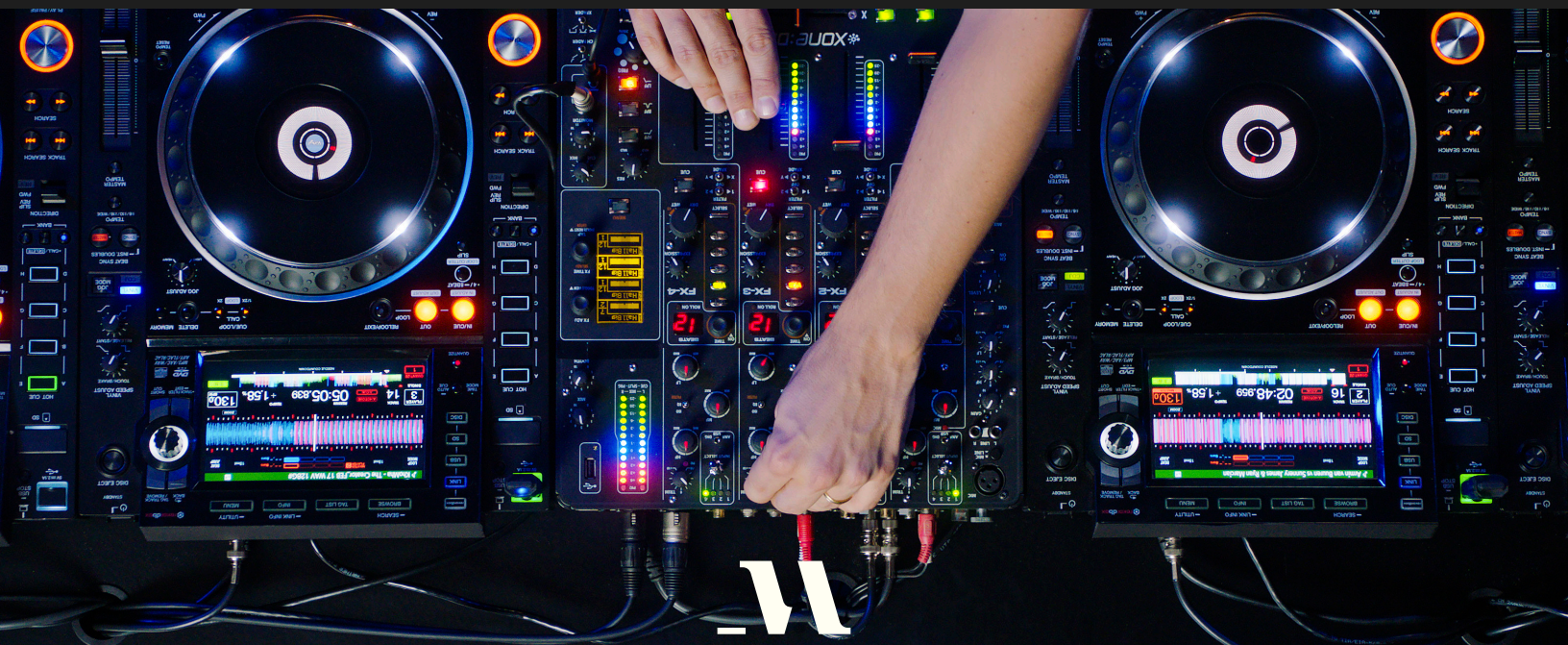# ARMIN VAN BUUREN

—

Teaches Dance Music

A LETTER FROM
ARMIN VAN BUUREN

I strongly believe there is a hit record in every human being. That is because I believe we're all unique—no other human being is the same as you. That's why there will be no second Einstein, Mozart, or Nelson Mandela. When I started as a music producer in 1991, I had my doubts. There was a lot of passion for music in my family, but my grandfather wasn't Beethoven. And I didn't have any big success with my tracks until 2013 when I released "This Is What It Feels Like." So it took me 22 years to get from buying my first synthesizer to my first Grammy nomination! Believe me, a lot of music producers get there faster! I made a lot of records that didn't do anything in the charts. I've been praised and criticized. My point is that I never gave up and I kept following my heart and my passion.

This is my MasterClass. It's the first time I share a lot of my techniques and "secrets." It's my approach on making dance music and being a DJ. Learn and use whatever you like but realize: your path is unique. You are your own sound. Listen to that inner voice and you can get there! Good luck!

ABOUT
ARMIN VAN BUUREN

Armin van Buuren is a dance music DJ, record producer, remixer, and label owner from the Netherlands. Throughout his career, Armin has won 12 DJ Awards, 27 International Dance Music Awards, and has been named the number one DJ by *DJ Mag* five times, four times in a row. Armin became the fourth trance artist to receive a Grammy nomination for his 2014 single "This Is What It Feels Like" featuring Trevor Guthrie.

Armin's passion for music began at a young age. He used money from his paper route to buy records and a sampler. Soon he was making mixtapes for all his friends. The joy he found in making music for others has persisted through a 25-year career. Armin has performed at some of the world's biggest and best festivals, clubs, events, and shows. He has performed for the newly crowned king and queen of the Netherlands, and he became the first solo dance artist to play Madison Square Garden, an event which sold out in under an hour.

In 2001, Armin aired the first episode of his radio show, *A State of Trance*. In the years since, ASOT has amassed a following of over 41 million listeners and is broadcast to over 100 FM stations with fans from over 84 countries. In this weekly two-hour show, Armin presents the biggest tunes of the moment and provides an interactive way for fans to discover new music. In 2017, Armin opened a brand-new radio studio in the Armada Music headquarters in Amsterdam, from which the *A State Of Trance* episodes are broadcast live.

Armin's label, Armada Music (five-time consecutive winner of the International Dance Music Award for Best Global Record Label), is home to more than 40 sub-labels and releases productions by some of the industry's biggest names and rising talents. Within the 14 years of its existence, Armada Music has become one of the most musically diverse record labels in electronic music, with over 80 employees contributing to its enormous growth. In 2017, Armada Music was voted #7 in *Mixmag*'s "Label Of The Decade" poll.

Armin's loyalty to fans, creativity and collaboration in the studio, and dedication to the craft of dance music continue to make him one of the world's top DJs and producers 25 years into his career.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

The MasterClass team has created this workbook as a supplement to Armin's class. In each chapter you'll find a review of Armin's video lesson, explanations of key concepts, opportunities to learn more, and assignments to test your skills. We have also included a Fundamentals Guide for you to reference basic terminology, equipment, and a list of tracks Armin will use throughout the class.

MASTERCLASS COMMUNITY

Throughout, we'll encourage you to discuss elements of the class and your work with your classmates in The Hub. You can also connect with your peers in the discussion section beneath each lesson video.

IN THE STUDIO WITH ARMIN

Armin and his producing partner, Benno de Goeij, collaborated on an original instrumental trance track for this MasterClass. We have divided their process into eight In the Studio chapters throughout the class. You'll get a chance to watch Armin's creative process, unfiltered and in realtime. It'll also be a chance to see some of the key concepts from Armin's lessons put to practical use. As you watch Armin and Benno producing, take notes, try to re-create some of the things they do in your home studio, and ask yourself, Why did they make that decision? Or, What would I have done differently?

If you have questions, either ask your peers in The Hub, or ask Armin on Twitter using #AVBMasterClass.

YOUR CLASS PROJECT

Armin believes to be a great DJ today, you must create your own tracks. Throughout the class you will be asked to apply his advice, techniques, and best practices to your own original tracks. We recommend you create at least three tracks that demonstrate your growing skills. After you've chosen your best work, create a three-track EP you can submit to your favorite record label.

2.

FINDING MELODIC INSPIRATION

"You are your own sound."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Find Inspiration Organically
- If It Sounds Good, It Is Good
- Listen for Chords That Move You
- Let Rhythm Inspire You
- Sing Your Way to Catchy Hooks: "You Are"
- Use Friends to Test Your Ideas
- Overcoming Writer's Block

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin's songwriting process usually begins with the music rather than the beats. But he emphasizes there's no one way to be musically creative. These are some of the different strategies he uses to find inspiration:

- Take a song you love, break it down, and find new uses for its basic parts. Armin demonstrates how a portion of Erik Satie's "Gymnopédie No. 1" can be broken down into two simple chords. These chords can be played different ways and can inspire new chord progressions and melodies.

- While Armin believes it is helpful to have a basic understanding of music theory, he suggests you experiment with chords that are musically incorrect. Something about unconventional sounds could inspire you. Play with wrong-sounding chords—record them, reverse them, add effects—until you find something that sounds right to you.

- Grab an exciting a cappella track and try to write new chords, melodies, and rhythm tracks that fit around it.

- Scroll through your DAW's library of loops and presets and try out different sonic combinations until something strikes your ear as interesting.

Inspiration can come from many different sources, but sometimes you can't escape writer's block. Don't be discouraged.

LEARN MORE

- Listen to the original, extended, and piano versions of "I Live For That Energy."

- Listen to the "You Are (Extended Mix)."

- Listen to Erik Satie's "Gymnopédie No. 1." You can look at the sheet music here.

- Armin says working with a collaborator can bring new creativity into your process. Learn about Armin's frequent coproducer, Benno de Goeij—later you'll get to see them working together on a brand new track.

FINDING MELODIC INSPIRATION

ASSIGNMENT

- Armin shares a number of techniques he uses to get creative in and out of the studio. What have you found works best for you? Share your personal creativity tips in The Hub.

3.
BUILDING YOUR HOME STUDIO

"You don't need to spend a lot of money to make decent-sounding tracks."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Turn Limitation Into Inspiration
- Creating a Vibe
- The Basics
- Where to Start With Software
- Monitoring and Acoustics
- The Sine Wave Test
- Working With Your Acoustic Limitations

CHAPTER REVIEW

In Armin's early career there was no such thing as a do-it-all DAW for the home computer, and making dance music was a very expensive hobby. Today, you don't need to invest a lot of money to make great music. You don't need to have every piece of gear and software on the market. You do, however, need to invest time in learning your DAW and your plug-ins inside and out. Find a DAW and a few plug-ins you like and focus on learning everything you can about what they do and how you like to use them. This is how you can begin to focus on your signature sound as a DJ and artist.

Spend time thinking about the acoustics of the room where you're making your music. Armin demonstrates how you can use a sine wave to test which frequencies are louder or quieter in your workspace. Try to work in a sweet spot where the sound is relatively even across the frequency spectrum and watch out for areas that cancel out your bass. Blankets can help you with higher frequencies, but usually the bass will be your issue, and the bass is incredibly important in dance music. A tip for making the right choices for your mix is to road test your tracks. Listen to them in your studio, in the car, on your friends' speakers, and on different pairs of headphones. You want your tracks to sound great on dance floors and on little laptop speakers.

If you're working long hours in the studio (wherever that may be), prioritize your comfort. Don't sit in the dark for hours on end. Don't be hungry. Don't forget to take care of your needs. These things can break your concentration and distract you from your creative flow. Pay attention to when and how you're most creative and try to set yourself up with working conditions that will help you be your best.

3.
BUILDING YOUR HOME STUDIO

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

For the gearheads out there, here's a list of every plug-in Armin's going to use in this class.

- Software Synths:
  - Serum
  - Massive
  - Sylenth1
  - Omnisphere 2
  - Nexus 2
  - Kontakt 5
  - Vengeance Producer Suite (VPS) Avenger

- Effects and Processing:
  - iZotope Ozone 8
  - FabFilter Saturn
  - FabFilter Pro-Q 2
  - FabFilter Pro-MB
  - LFOTool

- ValhallaRoom
- ArtsAcoustic Reverb
- Dimension Expander
- Kick 2
- Bark of Dog
- H-Delay
- L1 Limiter
- Little Labs Voice Of God
- Noveltech Character
- G Bus Compressor
- Invisible Limiter
- The Glue
- VSC-2 Compressor
- Antares Auto-Tune Realtime

LEARN MORE

- Armin uses a controller keyboard to play MIDI notes into his DAW. His favorite is the Yamaha CP300, because it has internal speakers which can be helpful when you don't want to wait for the plug-in to finish loading.

- You don't see it on camera, but another crucial part of Armin's studio setup is his DAC, or digital-to-analog converter. This piece of hardware converts analog audio signal to digital information and vice versa, so he can transfer hi-res audio in and out of his computer over USB. Armin's DAC of choice is the Apollo Twin.

- Armin recommends using Beatport.com and Splice.com for building your sample libraries.

3.
BUILDING YOUR HOME STUDIO

LEARN MORE CONT.

- The studio monitors you can see above Armin's mixing console are [Yamaha NS-10s](#). These are popular, professional-grade speakers, which are great for producing music across almost any genre. For producing dance music in your at-home studio, more affordable options include the [ROKIT series by KRK](#).

ASSIGNMENT

- Evaluate your room acoustics. Use a sine wave generator and listen for which frequencies are exaggerated or dampened by your studio. Move around and find your room's sweet spot. If you haven't been sitting in that spot, reconfigure your space.

4.

TEMPLATES AND ORGANIZATION IN LOGIC PRO

"You can always go back to an earlier version, which is great. Because [when] you start adding more sounds, sometimes you lose the magic."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Armin's Logic Template
- Organize and Color Code
- Archiving Your Projects
- Always Back Up Your Work

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin starts every track from the same basic Logic template: a 130-beat-per-minute (BPM) arrangement with a kick drum on the quarter notes, a couple basic instruments from the ES2 synth, and an ESX24 sampler. Armin also routes all his tracks using buses. Buses are a way of grouping tracks together in a DAW, so you can process them together all at once. Armin sends every track in his arrangement to bus 30, which then gets sent to bus 31 where he adds his final dynamic processing. Listening back and forth to bus 30 and 31 is a quick way to hear the sonic differences between his mixes before and after dynamic processing.

You may have every intention of sitting down and getting creative, but poor organization can immediately break your workflow. Spending your most productive hours searching for plug-ins or specific files will keep you from doing your best work. Invest some time in getting organized. Grouping and color coding tracks makes it easier to navigate complex projects. Armin colors his drums red; basslines blue; pads, melodies, and leads in green; effects in yellow; and vocals in orange.

Get into the habit of saving and backing up your work regularly. Armin recommends saving every 2–3 minutes and often with different version numbers. Version numbers let you easily access earlier drafts of your songs, so you can recapture some music magic you might have lost, or compare different mixes. Time Machine and Carbon Copy Cloner are both helpful backup utilities. Your projects are your art—they should be well protected.

LEARN MORE

- For those of you who are new to Logic Pro, you can read about basics, such as tracks and regions, here.

- Each track will have its own channel strip in Logic Pro (and most other DAWs). This gives users control over how each track is effected and mixed. Learn more about using channel strips here.

4.

TEMPLATES AND ORGANIZATION IN LOGIC PRO

- Armin has provided his Logic template here exclusively for his MasterClass students. You can read more about the benefits of using templates here.

- Backing up frequently is key to ensuring your work survives when disaster strikes. Armin recommends using Carbon Copy Cloner for backing up your files.

ASSIGNMENT

- Using the DAW of your choice, prepare a template that you will use to create original tracks over the following chapters. Use Armin's template as a guide and use his best practices to set yourself up for success.

IN THE STUDIO, PART 1: MELODY

This chapter is the first of eight bringing you into the studio with Armin and his coproducer, Benno de Goeij, as they create an instrumental trance track from scratch. As you watch Armin and Benno produce, keep an eye out for the ideas and techniques that Armin introduced in earlier lessons. Take notes, try to re-create some of the things they do in your home studio, and ask yourself, Why did they make that decision? Or What would I have done differently? If you have questions, either ask your peers in The Hub, or ask Armin on Twitter using #AVBMasterClass.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin demonstrates his songwriting process, again using chords from Erik Satie's "Gymnopédie No. 1." He begins by playing these chords in various ways to develop a progression that inspires him. Armin records his chords at slower tempo so it's easier to play, then speeds up the project's BPM, cleans up mistakes by editing the MIDI data, and quantizes his notes. Quantization is the process of aligning recorded notes with a tempo grid for situations where perfect timing is necessary.

Armin then invites Benno de Goeij to build upon his melody. Their process is very organic and relies on experimentation—they keep playing around until they find sounds and musical ideas that inspire them.

LEARN MORE

• Learn more about MIDI editing in Logic here.

• Navigate Logic faster by using some of these keyboard shortcuts.

• Learn more about quantizing regions in Logic here.

ASSIGNMENTS

• Sketch three original melodic ideas using some of Armin's techniques for finding inspiration:

   • Select a piece of classical music and break down the chords beneath the main melody. Play around with them in different ways—change their order, add other chords, arpeggiate the notes—until something strikes your ear.

   • Play a chord incorrectly. Reverse it and build a melody around this unique sound.

   • Pick up an instrument you're unfamiliar with and play two notes. Throw them into your sampler, add reverb, and see where they lead you.

   • Sing your melody before you write it! Design a demo that uses a singable melody just as Armin did with "You Are."

6.
WORKING WITH PADS AND LEADS

"You have to be very aware that as soon as you start layering, you are also clogging up your mix... the more frequencies you add, the fuller your mix becomes."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Layer Your Way to Huge Leads
- Keep Your Mix Clean
- Keep Your Leads and Vocals Out of Each Other's Way
- Pads Are Crucial (Even When You Don't Notice Them)
- Get Creative With Your Plug-Ins

CHAPTER REVIEW

Most of the melodic and harmonic heavy lifting in a trance track is done with pads and leads. Pads are sustained, atmospheric sounds that sit more in the background of a track and usually play chords. Leads are more present, cutting sounds that usually play the main melody. Armin shows how he builds fuller, more complex-sounding pads and leads by layering—stacking multiple tracks of soft synths playing the same notes on top of each other. It's important to remember to use your EQ when you're layering synths or your mix will get clogged up fast. Use a frequency analyzer, or listen for what you think are the most important frequencies in the pad or lead sound you're using, and roll off as much of the rest as you can.

When working with pads it's important to consider how they interact with the rest of your track. Usually leads will fight with vocals for the same part of the frequency spectrum. Filtering out the top end of your leads, like Armin does in "You Are," can leave room for vocal elements to shine through. Be intentional with your mix and let listeners know where to focus.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin uses the following plug-ins in this lesson:

- Nexus 2
- Sylenth1
- FabFilter Saturn
- ValhallaRoom
- ArtsAcoustic Reverb
- Dimension Expander

LEARN MORE

- What is distortion and how does it work? Learn more here.
- Armin often discusses the "transients" of a given sound. Transients are high-amplitude, short-duration sounds at the beginning of musical waveforms—the "attack" in other words. Transients are the key to making things sound crisp, clear, and impactful. EQing and proper compression can both help make your transients stand out better.
- Learn more about EQ and how to use it here.

WORKING WITH PADS AND LEADS

ASSIGNMENT

- Build on your melodies from the previous chapter by layering your leads and pads. EQ your sounds so they stay out of each others' way in the mix. Listen for the transients of your leads. Are they hitting you hard enough? Play around with the EQ and compression to see if you can bring them out more. Share your layered sketches in The Hub.

7.

IN THE STUDIO, PART 2: PADS AND LEADS

SUBCHAPTERS

- Building a Pad Sound
- Creating a Lead
- Starting the Breakdown

CHAPTER REVIEW

Focusing on pads, leads, and the breakdown, Armin uses a variety of plug-ins and effects to add melodic elements to his track.

Armin is experimenting with new ways to play his original chord structure—and new instrument sounds that will give the track its color. He tweaks a synth sound on the ES2. Playing around with Logic's standard synthesizers is a great way to look for melodic inspiration and learn the basics of synthesized sound. Next time you need a synth sound in your track, challenge yourself to build it by twisting knobs on the ES2 instead of using a preset.

Armin also does more MIDI editing: quantizing notes, deleting duplicates, and changing the notes' phrasing to a more fluid, legato style. Once again, Armin and Benno's work relies on trial and error. They always keep their ears open to new options.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin and Benno use the following synth and effects plug-ins throughout this chapter:

- ValhallaRoom
- ArtsAcoustic Reverb
- Sylenth1
- LFOTool

- H-Delay
- Nexus 2
- Serum

8.
IN THE STUDIO, PART 3: MORE LEADS

SUBCHAPTERS

- Scrapping a Lead Idea, Finding a New One
- Adding a Top Melody

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin reviews his lead and decides that it isn't the right sound for his instrumental trance track. It's too obvious, not mysterious enough. He removes it from the track and keeps it for later, just in case it may become useful. And, since Armin has been saving his track with version numbers, if he ever regrets his decision he can always go back a few versions and dig that lead sound back up.

Armin starts a new lead idea by opening up Massive by Native Instruments. He searches for a pluck sound that might lend a different kind of personality to his chords. You should always iterate on your sounds until you find one that matches your track's vibe. If you aren't completely sure, save it, then scrap it and start again. Changing your mind throughout the creative process is a good thing. That means you're challenging yourself, asking questions, and looking for new sounds.

9.
CREATING A GROOVE, PART 1

"If your kick is not working, [or it] does not have the right low end, it won't rock a crowd. You'll find that out the hard way."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Working With Drum Samples
- Every Kick Has a Top and Bottom
- Adjust Your Kick to Fit Your Track
- A/B-ing Kick and Bass Sounds: "Be in the Moment"
- Make Room for Your Kick to Shine Through

*The Alloy family of plug-ins has been discontinued and replaced by iZotope's Neutron mixing tools.

CHAPTER REVIEW

It might sound simple, but dance music is made for dancing. The beat that gets people on their feet comes from the kick drum. Armin demonstrates how to sculpt kick drum samples to create powerful dance grooves. Every kick you build should a have a top and a bottom to it. The top of the kick provides the transients that help it cut through your mix, and the bottom gives it the low end that anchors your sound.

If you need sonic inspiration when you're building kick and bass sounds, you can A/B your track like Armin does with "Great Spirit" and "Be in the Moment." Load a track with a sound you want to replicate into your DAW, adjusting the gain so it's about the same volume as the mix you're working on. Now listen back and forth, tweaking your mix as you go, until your track matches the sonic quality of your A/B track. Learning to duplicate sounds from songs you either love or know work well on the dance floor is a great way to improve your mixes and grow as a producer.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

In this chapter, Armin uses a variety of plug-ins to shape the sound of his kick and bassline. If you haven't already, explore these plug-ins to create a groove as Armin does:

- Kick 2
- iZotope Alloy 2*
- Native Instruments Kontakt 5
- FabFilter Saturn
- Bark of Dog (a free plug-in!)
- ValhallaRoom
- FabFilter Pro-Q 2
- LFOTool

ASSIGNMENTS

- Experiment with your kick samples. See how different kick samples fit or don't fit with the track sketches you're working on. Can you take a kick that isn't working and reshape it to make it useful? Or maybe roll off the low end and use it as a top kick? See how creative you can be in giving your kick maximum impact.

9.
CREATING A
GROOVE, PART 1

- Create a groove in your original tracks by exploring new ways to use kicks and bass sounds. Start by A/B-ing your track against a track you love, as Armin did with "Great Spirit." Try different kicks and basslines until you find the ones that give your track the sonic qualities you're looking for.

10.

CREATING A GROOVE, PART 2

"Who says the bassline always has to be a synth? It could also be a drum. If it sounds good, it is good."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Groove Is in the Details
- Adding Percussion Layers With Ableton
- Fitting Percussion Details Into Your Mix
- Groove Case Study: "You Are"
- Tell a Story With Your Drum Fills

CHAPTER REVIEW

You can create richer, more complex grooves in your tracks by adding percussion elements to your kick and bass. Armin breaks down some of the percussion layering in "Be in the Moment" (a 138 BPM track with more of a psytrance feel), as well as the groove elements in "You Are" (a slower, almost tribal groove).

Armin generates his percussion loops in Ableton, which automatically adjusts them to the proper tempo, then exports and adds them to his Logic projects. Always think about how your percussion is interacting with the rest of your mix. All the elements should tell a story together—not just sit on top of one another. The LFOTool is a great plug-in to carve space for all your different percussion layers, and also can give loops and samples a groovier feel.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

In this chapter Armin makes use of the following plug-ins:

- LFOTool
- Nexus 2
- Native Instruments Kontakt 5

LEARN MORE

- Armin worked with Dutch DJ and production duo Sunnery James & Ryan Marciano on "You Are." Learn more about the duo's chart placement and latest releases here.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Take a handful of percussion loops and transform them into new, exciting sounds—chop them up, add volume shaping, add strange effects and EQ. They should sound totally different than how they started.

- Bring your percussion loops, fills, and effects into your tracks-in-progress. If they don't naturally fit your tempo, or overall sound, adjust as needed. Use these new details to build on your groove, adding texture and complexity.

11.

IN THE STUDIO, PART 4: GROOVE AND BASS

SUBCHAPTERS

- Importing Groove Elements
- Adding Bass

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter Armin imports the grooves Benno was working on in Ableton to the main Logic project. Then they try transposing the song into different keys to see where it sounds best. A set of chords can take on a completely different feeling in a new key, so Armin always finds it interesting to experiment with the key he's working in.

Armin begins to develop a bassline using VPS Avenger. He creates two possible basslines and decides on the one that fits his intended sound. Rather than record the entire bassline, Armin just records the first couple bars, then transposes those MIDI notes across the other chords in the progression. MIDI editing is vital to Armin's production process. Even if you don't have a lot of musical training, if you have a good ear and know how to edit MIDI, you can make complex compositions in a DAW.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin and Benno make use of the following plug-ins throughout this chapter:

- LFOTool
- Nexus 2
- Vengeance Producer Suite (VPS) Avenger

12.

IN THE STUDIO, PART 5: THE BIG PAYOFF

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin and Benno begin to create a breakdown for their instrumental trance track. They experiment with the ES2, and then with the Sylenth1, trying to build a sound that's huge and euphoric. You can see what a big role emotion plays in Armin's production process. He tries to feel how a given sound will affect people on the dance floor. If he can't help nodding his head, or putting his arms up, he knows he's got something that might work.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin and Benno make use of the following plug-ins throughout this chapter:

- Sylenth1
- H-Delay

13.
MIXING AND MASTERING, PART 1

"Trance music is—of all the types of dance music—one of the hardest types to mix simply because you have so much information going on in one mix."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Always Mix With Fresh Ears
- Mix Case Study: "Sunny Days (Club Mix)"
- Sculpting the Kick Drum
- Honing the Bass Sound
- Choose the Right Bass Sound for Your Mix

CHAPTER REVIEW

Mixing and mastering is all about making creative choices to highlight different elements in your track. Using EQ and volume control, you're trying to make sure the audience is hearing the most important parts of your recording.

Armin explains that it's better to let your tracks sit a day or two before you mix and master them. Things always sound different when you're listening with fresh ears. When you do sit down to review and mix your tracks, Armin recommends testing your mixes on multiple sound systems—in your car, in a friend's studio—to make sure they have the same sound quality in any environment. Another way to test your tracks is to try them in your DJ set and see how they do on the dance floor.

Armin's club mix of "Sunny Days" is built around the sonic character of the kick drum and bassline. He stacks plug-ins to give those instruments big low-end presence and high-frequency transient bite—they'll need both to have maximum impact on the dance floor. Later, he'll use EQ and LFOTool to keep the leads, pads, and other instruments out of the kick and bassline's way.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

In this chapter Armin makes use of the following plug-ins:

- Bark of Dog
- LFOTool
- L1 Limiter
- iZotope Ozone 7
- Little Labs Voice of God

ASSIGNMENT

- Start mixing your tracks. Work from the ground up, honing the kick and bass sound for big impact. Always think about guiding your listeners' ears to the most important elements in the track. When you start layering in your pads and leads, they shouldn't overwhelm the groove. Your kick and bass should still be hitting hard.

14.

MIXING AND MASTERING, PART 2

> *"The trick with mastering is you want your sound to be as loud as possible without distorting."*
> —Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Mixing Layered Leads
- Keep Your Reverb Clean
- Use the Frequency Analyzer to Understand Your Instruments
- Breaking Down the End Bus
- Find the Right Loudness
- Test Your Mix by Turning It Down

*This is an EQ enhancer. Armin says this plug-in is best used for adding character to the top end of a sound.

CHAPTER REVIEW

As Armin continues discussing "Sunny Days (Club Mix)," he notes that each lead track has its own EQ setting, and that changing the reverb, release, or attack on each lead can make a difference in the overall sound. Reverb is essential to trance music and creating a dancing atmosphere, but Armin warns that it can clog your mix without proper EQing. A reverb plug-in that lets you adjust the frequency spectrum of the reverberations, like the ArtsAcoustic, can help you avoid this issue.

When it comes to mastering, Armin's work tends to be relatively understated. He uses multiband compression to bring the track's loudness up across the frequency spectrum. And he uses a limiter to get the overall track as loud as he can without distorting. (He reminds us that people's definition of acceptable distortion varies in the EDM world.) A crucial part of Armin's mastering process is to constantly A/B his processed mix against his unprocessed mix to hear how the sound has changed. To make this easier, he has these two mixes set up on auxiliary channel strips that get their signal from the pre-dynamics bus. When he's tweaking the processed mix, he's careful to make sure the perceived volume is the same as that of the unprocessed mix—otherwise his ears would get fooled into preferring whichever is louder. It's important to check your dynamic processing work like this because processing can take away transients and deaden the overall impact of your track.

Armin's tip for testing your final mix is to turn things way down—if you can hear all the important elements at a low volume, chances are your mix is well-balanced.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin makes use of the following plug-ins in this chapter:

- Noveltech Character*
- Sylenth1
- ArtsAcoustic Reverb
- G Bus Compressor
- Invisible Limiter

14.
MIXING AND MASTERING, PART 2

- Platforms such as YouTube, iTunes, and Spotify use loudness standards and volume normalization to keep a consistent volume between tracks. As you begin to mix and master your own tracks, you should be familiar with the following terms:

  - **Dynamic range:** The difference between the quietest sound and the loudest sound you hear in a piece of music.

  - **Compression:** The process by which the loudest sounds are lowered (and the quietest sounds are raised) in order to reduce the dynamic range within a track. This is a way to increase the perceived volume of a track.

  - **Loudness:** The perceived volume of a sound, which changes based on dynamic range.

  - **LUFS:** "Loudness Units Full Scale," a unit used to measure loudness.

- Learn more about loudness ranges here, and learn more about loudness standards in club and EDM music here.

- Compressors and limiters are the main tools Armin uses for adjusting his track's dynamic range. You can learn more about how they work and why to use them here.

ASSIGNMENT

- Start to rough in the end bus on your tracks-in-progress. Add a limiter and play with the settings to see how loud you can get your mix without distorting. Pay attention to what your dynamic processing is doing to each of the important sounds in your mix. How are the leads affected? How is the percussion affected? What is the impact of the kick drum?

15.
IN THE STUDIO, PART 6: CLEANING UP AND MIXING

CHAPTER REVIEW

One of the more tedious parts of creating a new track is cleaning it up and getting organized. It's important to delete unused musical ideas and color code your tracks so you can see the drums, leads, basslines, effects, and vocals at a glance. Having a clean project is key once you start moving tracks around in the arrangement phase.

Once Benno's got the track organized, he starts some basic mastering work, adding multiband compression and limiting to the end bus of the project. His ears are finely tuned and he can work very fast. He's looking to give the track more clarity and impact, and bring up the overall loudness level. He A/Bs against the unmastered mix frequently to make sure what he's doing is actually helping. He has volume-matched both mixes to clearly hear the difference and not be fooled into preferring whichever has more volume. Doing this work to get more loudness and a better overall mix now means he and Armin will be able to "feel" the track better as they start arranging and building the big drop.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

In this chapter Armin makes use of the following plug-ins:

- FabFilter Pro-MB
- The Glue
- Invisible Limiter
- VSC-2 Compressor
- Sylenth1

ASSIGNMENT

- Explore dynamic processing plug-ins on your own. Match some of Benno's settings and see what they do to your tracks-in-progress' sound. Every track is different, so you'll probably have to play around to get something you really like. Don't forget to trust your ears. As Armin says, "If it sounds good, it is good."

16.

CASE STUDY: MIX AND ARRANGEMENT IN "BE IN THE MOMENT"

"The moment the kick and the bassline come in you want it to really slap you in the face."
—Armin van Buuren

Armin's process creating "Be in the Moment" is a good example of the many decisions—how many layered tracks, automations, processing elements—that go into his tracks. The intro is dramatic, the kick and bass drop have a high impact on the dance floor, and the breakdown creates a euphoric atmosphere. The triplet-feel drop in the back half of the song creates surprise, while making use of the earlier lead and basslines, so it still fits into the overall identity of the track.

This track, with its psytrance influence, is a great example of Armin's dedication to growing as an artist and exploring new sounds.

LEARN MORE

· Listen to "Be in the Moment" in full here.

· Psytrance, or psychedelic trance usually differs from traditional trance in using faster tempos and emphasizing rhythmic elements over melody. Learn more about psytrance styles here.

ARRANGING A TRACK

"Trance music is all about release, it's about energy, it's about emotion, and you can bring that out by arranging carefully."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Intro
- Find Ways to Tease Your Main Melody
- Building Tension Before the Drop
- Always Keep the Beat
- Automating the Drop
- Arrange With the Dance Floor in Mind: "Sunny Days (Club Mix)"

CHAPTER REVIEW

Trance music is all about dynamic storytelling—taking your listeners on a journey from atmospheric breakdowns to huge drops. Armin shows you some arrangement principles that you can put to use to make your tracks more captivating to dance floor crowds. Armin uses loops and filters to build tension before his drops, and uses volume automation to make sure the drops are full of climactic excitement.

Arranging is one area where your DJ skills should really inform your producing. Keep the crowd in mind and think about what's going to keep them dancing. They can't dance unless they know where the beat is, so use rhythmic elements, like a pluck sound, to keep the groove going when the kick drum isn't playing. Also think about what elements other DJs need in your track in order to be able to easily mix it into their sets. Straightforward intros and outros can make for much smoother transitions. You can always judge the success of your tracks by watching how they do on the dancefloor.

LEARN MORE

- In 2017, Armin compiled a list of the 30 best trance tracks of all time for *Billboard*. Listen to some of these tracks and pay careful attention to the arrangements. What similarities do you find?

ASSIGNMENT

- Think about the story you want to tell to your crowd on the dance floor with your tracks-in-progress. With that in mind, start arranging it. Consider how you will adapt your track so that it can be mixed into other songs easily.

18.

IN THE STUDIO, PART 7: PERCUSSION AND ARRANGING

SUBCHAPTERS

- Adding Percussion and Texture
- Arranging the Intro and Breakdown

CHAPTER REVIEW

Now that Armin and Benno have most of the melodic and percussive elements they think they need, they're ready to start giving their track some structure. Armin begins by arranging the breakdown. He repurposes melodic elements—cutting and looping—to give the track more drama and variety. Armin also adds fills and effects which give richness to his mix.

Arrangement is another opportunity for you to experiment with new sounds, plug-ins, and layering techniques—don't be afraid to try new things, even if they don't work. Save your work often, version up, and find the sound that works for you.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin and Benno mention the following plug-ins in this chapter:

- ValhallaRoom
- ArtsAcoustic Reverb
- LFOTool

ASSIGNMENT

- Take a closer look at the arrangement Armin's built in this chapter. What are the different sections? How long does each section last? What are the main musical elements in each of those sections? Try applying some of those principles to your tracks-in-progress. See what creative ideas you can come up with to build on the structure you've just borrowed. Share your working arrangements with your peers in The Hub.

19.

IN THE STUDIO, PART 8: BUILDING THE DROP, REVIEWING THE TRACK

SUBCHAPTERS

- A/B-ing the Big Leads
- Arranging the Drop
- Finessing the Drop
- Listening and Critiquing
- Naming a Track

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin knows he wants this track to have a powerful drop with big staccato leads, so he starts A/B-ing with the drop from his similar and already successful track "J'ai Envie De Toi" Remember, A/B-ing isn't about copying the musical ideas of the other track, it's about trying to create a similar impact or sound color.

Armin and Benno start honing the sonic quality of the big leads, trying to give them more attack. They also test the drop out by listening to it closely, and they notice the lead up to the drop is louder than the drop itself—a big problem in dance music. To fix this, they add a gain automation, which Armin reminds us is easier than automating track volume.

LEARN MORE

- Armin uses one of his tracks, "J'ai Envie De Toi," to A/B his new leads. Listen to "J'ai Envie De Toi" here.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Armin wants to share his work with you to study and even remix. You can download the Logic project of this MasterClass jam or just the audio stems here. Take a close look at the creative choices Armin and Benno made. What is each track contributing to the overall sound? What journey is the arrangement taking you on? Feel free to play around and make some changes.

- Build your drop! Use volume automation, effects, and A/B-ing to craft the perfect drop to get your audience dancing.

20.

WORKING WITH LYRICS AND VOCALS

"We've used a human voice as a synthesizer...it sounds weird, it sounds off, it sounds unconventional, it sounds great."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Don't Be Afraid of Lyrics
- Trust Your First Idea
- Create Your Own Vocal Samples: "I Live For That Energy"
- Manipulating a Vocal Sample: "Be in the Moment"

CHAPTER REVIEW

Audiences love lyrics. Even in mostly instrumental music like trance, the right words can add a layer of emotion that makes a song unforgettable. Even if you've never worked with words and lyrics before, that shouldn't stop you from experimenting. Armin isn't a native English speaker, but he put pen to paper and wrote the rap for "You Are," as well as a trance music preach for "I Live for That Energy," which was based on "My House" by Chuck Roberts. Listen to what you've produced, let it lead you to an emotion, and then the words will come.

Creating your own vocal samples can also be a great way to add excitement to your tracks. It also saves you from having to worry about the legal implications of sampling someone else's work.

LEARN MORE

- Armin says the chorus of "Sunny Days" reminded him of "Lovely Day" by Bill Withers. You can listen to that track here. Do you hear any similarities?

- The rap for "I Live for That Energy" was inspired by Chuck Roberts's "My House." Listen to the a cappella here.

- Armin highly recommends the Alchemy Synth which is now a part of Logic Pro. Alchemy coupled with the ArtsAcoustic Reverb created the unconventional sound in the intro of "Be in the Moment."

ASSIGNMENT

- Experiment with lyrics for at least one of your tracks-in-progress. If you're intimidated by the writing process, remember ABBA's approach to lyrics—they ad-libbed gibberish melodies then wrote lyrics to fit. You can take this approach, but remember to save your first idea and come back to it periodically.

21.
VOCAL SESSION, PART 1: TRACKING

"Golden rule: Always record your first take."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Prepping for a Vocal Session
- Tracking Vocals

In the next three chapters, Armin is going to teach you his approach to working with singers and recording vocals. With help from the song's original vocalist, Josh Cumbee, Armin will rerecord a portion of the vocal track from his single "Sunny Days."

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin begins the vocal session by prepping a new Logic project with a stereo mixdown of "Sunny Days." This helps avoid latency when the vocalist is recording. Armin asks Josh Cumbee to sing the first verse and they complete four takes before Josh comes back into the control room to have a listen.

The most important part of working with a vocalist is making them feel comfortable. An intimidated vocalist won't perform the way you'd like them to, which costs time and money. Encourage your artist, keep their emotions in mind, and make sure you both have the same goals for the recording session.

LEARN MORE

- If you're working in Logic Pro, you can read about bouncing your track to a stereo file here.

ASSIGNMENT

- If you have a vocalist you would like to work with, prepare a stereo mixdown of your track in a new project. Record a few takes of your vocal idea, checking in regularly with your artist to make sure they are comfortable.

22.
VOCAL SESSION, PART 2: COMPING

"Vocal comping is a very personal process. It's really what makes you an artist."
—Armin van Buuren

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin sits with Josh to begin the comping process. Vocal comping is the process of combining multiple takes to create a single "perfect" vocal performance. Armin believes in always comping with your vocalist present—they should be comfortable with the performances you're using, and they always know their voice best. When you're comping, think about the emotion each line of singing is supposed to convey, and pick a take that matches musical excellence with the right emotional quality. Armin and Josh also discuss the use of Auto-Tune, which some artists love and some artists hate. Armin believes Auto-Tune can be used as a creative tool, but doesn't like to overuse it in his own work. He also prefers to comp without Auto-Tune on.

After selecting the best lines from each take, the file is flattened and ready for mixing.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

- Armin uses the [Antares Auto-Tune Realtime](#) to correct any inconsistencies with Josh's pitch.

LEARN MORE

- It's hard to find a contemporary artist that doesn't use vocal comping. Learn about the process and how some popular artists have used it [here](#).

- If you're new to the ins and outs of vocal comping, you can learn more about the basics [here](#). For a step-by-step look at how comping works in Logic Pro, read [this article](#).

- The creator of the Auto-Tune audio processor is Andy Hildebrand, originally an engineer in the oil industry. His invention resulted in an economic shift in the recording industry. Read more about the creation of Auto-Tune [here](#).

ASSIGNMENT

- After recording multiple takes with your vocalist, start to comp the vocal with the artist in the room. Let their knowledge of their own voice guide you in selecting the takes that make up the best possible vocal recording.

23.

VOCAL SESSION, PART 3: EDITING AND MIXING

"The voice is the instrument of the artist... he or she is usually very particular about how you use his or her voice in your mix."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Editing Vocal Tracks
- Effects and Mixing
- Getting the Best From Your Vocalist

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin explains the importance of listening back to your composite vocal on its own, without any effects processing or any music behind it. You should listen carefully for imperfections, any background noises, strange mouth sounds or clicks, pitch inaccuracies, etc. If you or your vocalist are unhappy with your composite, ask your artist to do more takes. Once you are satisfied, you can begin to clean up the track.

When Armin edits a vocal, he leaves some breath in to give it a natural sound, but takes out any noisy breathing that might distract from the music. He also uses a de-esser plug-in to reduce the sharpness of harsh sounds like "s," while taking care not to lose important parts of the singer's words.

Armin recommends you record all of your lead vocals at the same time to avoid changes in the sonic quality of the vocal, due to the food the artist has eaten (such as milk), sickness, or strain on the vocal cords. If Armin isn't getting the best performance out of his vocalist, he plays around with what the singer's hearing in their headphones by adding reverb to their voice or playing a different backing mix. The goal is to get the vocalist excited and encouraged to make the next take their best.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin uses these plug-ins while working on Josh's vocal:

- FabFilter Pro-C 2
- FabFilter Pro-DS
- ArtsAcoustic Reverb

ASSIGNMENT

- If your vocal track is ready for cleaning, begin to edit and add effects. Aim for a clean but more or less natural sounding vocal.

24.

SINGLES, CLUB MIXES, AND EDITS

"If it sounds a little greasy, I actually think it's cool."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Turning a Pop Vocal Into a Club Mix
- Adding Layers to Your A Cappella
- Extended Mix and Radio Edit

CHAPTER REVIEW

These days, a dance music producer needs to be versatile enough to produce different kinds of tracks: from pop radio songs (with an emphasis on catchy melodies) to club mixes (with an emphasis on danceability and big drops). In the case of "Sunny Days," Armin started with the pop radio version and used it in his club mix. He started by taking the a cappella vocals and building a series of big impactful sounds around them.

Building extended mixes and edits in the same project can save you a lot of time and hassle. That way any changes you make to the overall mix will be applied to both versions of your tracks.

EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin uses the following plug-ins in his remix of "Sunny Days":

- Vengeance Producer Suite (VPS) Avenger
- Sylenth1
- G Bus Compressor
- LFOTool

ASSIGNMENT

- Take the a cappella you just comped with your vocalist and use it as the basis for a new mix. Import it into a new project with a different tempo and time stretch the audio to match. Build a new chord structure around the melody and experiment with a groove you haven't tried yet. In essence, you're remixing your song.

25.

APPROACHING YOUR DJ SET

"A good DJ set, in my opinion, tells a story."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- DJing Is Sharing Your Passion for Music
- Use Every Gig As a Learning Opportunity
- Play Your Own Music
- Borrow From What's Hot
- Leave Room for Experimentation
- Using Repetition to Create an Arc
- Be You

CHAPTER REVIEW

The drive to become a DJ stems from a passion for sharing music you love with others. When you're just starting out, every opportunity you have to perform is a chance to gain fans, test your original tracks on a dance floor, and become more comfortable mixing in front of a live audience.

Armin doesn't program his DJ set to the minute. If he has one hour to play 18–22 songs, he will prepare a folder of 40 tracks to choose from during his set. He will typically plan his intro and second track, and then let the energy of the crowd dictate where to go next. This helps to keep every night interesting and exciting. Armin also designs his sets to have a beginning, middle, and end—just like any good story. One way he achieves this structure is by repeating elements, such as an encore track that references an earlier highlight in the set.

LEARN MORE

- Armin plays his encore version of "Sunny Days" through the Rekordbox DJ software, which you can download here.

ASSIGNMENT

- Follow Armin's advice and in two sentences write why someone would leave their house to see you perform. Think about what makes you special as an artist—Do you have a new single out? Do you make mashups better than anyone else? Be concise and share your two sentences with your peers in The Hub. Now look over some of your go-to DJ tracks; do they reflect what you've said in your two sentences?

26.

BUILDING A SET: EDITS AND MASHUPS

"[In] my entire DJ career, every track that I've used or played first I've put into the right key and BPM."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Starting Your Setlist
- Editing Tracks for the Stage
- Making Mashups

CHAPTER REVIEW

Performing a great DJ set takes careful planning and editing. Armin doesn't pre-program every song in his set, but he does put in a lot work at home that enables him to be more creative on stage. He makes an edit to every track he is considering for his set to ensure he can keep the attention of the audience while introducing them to new music. Armin demonstrates how to quickly edit a track by cutting down the intro of Beatsole's "Before I Wake."

When it comes to making mashups, Armin surveys the songs he knows he wants to play for a specific set and looks for songs in the same key. He considers what his favorite parts of each track are, and how they might merge effectively. He pulls them into Ableton, makes sure each track is on the grid, and starts making edits. He finds the best way to piece the tracks together, then adds samples, drum fills, and effects to smooth out the rough transitions.

Making mashups like these can help you to create exciting and unique sets that will set you apart from other DJs.

LEARN MORE

- Armin uses the [Mixed In Key](#) harmonic mixing software to identify the key and BPM of his selected tracks before starting to create a mashup.

- Armin demonstrates a quick way to edit tracks using Beatsole's "Before I Wake." Listen to the track [here](#).

- Armin's mashup demonstration consisted of these tracks:

  - "The Creator" by KhoMha
  - "Flashlight" by Armin van Buuren and Ørjan Nilsen
  - "You Are" (a cappella) by Armin van Buuren and Sunnery James & Ryan Marciano

BUILDING A SET: EDITS AND MASHUPS

ASSIGNMENT

- What are the tracks you love to dance to? Create a shortlist of tracks you would play in an upcoming DJ set. Take note of their keys and tempos. Select 2–3 songs that would sound good edited together and pull them into your DAW to create your own mashup. Remember to make sure each track is on the grid and at a volume that is loud enough without distorting. Share your mashups with your peers in The Hub.

27.
USING THE DECKS: BASICS

"As a DJ, I'm always counting in the back of my head."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Armin's On-Stage Setup
- Organize Your "Record Box"
- Use Hot Cues to Edit on the Fly
- Make It About the Music

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin recommends that all aspiring DJs learn their equipment inside and out—if you don't own the right gear, go rent what you need for a month and practice. You should be competent with all the different musical functionalities of your gear and comfortable enough to troubleshoot any technical problems that you might encounter during a performance.

Armin's typical DJ setup includes four Pioneer CDJ-2000 players and an XONE DB4 mixer. Why four CDJs? It's simple: Computers (and most technology) can break. Having more than two players available when performing live means you can play through most unexpected technical issues. Armin likes the XONE DB4 mixer because of its sound and, most importantly, the capability it provides to apply different effects—especially reverb—per individual channel (rather than just the master channel). This opens creative possibilities that help him smooth his mixes and add dramatic effects to his sets.

Armin's tracks are organized in advance by key and BPM so that he can easily mix tracks together. He thinks simple, seamless transitions are key to keeping your audience in a state of trance. The audience is there to hear the tracks you're playing, not the fancy tricks you can do with the decks. Armin uses preprogrammed hot cues—which let him jump to preassigned points in the track at the push of a button—to edit tracks on the fly. Using these cues, Armin can let a song go long if the audience likes it, or jump toward the end if it doesn't rock the crowd.

LEARN MORE

- Research the equipment Armin uses in this chapter, such as the CDJ-2000 or the XONE DB4. Rent this equipment or similar models to practice your DJ set at home. Practice until you're completely comfortable and feel like you could stay cool in an on-stage technical disaster.

28.

USING THE DECKS: ARMIN'S TECHNIQUES

"Mixing in key enables me to put more tracks in a shorter time."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Making a Transition
- Overlapping Tracks
- Changing Tempos
- Smoothing Transitions With Reverb
- Doubling Channels in Your Mix
- Using the Loop Function

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin demonstrates how he would perform a smooth (and unnoticeable) transition between two songs using hot cues and reverb. It's important to remember that mixing seamlessly is a skill you can master—made easier by working with tracks that are in key and the same BPM.

Keeping tracks shorter helps to keep up the energy of the crowd—especially in quicker festival sets. If you have a longer set, you should let your tracks breathe and play them more as their producers intended.

Armin prefers not to use the beat sync functionality on his CDJs—he'd rather trust his own ears than the Rekordbox software. The more experience you get as a DJ, the more you'll develop your own taste and style—it's all about finding a balance between what you like and what makes the crowd move.

29.
PERFORMANCE TIPS

"People on the dance floor are there to have a good time."
—Armin van Buuren

CHAPTER REVIEW

Even after years of being the world's number one DJ, Armin still gets nervous before sets. From the moment he enters a venue, his mind is on how many fans are there, whether there is a line outside, if there have been any technical issues, if the promoter is happy, etc. Armin reminds you that while you may have all of these thoughts too, your job is still to entertain the audience.

Armin shares some of his tips for delivering engaging performances:

- Don't just look at the front row of fans—they're usually the ones having the most fun. Challenge yourself to read the room and make eye contact with the back row and the people along the sides. These are the attendees who might be unsure of who you are or of the music you're choosing to play. If you can make them dance, then you're probably doing a good job.

- If someone needs to shout at the bartender to order a drink, you're probably playing too loud.

- How much you talk between tracks is up to you, but don't be afraid to let people know who you are and how much fun you're having.

- If you're playing for a mainstream audience, and not deep dance music fans, then follow Armin's "one on, one off" rule. Play a classic, a Top 40 hit, or a recognizable mashup, and then play something unknown. Eventually, you can experiment and see how many unknown tracks you can get away with.

- Armin keeps an "if all else fails" folder handy full of fan favorites. If fans are asking for one of them, he tries to deliver.

- When playing in a lineup with other DJs, be a professional. Spend a little time researching who you're sharing the night with and:

  - Don't play tracks from the DJ before or after you.
  - Don't play tracks from that DJ's label.
  - Don't play the next DJ's big track as your last track.
  - Don't go over your time.

29.
PERFORMANCE TIPS

LEARN MORE

· Armin suggests studying the setlists of your peers and other DJs you love. You can begin by reviewing a number of Armin's setlists here.

· Performing in loud environments can hurt your hearing over time. Learn about how hearing loss occurs and what you can do to protect yourself here.

ASSIGNMENTS

· Do your homework. Look at what other DJs are playing and be inspired to adapt similar tracks to your setlist. Share your favorite websites, blogs, or other publications for finding artist setlists with your peers in The Hub.

· Looking back at your short list of possible tracks from Chapter 26, make sure you have included classics and Top 40 tracks so that you can use them to practice the "one on, one off" rule.

· Compile tracks for your own "if all else fails" folder.

30.
HOSTING A
RADIO SHOW

"A radio show or a podcast is a very direct way to communicate with your fans."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- What Radio Can Do for You
- Armin's Programming Philosophy
- The Search for New Music
- Listen With an Open Mind
- Use Your Audience's Ears
- Basic Rules for Talk Breaks
- Grab Your Listeners' Attention
- Make a Human Connection

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin uses his radio show *A State of Trance* as the center for everything he does as an artist. He announces new music and tours, speaks about the artists and labels he's listening to, and tries hard to make a personal connection with his fans. Finding new music for the show also inspires the work Armin does when he's producing. Each episode of *A State of Trance* offers Armin's tune of the week, a fan-selected future favorite, a most talked about trending track, and a track accompanied by a story that allows listeners worldwide to be a part of the experience.

Armin has mastered the radio medium and shares his tips with you:

- Find new music: If you are programming your own show, you don't need to be on all of the promo lists to find great music. Search for websites and blogs that curate the best new tracks of the week. It's your job as a DJ to deliver them to your fans.

- Have an open mind: Armin likes to listen to new tracks without knowing who the artist or label is. This information can bias your feelings about a track based on the label's reputation or the artist's past successes. You should try to form your own opinions about new tracks before judging them based on their creators.

- Use your audience: If you aren't sure about a track, ask your listeners to give you feedback. Your listeners quickly become your own focus group for testing new tracks.

- Speak with purpose: You should plan out how you will use your talk breaks. Armin recommends you remind your listeners what show they're listening to. It's also good to repeat the website address, if there is one, so they can follow along from wherever they're listening. Engage your audience in what you're saying instead of giving them a passive experience. The audience is listening because they want to hear you.

- It's great to show some on-air personality to your fans. Be real. Don't talk down about yourself. Present yourself and your music, events, and announcements with confidence.

30.
HOSTING A RADIO SHOW

LEARN MORE

- If you've ever thought about starting your own radio show, now's your chance. Read about what gear you'll need and how to get started here.

- If you are working on a podcast, it's important to understand how to engage your audience. Read tips from NPR's Tamar Charney for winning the ears of listeners over your competition.

- Armin's *A State of Trance* reaches over 40 million listeners worldwide. Learn more about ASOT and listen in.

ASSIGNMENT

- It is impossible to listen to every new track, so you should spend time searching for websites and blogs that can help you identify the best tracks of the week. Share your best resources in The Hub with your classmates.

- If you'd like to follow in Armin's footsteps and have a radio show as a central part of your musical work, then start your own! Plan how you will program each show, where your music will come from, and how you will engage with your audience. The resources located in the Learn More section will help you get started.

31.
ARMIN'S EARLY INFLUENCES

"I never really had the ambition to become a DJ or to be a producer. I just wanted to do it because I loved it so much. It was really my passion, you know, making little mixtapes for my friends...I still have that passion in me. I'm still that little kid."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- It All Starts With Your Ears
- A Musical Household
- Teenage Rebellion
- The Jedi Master: Ben Liebrand
- Electronic Pioneers
- Important DJs
- Classical Composers and Trance Music

CHAPTER REVIEW

Armin's father, a doctor, used music to relax. His home was always full of music, and Armin grew up with progressive rock and recorded radio shows playing loudly from the floor beneath his bedroom. At eight years old, Armin received a cassette tape from a friend containing the local weatherman sampled over a beat—that's when everything changed. Armin's love for electronic music grew as he sought out new records and mixtapes.

Armin's introduction to the DJ world came through the mixing of "Jedi Master" Ben Liebrand. Liebrand would create megamixes of tracks—he was one of the first to mix two records together.

Compositions such as Jean-Michel Jarre's *Zoolook* or Vangelis's *Antarctica* demonstrated how electronic music could be popularized. Both Jarre and Vangelis embraced the synthesizer, thought to be a "devilish instrument" at the time for its ability to imitate the sounds of other instruments. This emerging genre of music excited Armin and his desire to become a DJ began to grow. He saved up money from his paper route to buy an Akai S01, an eight-track mono sampler, and began to create his first tracks using everyday sounds such as his mother speaking, TV shows, or the housekeeper. Armin later came to think of this process of discovery and practice as self-education.

LEARN MORE

- Armin mentions a number of composers whose work with electronic instruments and melodies shaped his understanding of dance music. Expand your knowledge of the foundations of dance music by researching and listening to the music of each of these electronic pioneers.
    - Kitarō
    - Klaus Schulze
    - Jean-Michel Jarre
    - Ben Liebrand
    - Vangelis

ARMIN'S EARLY INFLUENCES

- Composer Wendy Carlos's *Switched-On Bach* is a collection of Johann Sebastian Bach pieces performed on a Moog synthesizer. Start familiarizing yourself with this album by reading this article from the Library of Congress, and listen to each track online.

- Explore this charming, yet sarcastic, interactive electronic music map by Kenneth Taylor. Presenting over 100 electronic music subgenres, this map can give you a basic understanding of the many types and styles of music you may create as you develop your skills as a DJ. Disclaimer: This map was a definitive resource for dance music subgenres in the 90s, but may need some updating. We recommend reviewing this genealogy of music as well.

32.
STARTING AND GROWING YOUR CAREER

"Every DJ I know, or every top 100 DJ in the world, has become famous in a different way."
—Armin van Buuren

SUBCHAPTERS

- Don't Pressure Yourself
- The Dance Floor Doesn't Lie
- Sending Out Your Demo
- Social Media Is a Must
- Draw Your Own Social Media Boundaries
- Protect Yourself From Negativity
- Never Stop Having Fun

CHAPTER REVIEW

At the start of your career it's important to recognize that there is no one path to follow. You may find success through a radio show, a popular collaboration, or a great label, but each of these paths originates from one place: the fun you have creating music. If you're having fun then your passion will show through your music. Armin had his first hit eight years into his career, but felt periods of frustration along the way and an intense pressure to make similar tracks. His creativity suffered, and it wasn't until his passion was reignited that he was able to make new hit tracks.

Once you have tracks that you feel are great, the quickest way to the top is to have them played by other DJs. One way to do this is to go through their label. Most labels have instructions on their websites on how they like to receive demos. Before submitting, you should investigate whether or not your music is a fit for their genre. You can also reach out to DJs directly.

People need to be able to find you and listen to your music, so your social media presence is increasingly important. You should engage with your fan base and let your fans learn about your personality. Armin likes to share positive things with his fans and even some of his doubts, but every artist has their own unique personality. Armin also likes to keep his family and personal life out of the spotlight and encourages you to set your own social media boundaries.

LEARN MORE

- Armada Music, Armin's label, has created a how-to guide for submitting your demos to labels. Read about where to start, what not to do, and how to stand out here.

- Do your research and decide if your tracks match the genre of your favorite labels. If you feel your demos align with Armada Music's style roster of artists, then you can submit to them directly here.

32.
STARTING AND GROWING YOUR CAREER

- Research your favorite music labels and select those whose genre is the best fit for your music. Once you've set your sights, select your top three tracks and submit them to your label of choice. Keep Armin's tips in mind, and refer to the supplementary information found in the Learn More above.

33.
CLOSING

"It was an honor and a pleasure to share this information with you. I really hope you have the tools now that you need and you're a little bit more inspired, and especially motivated, to go and have a lot of fun."
—Armin van Buuren

CHAPTER REVIEW

You've finished your MasterClass with Armin van Buuren!

No matter where you are in your journey, Armin hopes you will remember to have fun. His love for dance and electronic music helped him get to this point in his career, and he encourages you to always let that be the most important part of why you make music.

We want to make sure that your experience with Armin and your classmates doesn't stop here.

You can stay in touch with your peers by:

- Joining The Hub to connect with your classmates.
- Contributing to lesson discussions at the end of each video.
- Uploading your relevant assignments in The Hub for peer feedback.
- Submitting an Office Hours question to Armin.

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY

- Tweet your thoughts and questions to @arminvanbuuren and @masterclass. Be sure to include #AVBMasterClass in your message.