



Music for Our Mind and Health

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Music and Overall Wellbeing

We never fully appreciate what playing music can do for our overall health. . There is a large bit of research regarding wellness through music:

Flow

[Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#)¹ first named flow theory in 1975. It is constantly colloquialized to “in the zone.” We’ve all been there, it’s when we are in such a state of concentration or ‘flow’ that we are not worrying about our day, and are truly happy just doing the thing without a worry in the world. Music isn’t the only place where we feel a state of ‘flow’—It happens in sports, video games, art, and writing but every musician has felt this at some point, whether it is during a jam session or during a performance of an orchestral work.

Self-determination Theory

The [self-determination theory](#)² (Ryan and Deci) is truly the key to happiness. The theory states that if you achieve the 3 golden tenets, you will be happy. The three tenets are: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. So basically, if you feel like you're good at something, are part of a community, and free to express yourself and be creative then you will be happy. In music, this could easily be applied to performing in a group. However, in a traditional school ensemble, the autonomy piece is often missing simply due to the fact that band, orchestra, and choir are, in essence, dictatorships. Where this theory shows its tri-force of power is during a jam session or other truly creative activity.

Emotional Intelligence

[Daniel Goleman](#) first popularized the idea of emotional intelligence in 1995. Studies have shown that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on job performance, leadership ability, and overall mental health^{3 4}. People with high emotional intelligence have the ability to recognize and regulate their own emotions as well as recognize the emotions of

others. Music, has been known to enhance emotional intelligence. In a study, “It was discovered that those with musical experience demonstrated enhanced perception of emotions. The strongest results, in fact, were with those people who initiated musical training before the age of 7”⁵.

Music and Dementia Patients

It is known that dementia patients react positively to music therapy. Remarkably, the music part of the brain isn’t damaged by the disease. Perhaps the best thing anyone can do for a dementia patient is simply, play some music from their childhood. This is related to my next point.

Music and The Brain

[Robert Zatorre](#)⁶ of McGill University is the leading expert on music’s effect on the brain. He states that, “to solve diseases such as Alzheimer’s, we need to achieve a good understanding of the entire system...we are using music because it involves almost every brain system that is known to exist”⁷. When involved in making music, more parts of the brain light up than when doing any other activity—equivalent to a full-brain workout. This significantly contributes to overall brain health. It’s not to say—to use the old mantra—that “music makes you smarter” because all learning makes you ‘smarter,’ but it *is* to say that it keeps your brain healthy.

Singing

There have been recent studies that suggest that singing daily can substantially reduce stress. It has also been found to improve our immune system and prolong our lives. One of the major reasons for this is that singing is a form of controlled breathing having the same effect as yoga breathing. It also releases oxytocin and endorphins into the brain which help release stress and anxiety⁸.

Engaging the Unengaged with Rock Music: Combining Music with Behavioural Resource⁹

By Steve Giddings and Robyn Burgess

When you include popular styles like rock music authentically into your programs, you are much more likely to cater to different types of learners. It can be used to engage the unengaged learners in your programs. You know—the kids who never sign up for any extracurricular music group and who never *really* engage in activities in music class. Or it could be “those kids,” you know them—they are the ones who we often see alone on the playground, in the office, in trouble, or just generally unengaged at school. I’ve had my regular auditioned rock groups engage the unengaged but this was different. Let me explain:

The Flex Music Group

This year at my school, there was a block freed up for me to take smaller groups of learners to work on musical and extra-musical skills. The term “extra-musical” refers to such skills and concepts as: confidence, well-being, self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and focus. With the help of the student services team, Robyn (the behavioural resource teacher) and I, came up with a list of learners that we felt would have a good dynamic together to start our first 6 to 8-week rotation. I called it “flex music” for two reasons: 1) I could be flexible with what it was we offered during that time; and 2) the learners involved with it got to ‘flex’ their musical abilities in a new way.

Our first Flex Music Group was a group of special needs learners who came together at the same time to do music class together. Each of them had an EA (Educational Assistant) and the EA was responsible for them during that time. The best part was they could work on whatever skill they wanted to work on that day with their EA. I acted as the facilitator. For some, this was their only music time.

The Flex Band Group

The second 6 to 8-week rotation was a group of learners who qualified as needing one of the following: behavioural support, confidence-boosting, focus practice, or extra support in some way. They were “those kids” that are always in trouble in the office or lack confidence who we are just not engaging in their regular music class or in school in general—they needed attention for positive reasons. The learners in this group included six boys who exhibited these qualities and whom we thought could work together. The

boys in the group greatly benefitted from being a part of this group. Here is what it looked like:

Rock Stations

I had decided that these boys would begin with rock stations where they would rotate through the three main rock band instruments (drums, keyboard, and guitar) every other day when they had their flex band class. The goal was not to necessarily perform a song together but just to have them learn something on the instruments and explore their capabilities. A performance (or informance in this case) would've been just 'icing on the cake,' so-to-speak. Each of the stations had a visual aid to help them through what they needed to learn. As learning by ear, through tablature, and other forms of notation is common in rock music using these cards is completely appropriate for the style they are learning. Here are the 'cards' I gave them (see Figure 1):



Figure 1

Each of them had the patterns for “You Really Got Me” by the Kinks on it.

Jam Cards with Keyboards

Jam Cards are an amazing invention by Little Kids Rock (find them online for free) for a number of instruments but their keyboard jam card is designed to sit behind the keys of the instrument and can be moved to any position with ease. They show the visual patterns for a number of different scales and common chord progressions. There is even a blank card to make your own patterns, which is the card that we used for our class. There are three chords in “You Really Got Me” and these cards show the keys that need to be played to perform those chords (see Figures 2 and 3):

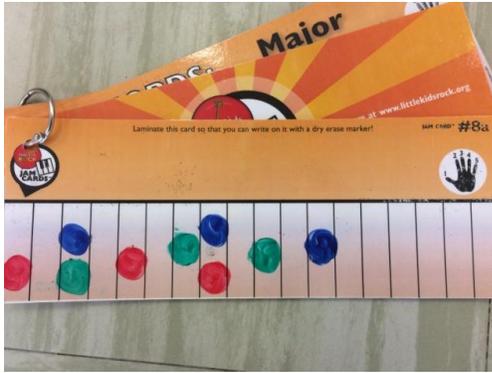


Figure 2



Figure 3

I began with having them play diads to get used to the movement. Once they rotated through the instrument at least twice, I had them try doing it with the triad and then once they had that, playing them eight times each and trying to switch smoothly. It is important to note that I never used the name of the chord, I just used the colour. Music wasn't the focus here, and once they learn it well, they can name it later. We often jump into theory much too early.

I had to coach them to use their thumb but if they are able to reach comfortably with other finger combinations then I didn't stop it. Part of keeping true to the informal nature in which much of this music is learned is that they are able to learn in somewhat hap-hazard ways that work for that particular person.

Drum Cards

I made these drum cards using blocks to represent eighth-note subdivisions of a measure. They show, very simplistically, how the instruments on the drum kit line up and play at particular times. On a basic level, this is how drumset notation works. Pictured is a rock pattern (many times I prefer the word "groove" over "pattern"). Start slow with the learners on this. I had to point to each column, one at a time, extremely slowly so they get the co-ordination down (see Figure 4):

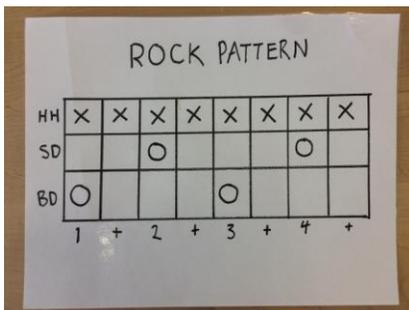


Figure 4

By the time they were on their second and third rotation through this instrument, they all had the rock pattern down—really well! To keep them engaged, I had them learn the Blues Pattern (Figure 5), and then later the Disco Pattern:

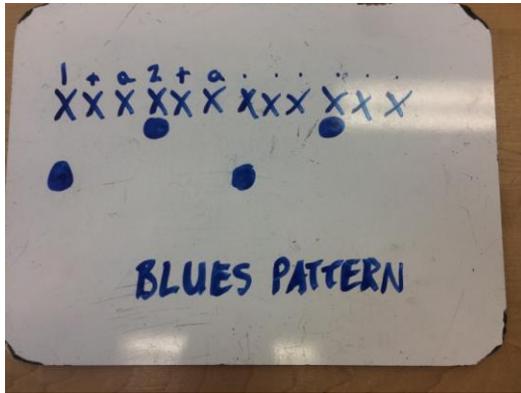


Figure 5

As mentioned in one of my previous columns (60-1, pp. 31-32), if they know a rock pattern, they can play most songs with ease as most songs just use a Basic Rock Pattern variation. The other to learn would be the Blues Pattern/Groove, also known as the Power Ballad Pattern/Groove.

Guitar TAB

Tablature (TAB) is a standardized notation for fretted instruments. Instead of a five-line staff, the lines represent the strings on the instrument so in the case of the guitar, there are six lines. Instead of notes, numbers represent what fret is to be pressed on a particular string. Stacked numbers represent harmony and single separate numbers represent melody much like traditional Western notation. Here is the chart that I provided for the guitar station (Figure 6):

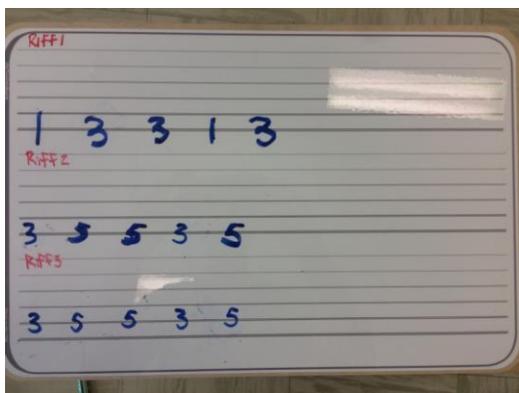


Figure 6

I had them learn Riff 1 first and then as they rotated through again I would add a new one until they knew all three. Once they were ready, I had them practice switching comfortably between all three. It's not important whether or not they do it the right number of times at this point. What matters is the switch.

Blending it Together

Near the end of the eight weeks we began to try and play all the parts together with whatever instrument they happened to be on that day. We began with making sure the drums could play their rock pattern together, which sometimes took a few attempts as we sometimes had three drummers trying to play together! The key for this to work is that they stayed glued on each other so that they could keep together or adjust when one went out of time.

Once the drums established their parts together, we layered in the guitar part beginning with Riff 1. I had to play the guitar part most of the time because a number of the learners in this group seemed to have the most trouble getting the coordination of the guitar down with the correct feel. You may find that when another instrument is added that the drums will go out of time because their focus changes to the new thing that's happening at the time. Once the groove is set with the drums and guitar, then we add the keyboards on their first chord 'G' (or in this case, red). I make sure they know to fit their sound inside the drum sound and follow the hi-hats with their pattern.

Then, once *that* groove is established I say "switch" and everyone is expected to go to the next pattern. For guitars this means going to Riff 2 and for keyboards this means moving to the next colour. Drums should stay on the rock pattern. If they don't lose the groove in this switch, I say "switch" again and they all move to the final pattern. We play it until I signal that we are ending—usually just a bob of the guitar neck. Drummers should play the crash cymbal at the end. They automatically did a 'trash can' ending which worked for the song, so we kept it.

I knew singing wasn't going to fly for any of these boys so just getting through this much of the song with instruments only was more than enough. I was so happy, and so were they.

The Benefits and the End

What we saw happen was like watching magic. The 7 boys came faithfully week after week, and for-the-most-part focused and in control. They craved to be a part of something and they craved the positive attention! Their confidence level grew, they got

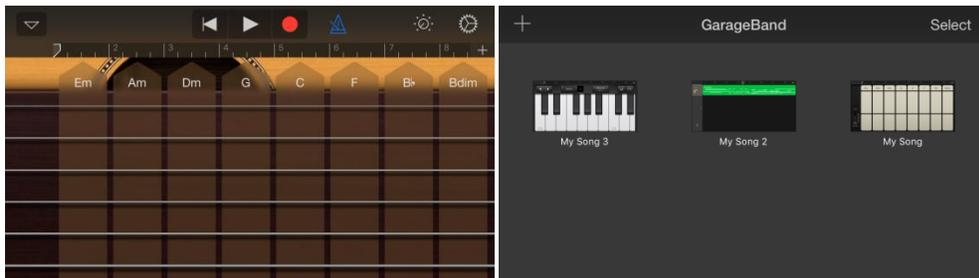
along, helped one another when someone was struggling to learn a part or to keep up. A couple even stayed at recess to practice without me asking them to on a regular basis.

It gave these boys a reason to *want* to come to school that day. It seemed that drums were the most popular and Robyn and I both agreed that we had never seen some of these boys as focused and hard-working as we did when they were learning the drums. They craved more and would always ask, “can I learn a new pattern?” In the end, we *did* perform part of “You Really Got Me” in the spring variety show. We performed the first verse and chorus of the song without vocals and they switched to their next riff when I signalled to them and ‘trash canned’ their ending just like in rehearsal. They did a great job with their informance/performance and they could not have been happier. If we weren’t able to find a place to perform in front of the school we would have invited a group in to show it to and these boys would have been just as happy. As mentioned, the informance/performance was not the goal here, it was just the icing on the cake. What *was* the focus of this group were the processes and the positive social interactions, hard work, and effort that came from it.

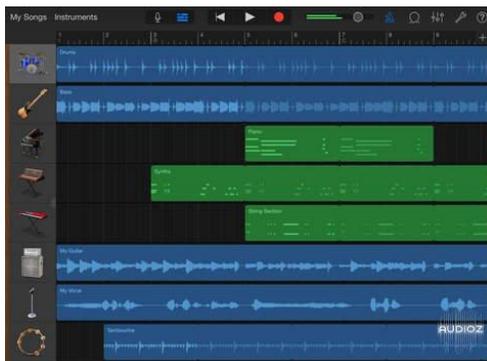
Technology and Apps for Helping with Engagement¹⁰

GarageBand

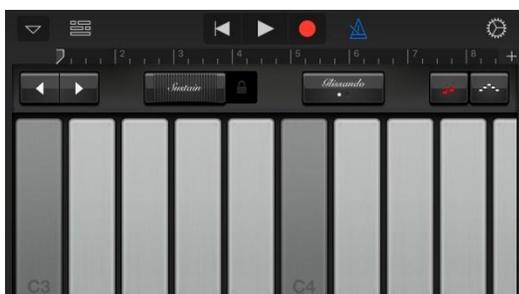
GarageBand is really under-rated, the only problem with it is that it's exclusive to Apple products so 'regular' ol' PCs, Android devices, and the like cannot support it. If you've not used it yourself, you should. It gives a really easy way to get over your fear of improvising and composing and it is a lot of fun. Here are a couple of screen shots of how the app looks on an iPhone 5S:



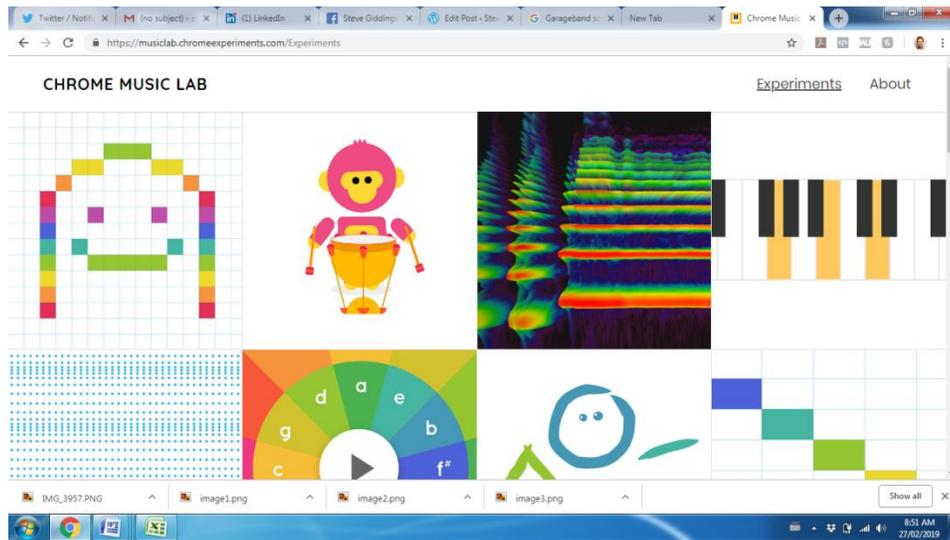
And here is one for iPad:



There is just so much to this very versatile app. You can create really 'good-sounding' chord progressions with a variety of instruments from guitars to orchestral strings just with the tap, or the slide of a finger. As well, you can create drum loops, cool patterns, and there is even a collection of scale patterns converted to play in all the 'white keys' so you cannot possibly play a 'wrong note' even if you tried:

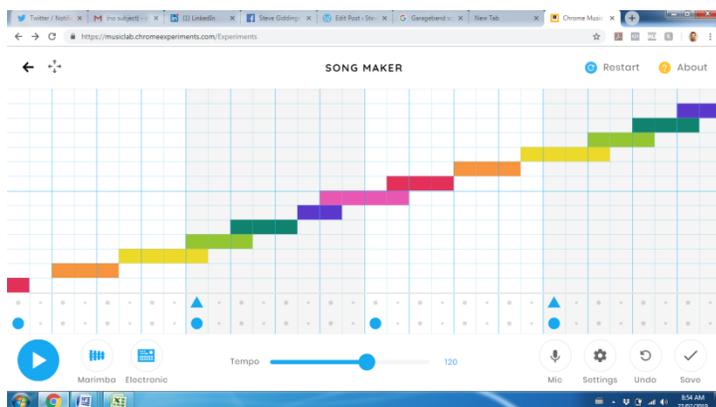


Chrome Music Lab



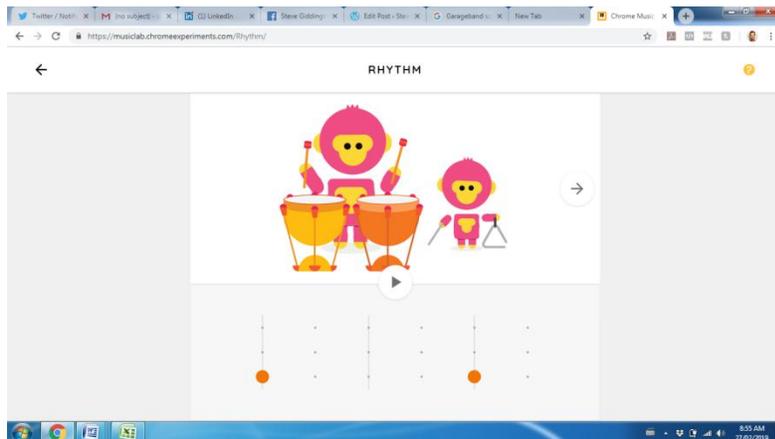
Here is a screenshot of some of the apps in Chrome Music Lab. Some schools (like mine) have class sets of Chrome Books where GarageBand isn't available. Chrome Music Lab isn't near as comprehensive but does have some pretty neat tools to help you and your learners create their own music. As you play around with these apps, you will quickly realize how easily you can create music. Here are some ideas you could use with your learners using a few different apps:

Song Maker



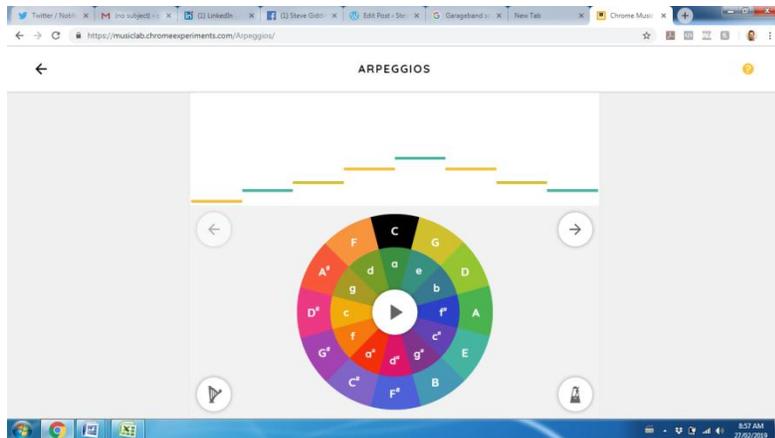
There are a few really cool features about the Song Maker app that I would like to point out: 1) The beat is subdivided into 8th notes so making really simple compositions is easy which also means you can transfer it to traditional notation quite easily; 2) the pitches are notated in the chromatic colour system like boomwhackers are. This means that C is always red; D is always orange and so on; 3) it is divided into a 4-measure phrase. The parameters are already laid out for you. Here are a few things you could do:

Rhythm



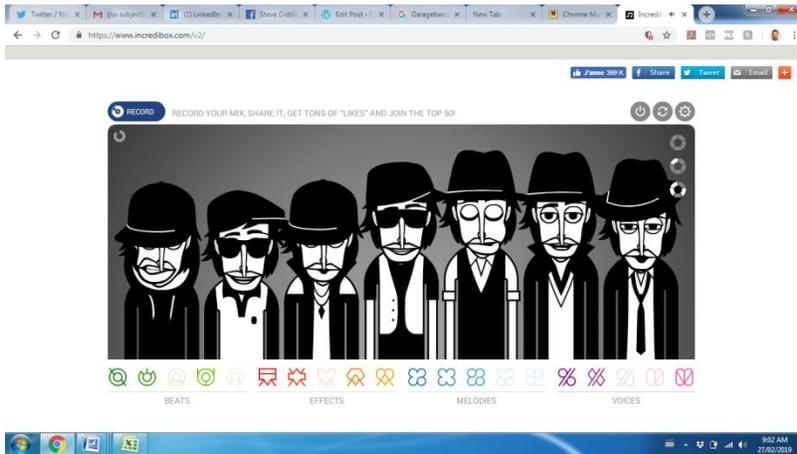
This cool app has some clever features to it as well. There are four metres to choose from: $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, and $\frac{6}{4}$ and each has a different flavour so-to-speak. The second one (in $\frac{4}{4}$) has a distinct drum set or rock and popular feel to it while the fourth one (in $\frac{6}{4}$) has a very latinesque flavour to it. The beats are also subdivided into eighth notes. Here are some ways you could use this app:

Arpeggios



This one is similar to the Smart Piano and Smart Guitar functions in GarageBand but instead there is no key per se. Closely related chords are close together and there is the ability to play all major and minor chords in a given key signature. There are no diminished chords because, well, they don't sound good and are rarely used. The best part about this app is that you can experiment easily with borrowed chords because if you don't stray too far from where you started, it will still sound good. Borrowed chords are good especially if it sounds good—there are no real 'rules.' Like the GarageBand app, it will autoplay a few preset patterns for you but you can adjust the tempo. Learning an instrument doesn't get in the way of the creativity here.

Incredibox



This is an online music DJ/hip-hop/beatboxing composition app found at [incredibox.com](https://www.incredibox.com). It is very intuitive and can make anyone sound like they know what they are doing very early. With the right combination of voices, a user can unlock specific mixes or composition material to add to their works. You can also record, save, and share on social media. Unfortunately, Incredibox was blocked on the student Chrome Books at school but not on the teacher laptops so I've done this as a whole group where everyone has input on what parts to add. It can be an amazing thing if your learners have access to this at school.

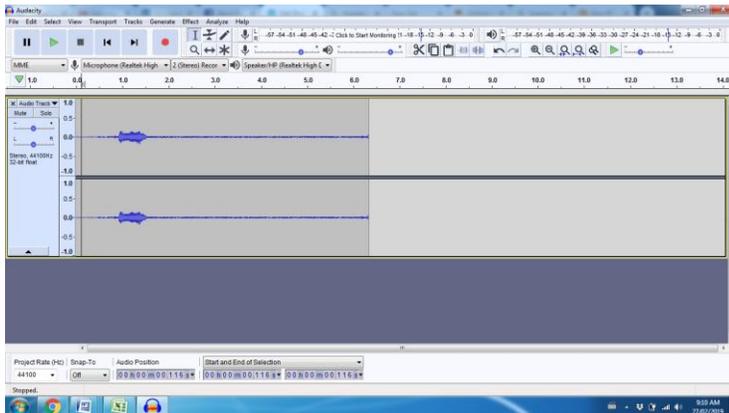
Looper Pedal/Looping Station



Looper pedals/station are fun to play around with and there are some really good 'looper' musicians out there. You can do this with any instrument as long as you can plug it into an amplifier or use a microphone to record the sounds with. With a looper pedal, a musician can create short loops of music that then repeat so another part can be added to create a live multi-track recording. They can be as complex or as simple as possible. Just google "looper compositions" or something similar and you will get an idea of what

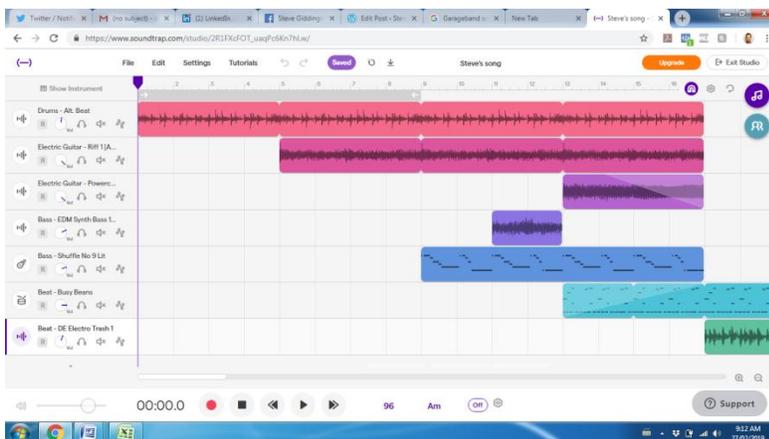
I mean. These work best with one musician but there is quite a learning curve with it. It seems it is all about timing and what you can do with, sometimes, only one button. Take a look, it could be an option for you and your learners.

Audacity



Audacity is a free recording production software. It has a good chunk of the functionality of some of the industry standards. You can download it for free using a quick Google search.

Soundtrap



Soundtrap is another production and recording app that is comparable to the industry standards like ProTools. The paid version (which you can try free for 30 days) has a collection of hundreds of loops, 'beats,' drum patterns, effects, MIDI capabilities, and yes, Auto-Tune. There is a free version, but what really sets this apart from most of the others mentioned is that you can easily collaborate with other musicians around the world. For example, you can create a great track and 'hire' a 'topliner' (a melody writer or rapper) to do their vocal part over it using the track-and-hook method for composition. Of course, the producer (composer) could certainly sing or rap their own parts for this too.

Also, much like the industry standards, it is compatible with MIDI controllers to input notes but also has a built in MIDI controller if you do not have access to one.

Write down some ways you could use these apps in your classroom:

App: _____

Ideas: _____

App: _____

Ideas: _____

App: _____

Ideas: _____

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