

Intro Script

Hey, I'm Jesse Sheehan founder of the music school Lila School of Bands, and I'm so stoked to be teaming up with Rockquest for *Breaking It Down* — a video series all about getting you and your band ready for the upcoming Smokefree Rockquest Heats.

I've personally coached multiple national finalists, and regional and national winners through Lila,

(shots of Parkdale, Emerson, Buzz)

Won the national final myself waaay back when I was a teenager *(maybe a shot of me as a teenager... maybe not!!)*

toured internationally with some of the biggest names in NZ music

(Shots of me performing with Neil Finn, Dave Dobbyn, and at Mount Smart Stadium with Ny Oh)

and I'm a friend of Rockquest and a frequent judge for the competition. In these videos I'm gonna share what I've learnt as a professional musician and mentor over the last 15 years .

We're gonna cover how to get started writing an original song so that you can enter rockquest, how to tighten up your band, and how to deliver a captivating performance that engages the crowd and wows the judges.

This video series is dropping twice a week - so stay tuned, and we'll see you soon !

Chords

If you want to enter the upcoming Smokefree Rockquest Heats you're going to need an original song. Here are 6 chords you can play around with to get you started.

(bam bam bam bam bam bam - appearing on screen)

These numbers point to 6 chords in every key that sound great together, In fact these chords sound so good together that you can play them in any order, and they happen to make up 90% of the songs you know.

(Fluerescent Adolescent - Arctic Monkeys 1 6 2 5)

Olivia Rodrigo

(Good 4 U - Olivia Rodrigo)

Wet Leg

(Wet Leg - Mangetou)

The Cure

(Boys Don't Cry)

Here's something you can try with your band at your next practice. Download the Lila Cheat Sheet in the comments below to get the chords in all keys, then get every band member to pick a number 1 - 6 at random. Play those chords through, and see how they sound, they'll all work together, but pretty likely there will be a couple you want to switch out.

Maybe you didn't like the sound of the 4 there, let's try the 6. Or maybe you think for the verse it should start on this chord, but then for the chorus the 1 chord makes sense. Or hey there's this random chord I don't know what it is - but I think it sounds cool. All of that's awesome - add it in - and ultimately follow your ears, and your taste.

Use this to get you started but don't get too fixated on the rules, it's not a science, the idea is to play around - experiment till you find something you love and that expresses who you are and what your band is about.

Have fun creating your chord progressions, we can't wait to see what you come up with! See you at the heats.

Writing Riffs

Depending on your genre of music, and the sound you're going for, you may want to focus less on chords and more on riffs.

Writing a good riff is the same as writing a good hook, most people's favourite riffs are singable - catchy, they can even be more a part of what you remember than the vocals.

Think Killing In The Name Of by Rage Against The Machine - the same riff all throughout the intro and then verses, then developing, similar ideas and adding notes. **play the riffs, then the development**

Or Do I wanna know by Arctic Monkeys - slow simple catchy riff, a hook by itself even without singing.

Kids by Mgmt - a keyboard riff and a huge hook, this is an example where the chords underneath are a big part of what makes this riff work and sound so good, you don't have to choose both

But how do you get started writing your own? Here's 3 ways you might approach riff writing for your original song.

- Sing an idea, until you find something catchy, and then figure out the notes on your instrument. You don't need to be a good singer for this, doesn't matter if it's out of tune, you know the notes you're trying to sing, now find it on your instrument. If you start from your instrument, say if it's guitar, what can often happen is just endless mindless noodling - unfocussed, closer to soloing, falling into old habits, and not getting anywhere.

Once you free yourself from your instrument you can focus and get clearer on simple catchy hooks that work much better for your song.

- Learn a bunch of riffs that you personally love and that you think sound great, then analyse them under a microscope, what makes them work? What is it that love about them? Take that inspiration and try to write a riff similar - or adapt one of the ones you just learnt. You can start playing it and re-imagine it, maybe if it goes down on one note, you'll go up. Just make sure you change it enough that it's your own - but remember it's ok to learn from and use the music that's already been made to inform your songwriting - all of rock and pop music is only 12 notes, re-arranged, us musicians and songwriters are constantly borrowing and learning from one another and that's a beautiful thing.
- Go deep on your scales. Understanding the notes you're playing and how they relate to each other can have a dramatic impact on your ability to play other bands riffs, write your own, and improve all aspects of your playing. And as a side note whether you know it or not, you're using scales all the time. It might be intuitively, following what sounds good, but the notes are still being taken from that framework - so it's not a choice of whether to use scales, because you do so regardless, it's a choice of whether you choose to understand what you're doing, or not - and how deep you go on that is up to you. If you do wanna go down this path we've included a lila scale cheat sheet with a mix to get you started.

Can't wait to hear your riffs at the upcoming rockquest heats!

Lyrics

So now you've got some chords, maybe a few riffs, now you'll need a melody. Here's a 3 step method for getting started on your melody and lyrics for the upcoming Smokefree rockquest heats. Or, if you're like last years National Final Winners Equilibrium, who were entirely instrumental, this can still help you find a melody one whatever instrument is playing it.

(show band playing and young person recording)

First, turn on your voice memo or camera, and record your band playing the chords, riff, bass line, or whatever they have so far. Get them to play it on loop for a minimum of 1 minute, the longer the better.

Second, get in a room on your own, play the recording, and record yourself singing over it. Repeat this over and over again.

Chances are 99% of what you sing won't work and you'll have to throw it out, that's ok, all you need is that 1 good idea that you can develop.

Third,

Once you've got a melody, play around with some words that fit the vibe. Does it feel sad, happy, angry, heartbroken? Make sure your lyrics fit the feel of the song.

And you're away! We can't wait to hear your awesome lyrics and don't forget to submit them for the Apra Lyric Writers awards at your next heats.

Arrange your parts

So you've got your original song for the upcoming heats, good job! But the works not over - now the band has to figure out all their parts.

Here's a few easy tips for the band to help you get started

Drummers you're gonna set the tone for what everyone else plays on this song- the groove taht you decide to bring will massively change what parts feel right to the rest of the band, so do it with intention - think about what kind of feel the song has inherently and what it is that your going for.

Often times, the way a song is sung, or the chords are strummed imply a certain feel already that you can latch onto. Is it light, chill, introspective, is it heavy, is it dancey *give examples* use this to inform the groove that you bring to the track.

Bassists, if the song has been written with chords, you don't have to be confined to just the root notes. Use other notes from the chord to outline the harmony and create interesting melodic lines. If you're stuck for how to do this, we've included some resources just for you in the comments below that can help. If it's a riff based song, often times you will play the riff as well, but feel free to add some bass variations in the low register to add something different. And last things for the bassists - and super important - pay attention to the drummers parts, especially the kick drum pattern - your bass line should line up with that pattern not fight against it.. That's the difference between a tight rhythm section and a messy one.

Chord instruments, guitars and keys, if there's more than one of you - make sure you're not all playing the same part.

Say you've got 2 guitars,,one guitarist is playing the chords of the song, say D A G down here, as the 2nd guitar it's not super effective to play those same chords in the same position on the neck, you're basically cancelling yourself out and you're not adding anything interesting.

Try a different part that compliments what your other guitarist is doing, one easy example could be playing those same chords in a different position. (*show example*) You'll get a much fuller 'wall of sound'. Alternatively you could write a guitar riff that goes with those chords like Reptilia 'The Strokes' **example*

If you're on keys the same goes, say it's keys and guitar, co-ordinate with your guitarist as to who's holding down the chords, and who's responsible for more melodic parts, different registers, or variations.

Whatever you do is up to you and your creativity - just don't stick with the default, get creative, make the most interesting parts you can, and don't stick with the first version you come up with - work at it till it's the best representation of your song you can bring. Can't wait to hear your arrangements at the upcoming Smokefree Rockquest heats!

Performance Blocking

So now your songs ready for the smokefree rockquest heats, it's time to work on your performance. We all want to perform like our heroes, but sometimes when we get on stage, people we know are there, the lights are bright, the judges are sitting their expectantly, it gets overwhelming, and we play the whole song stiff and glued to the spot.

Performance blocking is a technique we can fall back on when anxiety hits. It's super simple, all it is, is figuring out a road map for how you're going to perform the song **before** you get on stage.

For example maybe the bassist goes forward for the intro while the guitarists face eachother, and the singer goes up centre stage and sings right to the back of the room.

In the verse the singer walks to the left side of the stage and the band rocks out on the spot.

In the chorus the bassist goes back to hang out with the drums while the guitars come forward to connect with the singer.

You can try different combinations to see what works and feels good for you, it's your performance and there's no wrong answers, just whatever you do make use of that space, don't just stand stiff - it's not representing your band or song in the best way.

Can't wait to see you blow us away with your performances at the upcoming smokefree rockquest heats!

Blindfold Technique

If you want to lose points and hurt your chances at the upcoming smokefree rockquest heats, spend the whole song staring at the floor, or your hands.

The bands you look up don't do this, and you shouldn't either, it's the fastest way to lose connection with your band, the audience, and the judges.

Here's a trick to help get you out of the habit.

BLINDFOLD TECHNIQUE

(photos of emerson doing this, photos of other bands)

At lila we call it the Blindfold technique. Get in the bandroom, or if you're a soloist do this on your own, and play your whole song through blindfolded. Don't cheat! If you can see even a little bit this exercise won't work.

The Chances are for most of the song you'll do just fine with no sight, maybe there's a couple of moments where you'll struggle, but for the majority of the song you'll know it - it's in your fingers already, they're your songs, you wrote them.

So now you've proved to yourself that you're not looking at your hands because you need to. So why are we looking in the first place then? In most cases, it's cause it feels awkward, we feel nervous, embarrassed, we don't know where to look - it's actually an anxiety response. We've all been there, and it's part of the process, but we can't stay here - it's holding us back.

So the first place we should look at instead of our hands, is at our bandmates, who are hopefully our friends, and because your maytes you can help each other work through the awkwardness. Side note if you're not friends, make friends, hang out, it's good for the music, and it makes the experience of being in a band so much more fun.

Once you've connected with the band use that energy to look out to the crowd. Everyone wants to see you do well, enjoy the experience with them, appreciate the audience, bring them into your world.

Don't be this person **shot of person starring at hands** and we'll see you at the heats!

Don't snitch on your friends

Here's the number 1 thing you should never do when you play on stage with your band - and chances are if you're watching, you've done this yourself.

We've all seen it. Halfway through a song someone plays a wrong chord, or misses a beat, and who are the first people to turn on them? Screwing up their faces, shooting evil eyes... it's not the audience, it's not the judges, it's the rest of the band!

That reaction is truly a bigger mistake than the missed chord, the wrong bass note, or whatever has just happened on stage.

You've got to remember that the audience and the judges don't know your song, we're meeting you for the first time. We don't know all the different things you've practiced, how the transition is meant to go, the exact solo you've worked out. So as far as we are concerned whatever you play is what was meant to happen.

Until we see your facial expressions, and even (yes I've seen it) people mentioning it on the mic.

Both amateurs and pros make mistakes on stage, but the difference, is in how you deal with them.

Don't out your band mates, perform your mistakes like they were always part of your plan, save the rest for the debrief off stage.

See you at the heats!

Sing on the mic

Don't let poor mic technique be what holds you and your band back at the upcoming Smokefree Rockquest heats.

It's the easiest fix, and the quickest way to disqualify yourself if you get it wrong.

Have you seen this person before? (*holding mic pointing up at ceiling*)

Don't be this person. The Mic is not an ice cream.

These mics are designed to be super directional - wherever you point them, it will pick up the sound directly in front of it. So if you point it at the ceiling, you're gonna record the ceiling not your beautiful voice.

And the worst part? In your practice space you'll get away with it. You're in a small room, you can be heard by your band mate standing next to you. So you might think 'what's the big deal'.

Once you get to the Rockquest heats, you are in a huge hall, on a big stage. If you're not singing into that mic - we can't hear you.

So that means singers, keep that mic right up in front of your face, when you walk, when you do your tricks (*cut to famous popstars*), don't let it drop.

If you're on guitar, same applies, but make sure that if you must look at your hands (though try your best not to, see our other vid on the Blindfold Technique) that you avoid moving off Mic when you do so. This can easily happen, we are singing well into the mic, then we look down at our hands and suddenly our sound drops, we can't be heard. Angle yourself so that you stay right on the mic, get a little closer, so that when you look down your mouth stays on that mic, and you're picked up.

We want to hear you at the upcoming heats, sing into that mic, and our sound guys will handle the rest. See you at the heats!

Day of the event

It's the day of the event, you've got your song, your band is ready to go.

Here are 3 tips to make the day the best possible experience.

1, Hang Out With Your Band.

You guys have honestly done so well to have gotten to this stage. You've written a brand new song that didn't exist before, you've put in the hours in the rehearsal room, your performance ready, all while having school and life to keep up with. That's awesome.

The work is over, and now it's time to have fun and hang out with your band. Spend the day chilling together, get ready together, head into the event. There's nothing more to do, your objective today is to have fun, get in a good headspace, bond with your band and bring that good energy to the stage.

2, Lightly play through your own parts - warm up. Don't go overboard, you don't need to have a 5 hour rehearsal the day of the heats, you're just gonna tire yourself out. Just lightly warm up your fingers, sing some exercises, get yourself in a good state.

3, Enjoy it. This is meant to be fun - and by having fun, you'll do better, you'll play better, you'll perform better. Do whatever you have to do to get in a good headspace - breathing exercises, listening to your favourite music, watching your favourite show, whatever gets you relaxed and in a great mood.

Have fun out there!