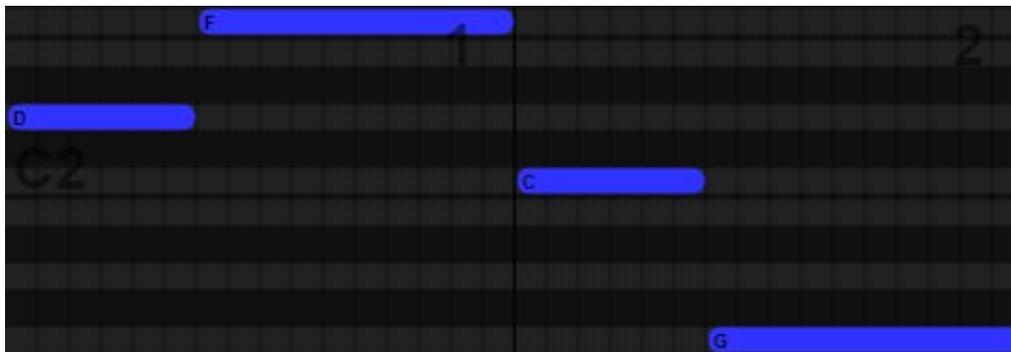


6 Hacks to Write Catchy Guitar Riffs & Synth Riffs | Hack Music Theory

Transcript of <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAeW3U-bHml>

whether you're an electronic music producer or guitarist in a band you're gonna want your songs to have contagiously catchy riffs in them so here's my six hacks for synth all guitarist that your fans will not be able to get out of their heads but first right harmony here I have today on the hack music theory show how to write a catchy rare what's a riff well a riff is a melody but it's not the main melody so in a song riffs occupy the same accompaniment category as chord progressions and just like chord progressions riffs loop so unlike the lead melody vocals for example which is varied and you know develops as it unfolds riffs are way more repetitive so when they're done well this means they can be creative and contagiously catchy all right let's jump in so the chord progression that we're gonna be writing a riff over is in D Dorian so that's just all the white notes with D as the root and the chords are d minor F major C major and G major



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and this is the same chord progression that we used in our video last week about how to write a catchy chorus chord progression and this example is from the chorus of our new single I'd love for you and we don't need to draw in all the full chords we can just put down the root note for each chord because this is gonna form the template over which we're gonna write our riff and remember when you're doing this template make sure you get the chord changes exactly correct so you want to know exactly when the chord changes happen so the riff is gonna align with those changes and just to be clear once we have finished writing our riff will delete this root note template and with that we're now ready to write our riff so here's

hack 1 harmonic notes

harmonic notes so because riffs are melodic but they're also attached to the harmony in other words the chords a great place to start writing a riff is with the harmonic notes in other words the

notes in the chord and when I'm told Maya is the one the 3 and the 5 so for example over the d minor here then the chord is d fa so let's start by putting in those notes



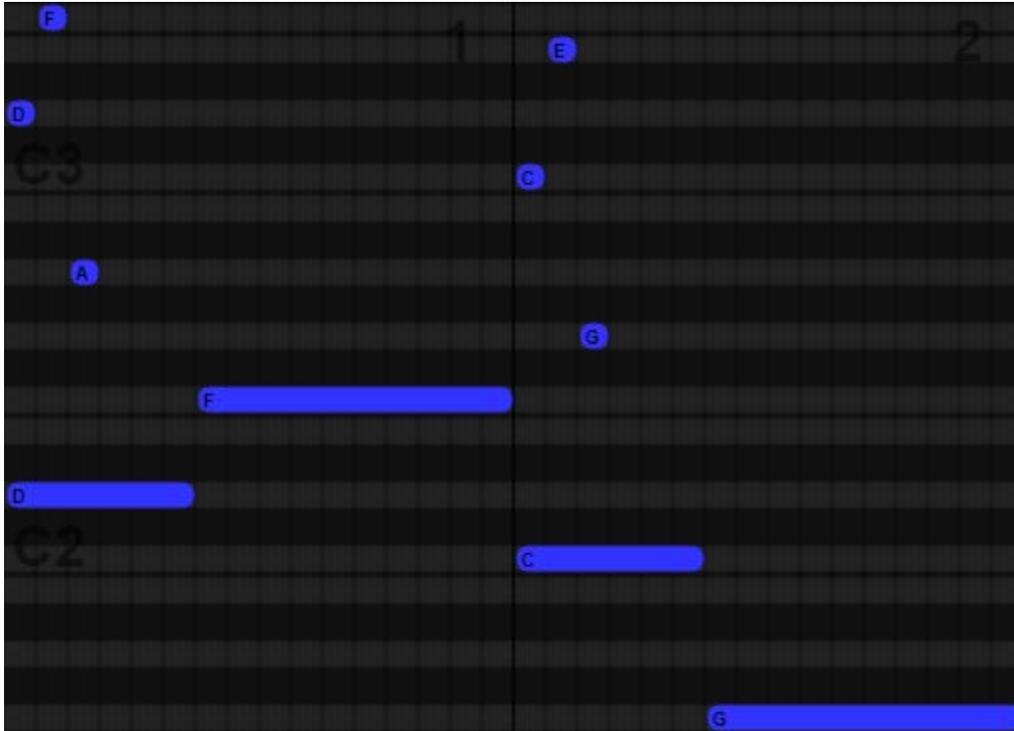
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and before we do anything we want to change our grid to 16th notes because that's gonna open up way more opportunities and possibilities for our roof ok so here we go sounding like arpeggios which is a broken chord so a chord played one note at a time just going 135 so we want to change up a lot but we want to be more creative than that so let's pull this last one I'm the a let's pull that note



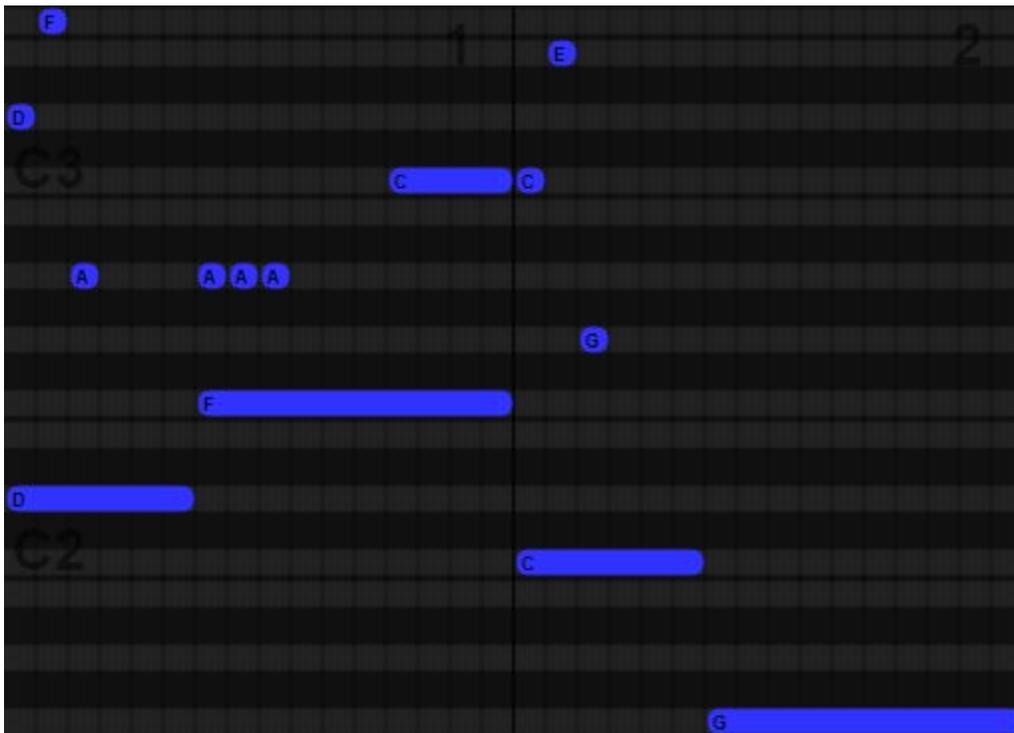
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down an octave and this is what we get now whenever you're wanting to write something that is contagiously catchy you always want to be thinking about symmetry symmetry is not only deeply comforting to the listener because it creates that sense of familiarity but symmetry allows us as songwriters and producers to reinforce a musical idea and make it even more catchy so let's create symmetry now roofs by reusing this melodic contour that we did over the first beat of the first bar let's reuse that over the first beat of the second bar and the chord there is C major so what we're going to do is start on the one which is C and we're gonna go up to the 3 which is e and then we're going to drop down to the 5 which is G and now we just need to fill in the gaps



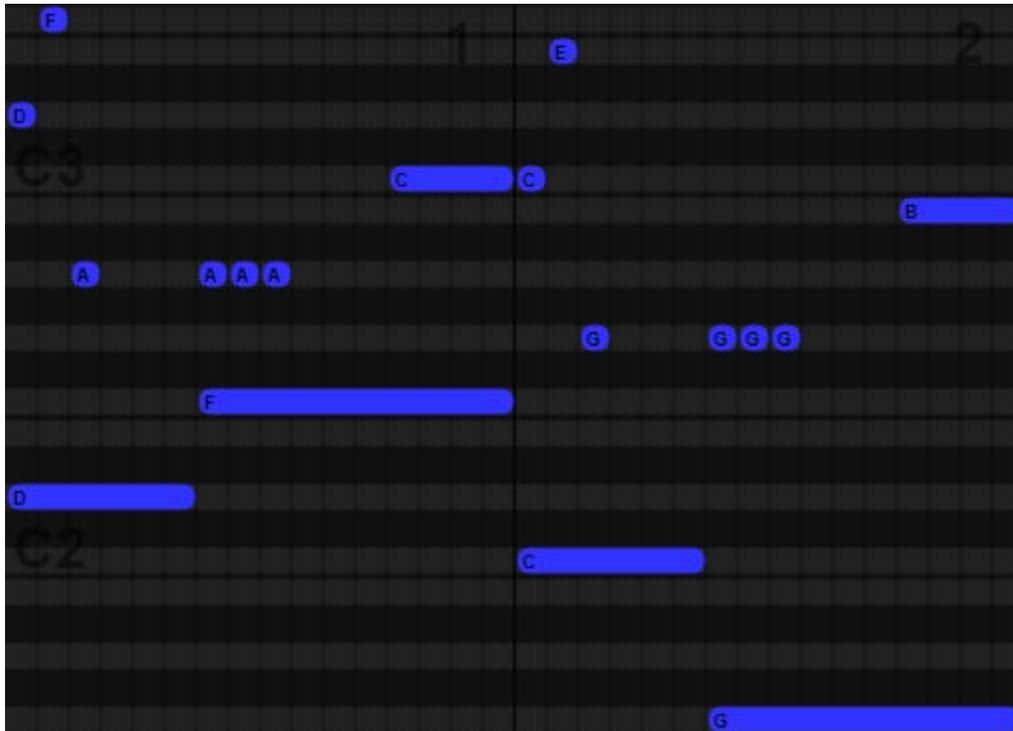
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so over the F major chord F is the one so we could play the 3 which is a and then we could go up to the 5 which is C and that's actually the note the second bar starts on and then what we can do is



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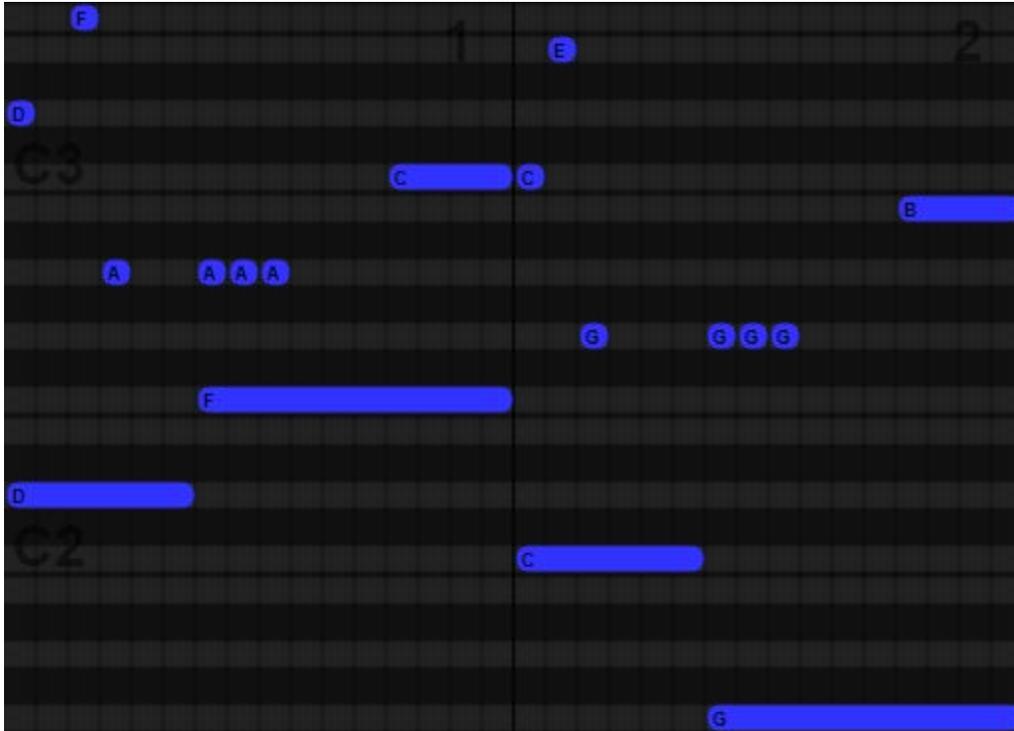
we can reuse that melodic contour of the G major chord at the end here and that way we create even more symmetry so we could go g g g and then up to the 3 of g major which is b so let's have a listen



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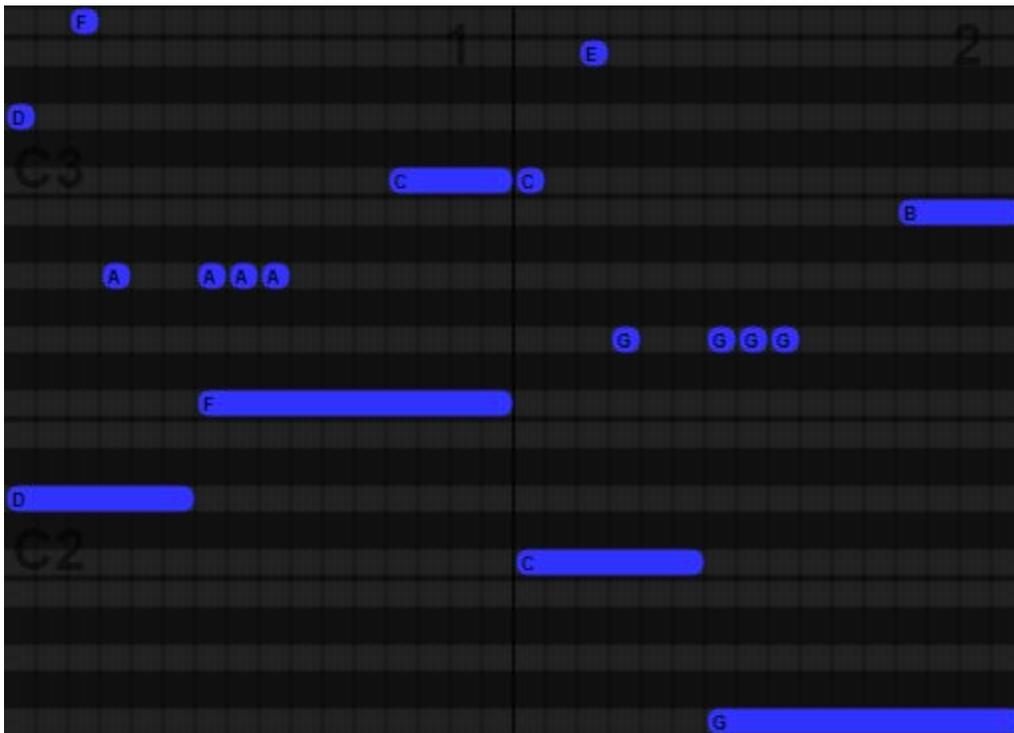
hack 2 syncopation

syncopation is accenting the offbeat and playing around with these off beats and your riffs is exactly how you gonna inject life and energy into its rhythm so let's have some fun with this over the first chord let's move those two notes the sixteenth later



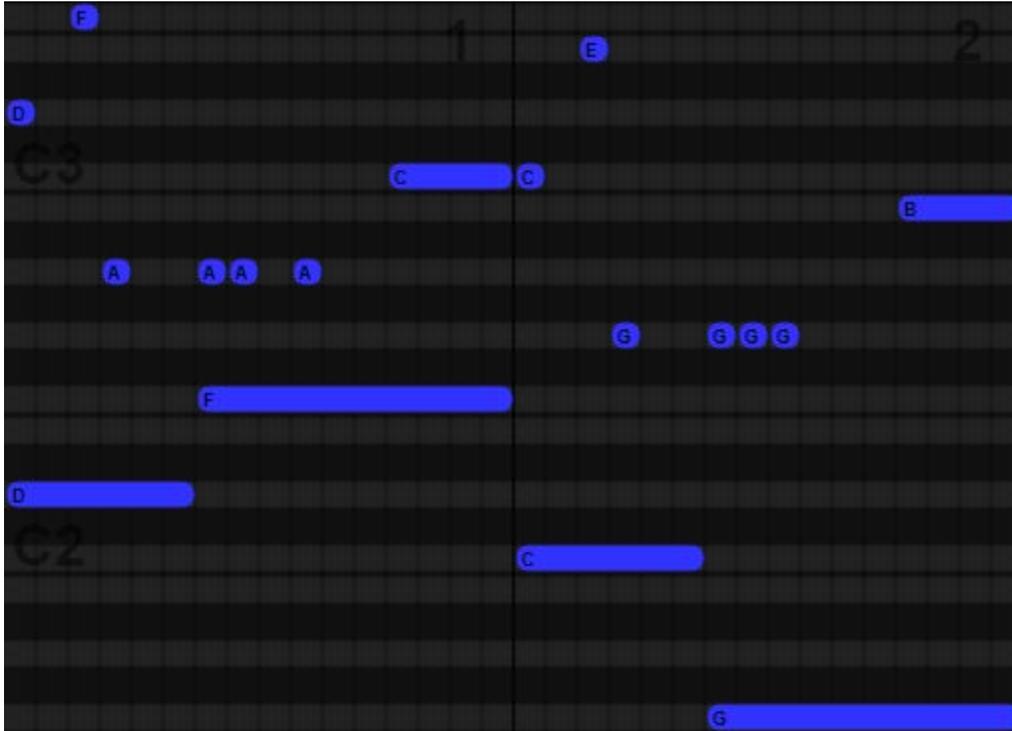
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and always remember symmetry where you reuse a melodic contour in the second half of the riff do the same thing with the syncopation so we want symmetrical syncopation otherwise it doesn't feel familiar the



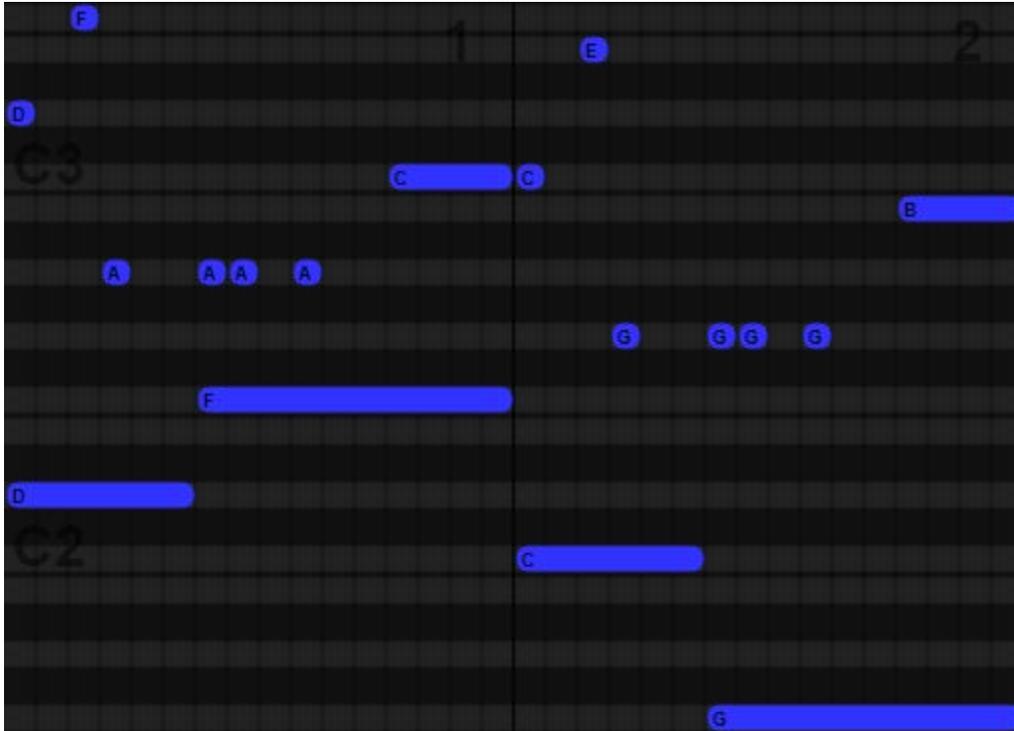
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second time around so that's the whole point we're creating something that's fresh because the notes are different in the first melodic contour here when D F a and then in the second bar it goes c e g but the melodic contour is the same and the syncopation is the same but it's fresh notes so it's just wonderful balance of something that's fresh and familiar okay let's do the same with with the F major let's move this one back a sixteenth and everything we do



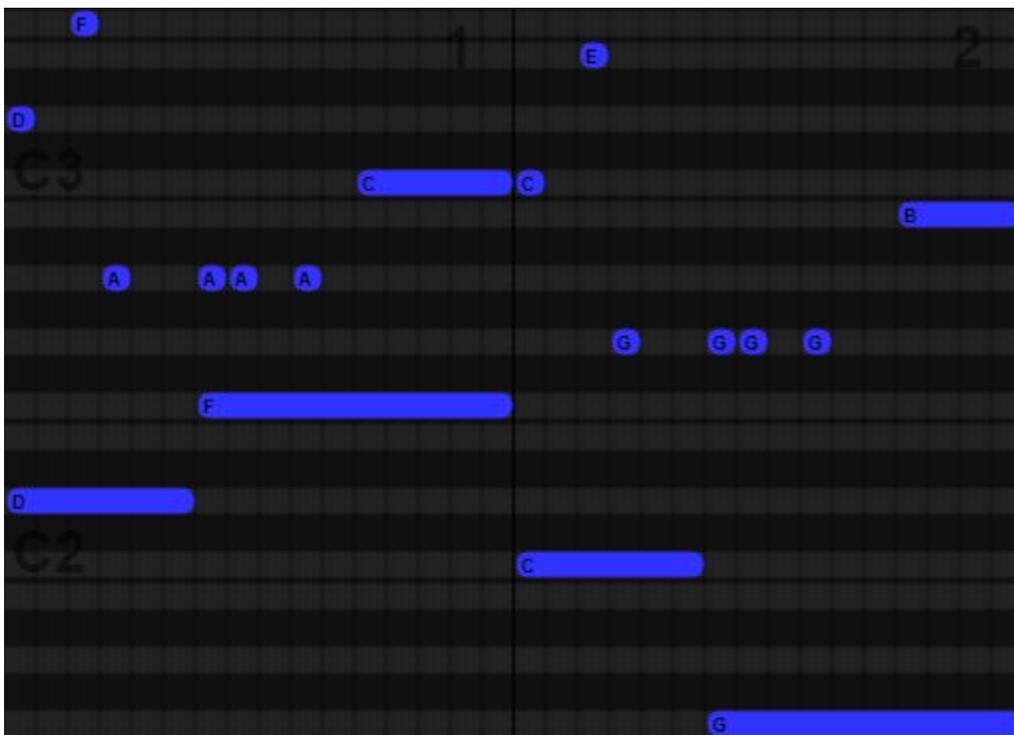
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here we want to do in the symmetrical part at the end here so we're going to move this G back and 16th as well and



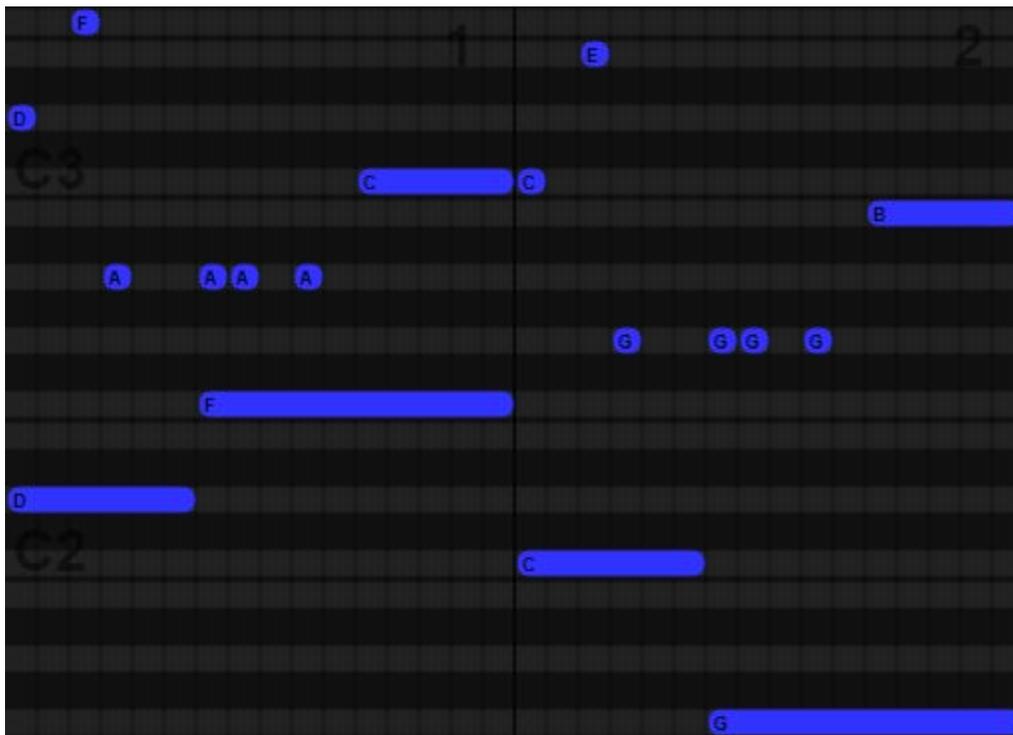
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then this long note here let's actually bring that the sixteenth earlier there's going to be a little element of surprise there which is super cool and then



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always thinking symmetrical we're going to do the same with the last night let's

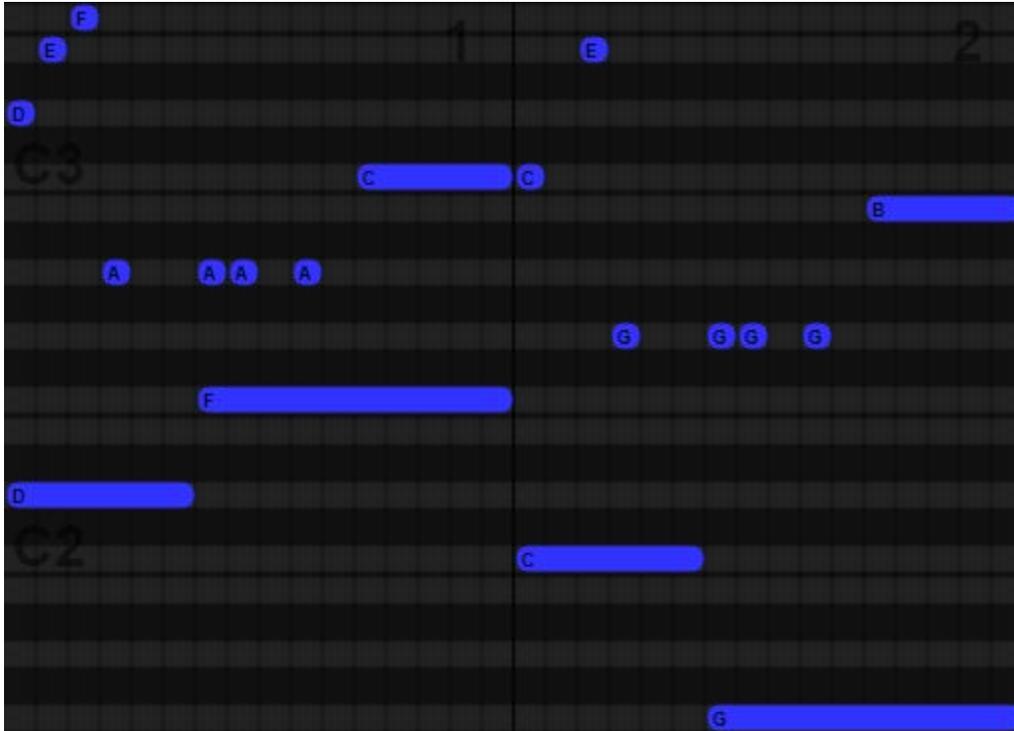


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have a listen here we go

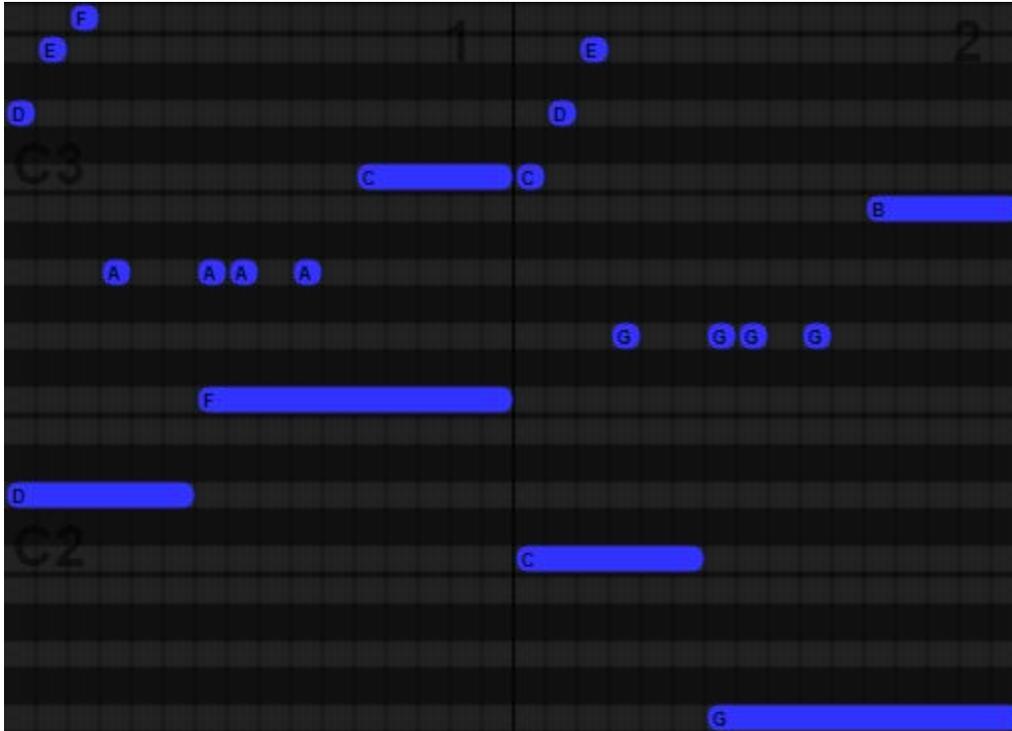
hack 3 non harmonic notes

so right now our riff is still made up exclusively of harmonic notes in other words notes that are in the chords and this means our riff is still sounding kind of like a bunch of arpeggios so to make our riff sound more like a melody what we need is to add non harmonic notes in other words notes that are not in the chords and these notes are what create interest tension and movement to our riff and turn it into a catchy melody so a great place to start with this is by adding passing notes a passing note is a note that you add in between two the notes so for example the D to the F a passing note would be e that you put



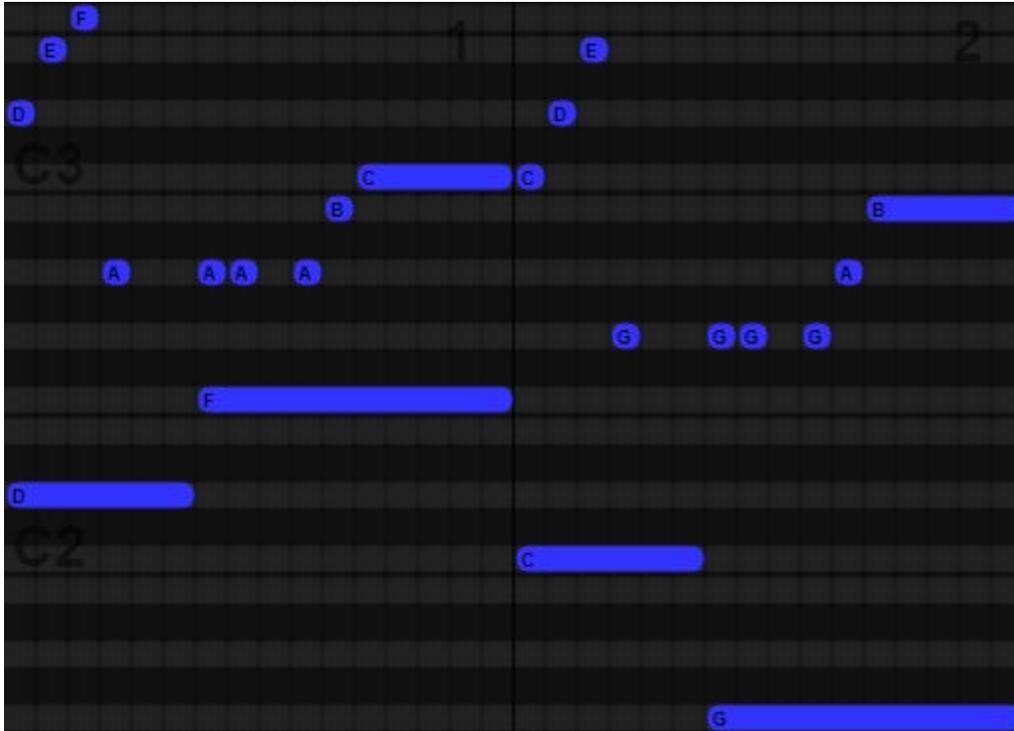
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in the middle so not only does that connect those two notes but now you create movement and this little melodic run and remember always thinking symmetry so if you add that there you want to add the same thing in the second half so between the C and the e we're gonna add the passing note D then and I'm sure



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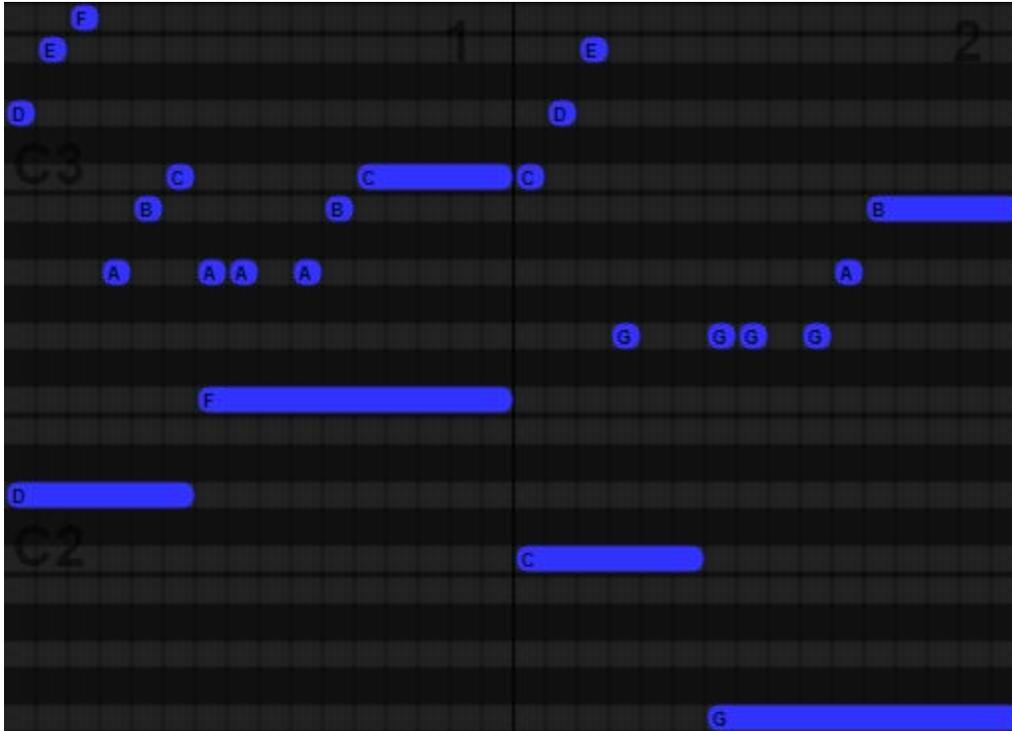
you've already spotted these over the F major we can also add a passing note between the a and the C so that's B and always thinking symmetry so what we do here we want to do at the end and the second half so over the G major chord between the G and the B we also add a passing note of a ok let's have a listen



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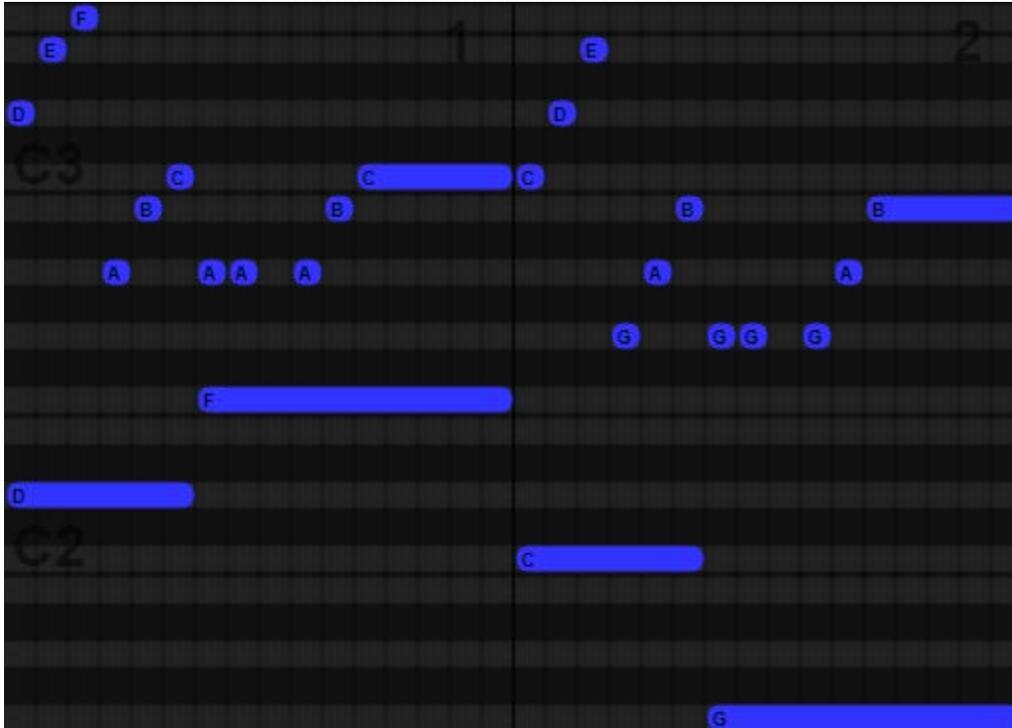
hack 4 motifs

here we go hack for motifs a motif is a short musical idea which we can reuse to give our music structure and therefore make it memorable and catchy and by now having gone through the first three hacks you undoubtedly have something in front of you that can be used as a motif so this is where we go motif hunting and the motif that is jumping out of me here is this lot ascending three note run that we created by adding that passing note so we've got one here we've got one here we've got one here we've got another one here but even though we've got four of these little ascending three note runs not once do they happen on the same three notes so I think that's exactly what we need to add right now so over the D minor chord we've got this little gap here of two sixteenth notes I think we should go a b c and that also gives us a little taste of what's about to come because we get that same run ABC



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over the next chord and always thinking about symmetry so what we add in the first half we want to add in the second half what that means is over the C major chord where we've got the G and then at the moment we've got these two sixteenth notes open we want to add in another ascending sarena run so oh gee a B and that G a B is then

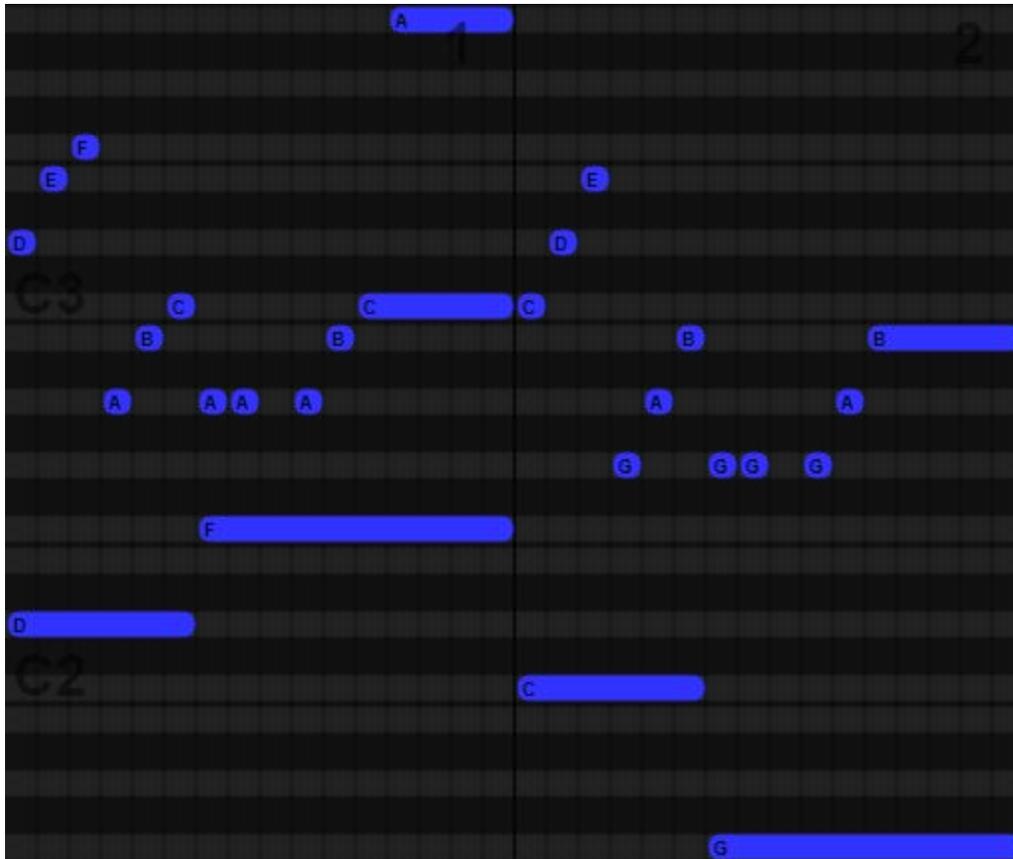


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repeated over the last chord the G major making this even more catchy so let's have a listen here we go

hack 5 harmony

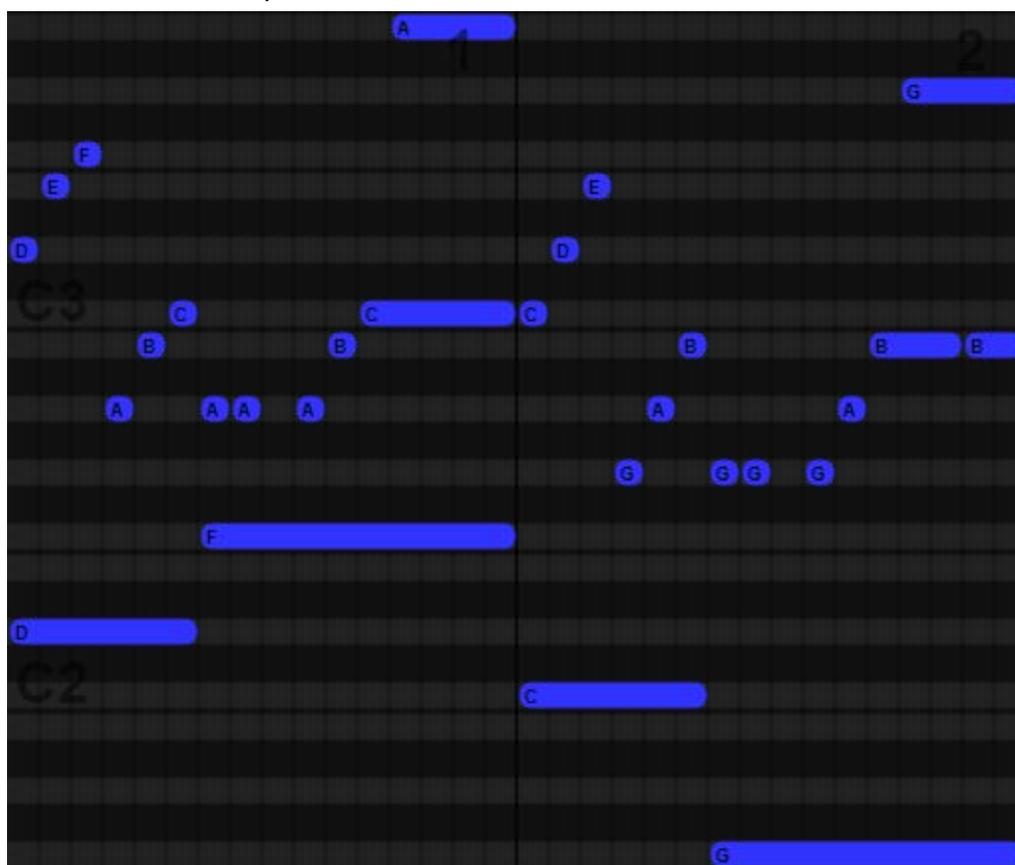
adding even just a little bit of harmony can give you a lot of power so wherever you have a long note see if you can find that long load a friend and what I'm thinking over the F major chord here where we've got that C let's add an A on top and instead of bringing them endings



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at exactly the same time let's bring that a in on the fourth beat so that's gonna be bang on a snare drum and it's really gonna emphasize that beautiful harmony we're gonna get here and always thinking symmetry we want to do the same thing at the end in the second half and so over the G major chord where we've got this B we're gonna be adding a G on top and same thing again let's bring the G in on the fourth beat so wow as that snare wax we're gonna get this beautiful

this melody like this it's going to go G a B and then as soon as that's high G comes in the ear hears that as being the next note in the melody which means that we actually need to look at the last note here which is the high G down to this D over here and you'll notice that that is five so many times from the G down to the D so that is a perfect fourth interval we don't want that and this is kind of wise confusing because if you count from the B even though the B is actually sounding to the very end of the bar if you count from the B up to the D like that's great that's three semitones that's not a problem that's a strong colorful interval but your ear is not going to be hearing the as the last note of the melody it's going to be hearing this hi G so what we need to do is to trick the ear back down to the B so then it hears the B of the last note which then goes up really powerfully to the D so all we do is we just play the B again and as soon as we play the B again now the B becomes the last note in that harmony so then we get a nice strong interval from the B up to

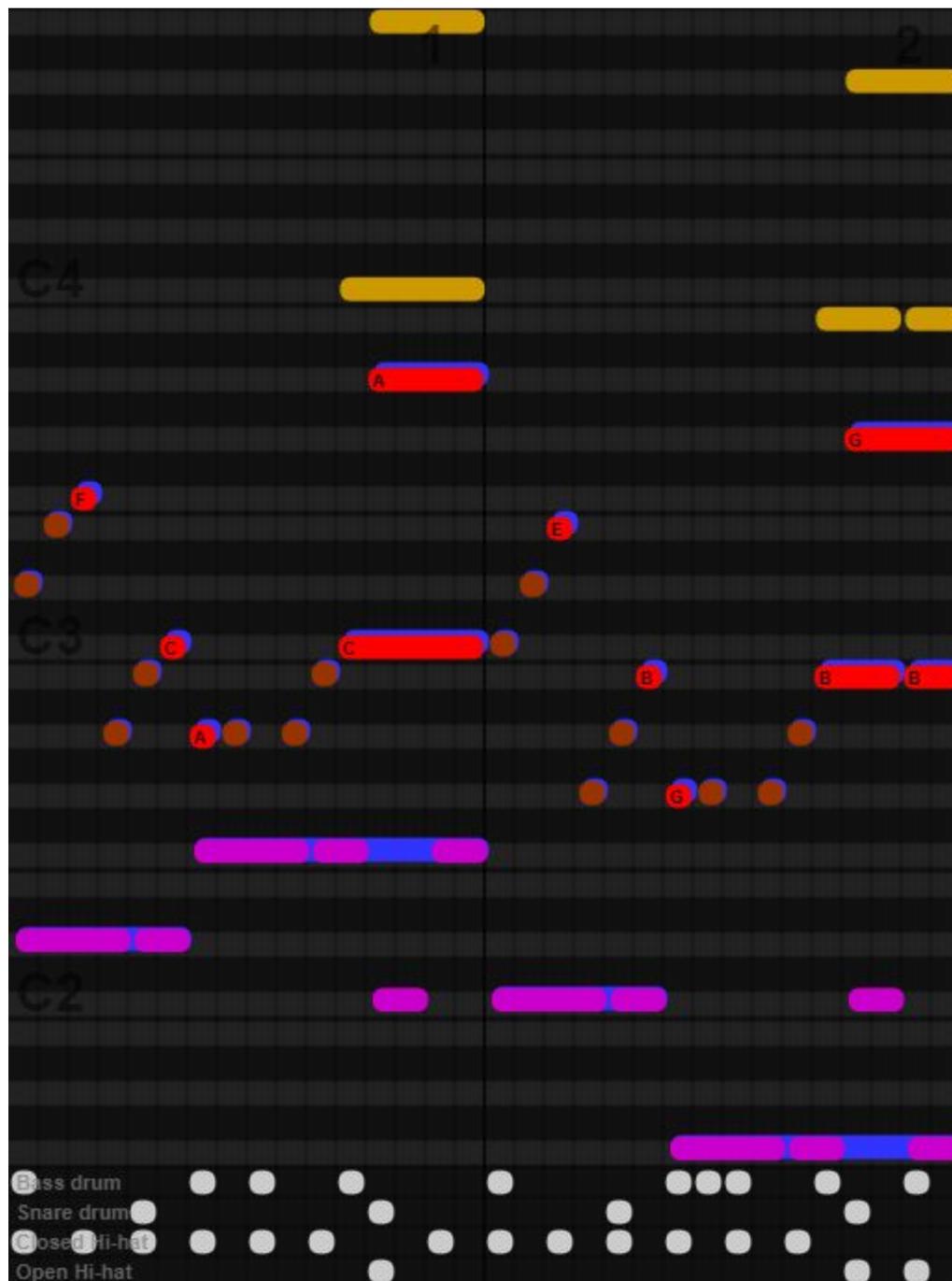


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the D and with that we are done this koala to think about here so if you want my riffs hack you can grab that in the song writing and producing PDF the link is below and just before I play the final version if you want to firm up your music theory foundation you can download our free book 12 music theory hacks to learn scales and chords or if you want our most tasty songwriting hacks then you can join our brand new online apprenticeship program on patreon all the links are below and thank you so much for watching we'll see you next Thursday on the hack music

theory show by the way if you'd like to get notifications so you don't miss our new videos then hit subscribe below and then hit the bell until next time happy songwriting and reducing

Final result



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