

ARE LOOPS CHEATING?

Many of us use rhythm loops in our compositions, but at what stage does relying on them become cheating? After all, products such as Apple Loops offer not only rhythms but also complete musical phrases, bass lines, vocal segments and so on that you can stitch together into complete tunes without ever composing an original note of your own. There's no copyright issue when combining Apple Loops or other licensed commercial products to create finished tunes, but does it still feel like your composition?

The answer is, inevitably, somewhat vague and depends on the perspective of the user. The same question used to be asked of sampling in general, but I have to confess that I sometimes find loops very useful. Just a tiny segment taken from a loop can be used in an entirely different context, and taking something like a clock's tick from a sound effects library and then layering it with a TR808 snare doesn't make me feel bad at all. Or maybe taking the attack from a vocal or instrumental phrase and turning it into a repeating rhythmic element? That also feels like fair game.

While I'll almost never use a loop, other than perhaps a rhythm loop, in its original form, you can often get musical inspiration by playing along to one, even if you then decide to drop the loop entirely from the finished composition — we all have to get our inspiration from somewhere. In the case of Apple Loops, which are designed to conform to tempo and can be changed in pitch, there's also the option of converting them to regular audio so that you can slice them up and then transpose or rearrange the different segments to create something new. Once saved as an audio file you can also use time stretch or reverse — or in the case of a monophonic melody you can apply drastic pitch correction, again to create something unique. Further processing via spectral reverbs, rhythmic choppers or stepped filters can take the material so far from its original source that you can really make it your own.

Even so, I still feel a touch guilty when using loops created by somebody else as source material, even when I change them so drastically, but I have to admit it is a level of guilt that I'm learning to live with. **///**

Paul White

Editor In Chief

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