Mao Midi Manual

Version 0.9 beta · Type the chords, hear the band.

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1. Getting started

Mao Midi turns a chord chart into a backing band. You write the chords, choose a style, and it plays drums, bass, keys and pad to match.

Your first song in a minute

1. Open Mao Midi. It starts with an empty song, with one Verse section.
2. Click the **+** tile in the Verse and type `C`, then press `Tab`. Type `Am` `Tab` `F` `Tab` `G` and press `Enter`.
3. Pick a **Genre** and **Variation** at the top, for example Pop and Classic Pop.
4. Press `Space` (or ▶ **Play**). Your band plays.
5. While it plays, change the Variation and hear the same chords in a new style.

> Just want to hear what it can do? Click **Example song** in the toolbar.

This manual comes with Mao Midi. Press `F1` in the app, click **About** → **Manual**, or find it in the Start menu.

2. The screen

Area	What it's for
Toolbar (top)	New, Open, Save, Example song and Import MIDI, plus the song title, time signature, Genre, Variation, Make a style..., Tempo and Transpose.
Transport	Play/Stop, back to the start, Loop, Follow, the part switches (Drums, Bass, Keys, Pad, Melody), Drag to DAW and Export.
Sections (middle)	Your song: a list of sections, each with its own chord tiles.
Chord panel (right)	Chords in your key, drum fills, and next-chord ideas.
Timeline (bottom)	The song's structure and chords. Show tracks opens every instrument's notes and the mixer.
Status bar	Song length and messages, plus the About button and the Sound output.

3. Writing chords

Each chord is a **tile**. A tile's width shows how long the chord plays. The small numbers show where the chord starts (`3` means bar 3, `3.3` means bar 3, beat 3) and how long it lasts.

Typing

- Click a tile and just start typing. Press `Enter` to confirm, `Tab` to move to the next tile, `Shift`+`Tab` to go back, and `Esc` to cancel.
- Type into the **+** tile to add chords. Keep pressing `Tab` to keep adding.
- Type two chords into one tile, like `F G`, to split it between them.
- Mao Midi understands most chord names: `C`, `Am`, `F#m7`, `Bbmaj7`, `G7sus4`, `D9`, `Cdim`, `Eaug`, `C6`, and slash chords like `C/E` or `Bb/D`. Type `N.C.` for no chord. If it doesn't recognise a name, the tile turns red.

Dragging

- The right-hand panel lists the chords in your **key**. Pick the key yourself or click **Detect** to work it out from your chords.
- Drag a chord onto a tile to replace it, or onto **+** to add it. Hold `Ctrl` as you drop to split the tile, or `Shift` to insert the chord before it.
- **Hold the mouse button down** on any chord or tile to hear it.
- Select a tile and **Next chord ideas** suggests chords that could follow it. Click one to add it.

Changing length and order

- Drag a tile's **right edge** to make it longer or shorter, in whole beats. The chords after it move along.
- Drag a tile to move it somewhere else.
- Right-click a tile to edit it, split it in half, duplicate it or delete it. You can also select it and press `Delete`.

> While the song plays, the chord being heard fills with colour from left to right.

4. Sections and energy

A song is built from **sections**, such as Intro, Verse, Chorus, Bridge and Outro. Click **+ Add section** to add one. Each section has:

Setting	What it does
Section	Its name. Pick one from the list or type your own.

Energy	How hard the band plays: **Soft**: sparse and quiet, good for intros and breakdowns. **Normal**: the main groove. **Big**: drums and bass step up, the pad comes in, the keys stay as Normal. **Max**: everything at full: busier keys, crash cymbals and the most volume.
Play	How many times the section repeats (×1 to ×8).
Style	Normally "Song style". Choose another style to change the feel for just this section.

The buttons on each section play from that section (▶), move it up or down (↑ ↓), duplicate it (⧉) or delete it (✕).

Moving where sections start and end

The coloured blocks on the timeline's **Sections** row show where each section starts and ends. To move one, point at the edge between two blocks until the pointer becomes ↔, then drag it left or right. A blue line and a label such as "+2 bars" show where it will go. When you let go, the bars, with their chords, drum fills and imported notes, move into the other section. This works on the main timeline and in the Tracks and mixer window.

Right-click a section on the Sections row for more:

- **Change … to** renames it, for example when Mao Midi called a Chorus a Bridge.
- **Energy** sets how hard the band plays in it.
- **Add a section marker at bar…** starts a new section at the bar you clicked. Pick its name from the list.
- **Remove the … marker** joins the section to the one before it. **Join with the … after it** joins it to the next one.
- A section that plays more than once (×2 or more) is written out as separate sections the first time you move one of its edges. The music doesn't change, and you can then move each one on its own.

> This is the quickest way to fix an imported song whose sections Mao Midi guessed wrong. There's no Undo yet, but you can always drag an edge back.

5. Styles

Choose a **Genre**, then a **Variation**. There are 20 genres: Pop, Rock, Ballad, Folk & Acoustic, Funk, R&B & Soul, Hip-Hop, Disco & Dance, Jazz, Blues, Gospel, Bossa Nova, Latin, Reggae, Country, Electronic, Hard Rock & Metal, Punk & Ska, Cinematic and Game Music. Hover over a variation to read about it. Picking one also sets its natural tempo.

Time signature

- **4/4** is the usual: 200 styles.
- **3/4** has 24 waltz styles. Two chords in one bar split the bar 2 + 1 beats.
- **6/8** has 26 styles, including ballads, jigs, shanties, slow blues and Afro-Cuban grooves. Here the tempo counts dotted quarter notes.

The whole song uses one time signature, and the style lists only show styles written for it.

Tempo and key

Drag the **Tempo** slider to change the speed. **Transpose** − / + moves the whole song up or down a semitone at a time.

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6. Drum fills and endings

Mao Midi never adds fills by itself, so you decide exactly where they go. Under **Drum fills** in the right-hand panel:

- Drag **1 beat**, **2 beats** or **Full bar** onto a tile. The fill plays at the end of that bar, and a crash cymbal follows it.
- Drag **Ending** onto the last tile for a final hit that lets the chord ring.
- An orange marker shows where each fill sits. To take one off, right-click the tile and choose **Remove fill / ending**.

In 6/8, the fills come in Half bar and Full bar lengths.

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7. Playing and practising

- `Space` plays and stops. Anything you change is heard straight away, even while the song plays.
- ⏮ goes back to the start. Click anywhere on the timeline to move the red playhead there.
- **Loop** plays the song round and round.
- **Follow** scrolls the section being played to the top of the screen and outlines it in blue, so you always know where you are when playing along.
- The part switches (**Drums, Bass, Keys, Pad, Melody**) turn whole instruments on or off. For example, untick Keys if you're the keyboard player.

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8. Tracks and the mixer

Click **Show tracks** under the sections to see every instrument's notes, piano-roll style. Hold `Ctrl` and use the mouse wheel to zoom.

Mute, Solo and Focus

Button	What it does
M, Mute	Silences that instrument.
S, Solo	Plays only the soloed instruments. You can solo more than one.
F, Focus	Makes everything else 30% quieter, so one part stands out. Great for learning a part.

They work while playing, and WAV export uses them. Mute beats Solo. They aren't saved with the song.

The Tracks and mixer window

Click ⤢ **Tracks and mixer** next to Show tracks, or press `Ctrl` + `M`, to open a full-size window with every track at the top and a mixing desk underneath.

- The tracks fill the screen, and the whole song fits across it. **Fit song** does this again after you zoom. Click a track to move the playhead there, and press `Space` to play or stop.
- Each instrument has a **fader**. Drag it to set that instrument's level. 0 dB is normal, the top is +4 dB, and the bottom is Off. Double-click a fader to put it back to 0 dB, or use the mouse wheel over it for fine steps.
- **Master** turns everything up or down together.
- The button under each track's name shows its **instrument**. Click it to choose another, from 128 General MIDI sounds grouped by family, or a different drum kit for Drums. Choose *The style's own sound* (or *The imported track's own sound*) to go back. Your choice is used everywhere: playback, WAV and MIDI export, and it's saved with the song.
- The **meters** show how loud each instrument is playing as the song plays.
- **M**, **S** and **F** are here too, and they stay in step with the main window. Muted or silenced tracks fade on the screen.
- Each track's name has **Imported / Generated** (on tracks with imported notes) and ↻ **Pattern**, which work just like the ones on the main timeline. Right-click ↻ Pattern to pick a pattern from a list.
- Drag section edges on the Sections row, or right-click it to split or join sections.
- **Reset levels** puts every fader back to 0 dB.

The fader levels are saved with the song and used for playback and WAV export. MIDI export and Drag to DAW leave levels to your DAW. Close the window, or press `Esc`, to go back.

A different part for one instrument

- ↻ next to an instrument gives just that part a new pattern, taken from the other variations in the same genre. For example, you can try a different bass line under the same drums. Click it again to keep trying. Right-click it to choose from a list or go back to the song's style.

9. Importing MIDI

Got a MIDI file of a song, a bass line or a drum groove? Mao Midi can work out its chords and build a backing around it.

A whole file

1. Click **Import MIDI...**, or drag a `.mid` file onto the window.
2. The import screen lists every track with its instrument and a guess at what it is: Drums, Bass, Keys, Pad, Melody, *Own instrument*, *Chords only* (used to find the chords but not played) or *Leave out*. Change any guess, and press ▶ to hear a track on its own.
3. Click **Import all tracks** to play every track in the file. The first bass, keys, pad and melody keep their places, and every other track (strings, brass, a second guitar...) becomes an *Own instrument* with its own sound and its own lane, fader and M/S/F. Up to 9 tracks can have their own instrument.
4. If the song starts with a pickup before bar 1, use ◀ ▶ to line the music up with the bar lines.
5. If the file has drums, Mao Midi suggests the closest-matching styles. Pick one and click **Import**.

Mao Midi reads the tempo and time signature, finds the key and chords, and splits the song into sections. It uses the file's markers if there are any. If not, it works out the Intro, Verse, Chorus, Bridge and Outro from repeated chords, and sets each section's energy from how busy it is. If it gets them wrong, drag the section edges on the timeline to fix them (see Moving where sections start and end).

Your tracks play **exactly as recorded**, and Mao Midi generates the instruments you don't have. These generated parts also fit around yours: the bass locks to your kick drum, the keys and pad keep out of your melody's way, and the band swings if your drums swing.

Checking the chords

A chord Mao Midi isn't sure about gets an orange **?**. Hold the tile to hear it, and if it's wrong, type the right chord. That clears the mark.

Your notes follow your chords. When you change a chord, the imported notes under it (except drums) move to fit the new chord. For example, change C to Am and the E becomes a C. Change it back and they return. To turn this off, right-click any chord tile and untick **Imported notes follow chord changes**.

One track onto one instrument

Click **Show tracks** and drop a MIDI file onto an instrument's lane. It replaces that instrument from the bar where you drop it, and the rest of the song stays as it was. If the file has several tracks, Mao Midi asks which one to use.

- Click **Imported / Generated** on a lane to compare your part with Mao Midi's own. Your notes are kept either way.
- Right-click a lane's name to remove imported notes.

- The **Melody** lane only plays notes you import.

> Try the files in the **Example MIDI** folder. It's in the Start menu if you used the installer, or next to MaoMidi.exe in the portable version.

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10. Pasting a chord sheet

You can make a song from a chord sheet copied from a website or songbook, with chords written over the words and headers such as `[Verse 1]` or `Chorus:`.

1. Copy the chord sheet.
2. In Mao Midi, click **Paste chords...** at the top, or press `Ctrl` + `V` on the main screen.
3. The sheet appears on the left and the song Mao Midi found appears on the right. You can edit the text, and the song updates as you type.
4. Give the song a title and click **Import**.

- Headers become sections. Verse 1, Verse 2 and so on all become Verse, and choruses start at Big energy.
- A line with only chords on it is a chord line, and each chord comes in where it's written over the words. Chords inside the words, like `[Am]words [F]more words`, work too.
- Only the chords are kept. The words are left out.

How long each chord lasts: a chord sheet doesn't say, so Mao Midi guesses. Each line of words gets 2 bars if it has one or two chords, or 4 bars if it has more, and its chords are spread over them by where they sit. You can choose 1, 2, 4 or 8 **bars per line** instead. Afterwards, drag a tile's edge to make a chord longer or shorter, and drag or right-click the section markers on the timeline to fix the sections.

Set the tempo and style as usual. Choose the time signature in the paste window if the song isn't in 4/4.

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11. Making your own styles

Like how a song sounds? Turn it into a style and use it on any other song.

1. Set up the song, either imported or generated, and click **Make a style...** next to Variation.
2. Give it a name and tick the instruments to learn. The rest come from the current style.
3. Check the patterns it learned and click **Save style**. Tick **Use it for this song now** to switch to it straight away.

Your styles appear under **Genre ▸ My styles**. Bass lines are learned relative to the chords, so they follow whatever chords you write. When you save a song, the styles it uses are stored inside the song file, so it sounds the same on a friend's computer.

To delete one of your styles, select it and right-click the Variation box.

12. Saving and exporting

To…	Do this
Save your song	**Save…** makes a `.maomidi` file. Double-click it later to open it in Mao Midi.
Share a backing track	**Export** ▾ → **WAV audio, to share…** saves CD-quality audio of exactly what you hear, set to a good level for sharing. It respects the part switches, the mixer levels, and Mute, Solo and Focus. For example, untick Melody or mute your instrument for a play-along track.
Continue in your DAW	**Export** ▾ → **MIDI file…** saves one file with a track per instrument. **MIDI, one file per instrument…** saves separate files. You can also hold the mouse on **Drag to DAW** and drag straight into your DAW or a folder.

> There's no undo yet in this beta, so save before big changes.

13. Sound and MIDI output

Mao Midi uses its own built-in synth (the GeneralUser GS sounds played by FluidSynth), so you don't need anything else. Under **Sound** at the bottom right, you can choose any other MIDI output instead, such as the Windows GS Wavetable Synth, a hardware synth, or a virtual MIDI cable into your DAW.

The MIDI channels are: drums 10, bass 2, keys 3, pad 4 and melody 7.

14. Keyboard shortcuts

Key	Does
`Space`	Play / stop
`F1`	Open this manual
`Ctrl` + `M`	Open the Tracks and mixer window
`Ctrl` + `V`	Paste a chord sheet you've copied

Start typing, `Enter` or `F2`	Edit the selected chord
`Enter`	Confirm the chord
`Tab` / `Shift` + `Tab`	Confirm and move to the next / previous tile
`Esc`	Cancel editing
`←` `→`	Move between tiles
`Delete`	Remove the selected chord
`Ctrl` + mouse wheel	Zoom the timeline
`Ctrl` / `Shift` while dropping a chord	Split the tile / insert before it

15. Troubleshooting

"Windows protected your PC" when installing

Click **More info**, then **Run anyway**. Mao Midi isn't digitally signed yet, so Windows doesn't recognise it.

No sound

Check that **Sound** (bottom right) is set to Mao Midi Synth, that the part switches are ticked, and that nothing is muted or soloed in Show tracks. Also check Windows' volume and output device.

Wrong chords after importing

Look for the orange **?** marks first. Hold a tile to hear it, then retype it. MIDI files with only one or two instruments give Mao Midi less to go on.

The music doesn't line up with the bars

Import the file again and use ◀ ▶ on the import screen to move it until the first downbeat lands on bar 1.

Where are my styles?

In `%APPDATA%\Mao Midi\Styles`. Uninstalling Mao Midi keeps them.

Something else?

This is a beta, and feedback is very welcome at nickmao.co.uk/maomidi.

Mao Midi 0.9 beta · Sounds: GeneralUser GS by S. Christian Collins · Synth: FluidSynth (LGPL 2.1) · MIDI: DryWetMIDI (MIT)