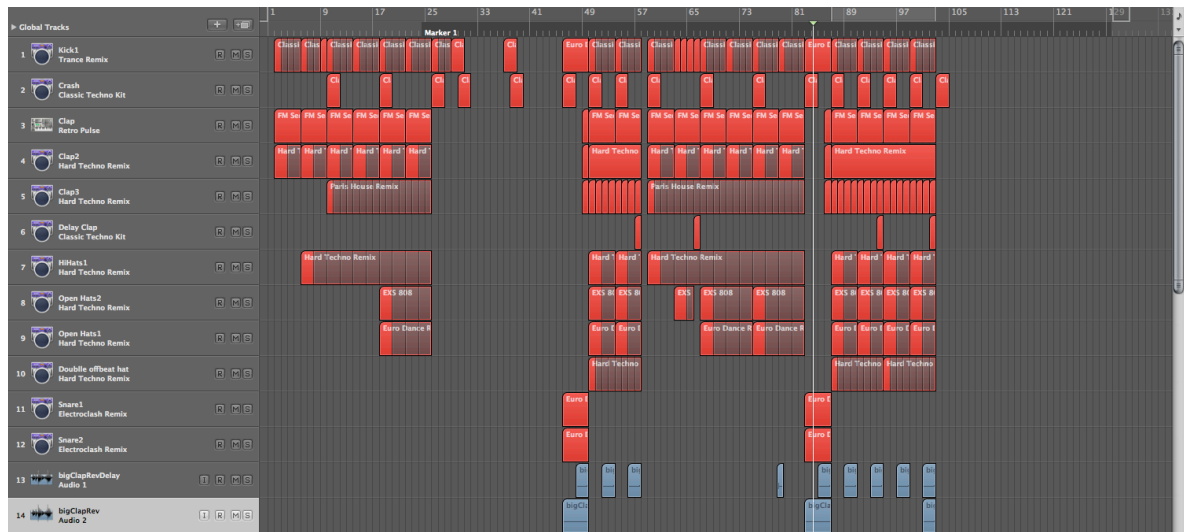
the automation is controlling its cut-off. This will create a similar effect to the automation of the low pass filter, but will have a greater effect on the timbre. In my track, I

drastically raise the cut-off value just before the 'drop'. It remains this way until the verse section returns, then it drops instantly back down again. This again helps generate interest and power during the drop sections.

I've only mentioned a couple of different automation techniques; remember any plug-in, synth parameter or mixer parameter can be controlled via automation, so get creative! (Listen from 1:23 of my arrangement; this is the build up section and features loads of automation to make the synths become more and more powerful).

Layering

From analysing trance music, you might think there are very few layers, and musically, you're probably right. However, from a production point of view, there may well be numerous layers that make up just one simple element. For example, the image below shows my drum parts. Although the rhythms are very simple, there are many layers often duplicating the same rhythm, but with several different timbres that helps create that powerful and full sound.



So I have 3 clap parts, all playing the same rhythm but offering different timbres. Although I've only used 1 kick drum track, you may find that having one kick track with a bass heavy sound, and one with a punchier, brighter sound could complement each other and generate a very powerful kick. Remember that the more layers you have, the more challenging the mixing becomes. You have to be very careful with your EQ. If you have too many parts all around 100 – 200Hz, you will have a very muddy mix, and potentially lead to distortion. Use the analyser within the channel EQ to monitor various parts frequencies to help you make EQing decisions.

Add some Ear Candy!

Again, to add interest to the texture, Trance music often features many little effects, sometimes un-pitched. These are usually found just before and after drops and break-downs or at the end of bars. In logic, you may find preset synth sounds that offer these kinds of effects, but remember to make them your own by layering them and by applying plug-ins and automation.