sYnCHAoZ' Skale Tracker Drumming Tutorial

Source : http://www.synchaoz.com/music/tutorial/sYnCHAoZ%27%20Skale%20Tracker%20Drumming%20Tutorial.html

Introduction

The goal of this tutorial is to teach you the basic mechanics and workings of Skale Tracker and also give you insight in the dynamic power that a good tracker holds - and ultimately of corse, teach you how to make your own semi-realisticly sounding drumtracks.

First of all you should know a little background on what Skale Tracker actually is. If you don't know what a tracker is, you can check it out on the official Skale Tracker homepage.

A 'tracker' is a music application that utilizes regular samples (.wav files) to construct and assemble musical compositions with amazing precision and control. Unlike a sequencer the trackers don't have regular tracks in which you can copy/paste samples of pre-made beats. Trackers use so called 'patterns' which technically is the same as a 'track' within other audio apps.
What makes trackers stand out however is the amazing diversity and flexibility it offers - a skilled tracker has 100% control of each single sound, note and beat within his song, even down to the tiniest echo-effect, fading, panning - you name it. This however also means that music creation with a tracker can be a very long and straineous process. Since everything is done manually, it can quickly become tedious and one needs to stay focused to maintain overview of what is going on where and when within a very limited interface that does not allow you to actively monitor most of what is currently happening. Tracking requires patience, overview and willpower. If however you manage to overcome and master these traits, you will then find that you have one of *the* most powerful music-creation tools available ever to be created - unequaled control and flexibility beyond anything even the best sequencer can ever provide.

Skale Tracker is but one of these trackers, and indeed a very good and advanced tracker at that. In actuality Skale Tracker is Fast Tracker 3 - the build-up of one of the, arguably, best and most well-known trackers of all time - Fast Tracker II by *Fredrik Huss* and *Magnus Högdahl* of the now known company *Starbreeze* (now full-blown PC game developer). I'm not going to go into detail about Starbreeze or the creators of Fast Tracker II, however I can provide you with a link to their official Starbreeze homepage where you can read up on them.

When the Fast Tracker II development was eventually abandoned (due to the developers not being able to spare the free time since the financial donations were insufficient), they released the source code for FT2. A skilled spanish programmer, *Ruben Ramos 'Baktery' Salvador*, took it upon himself to study the FT2 source code and build a new and improved version, entitled Fast Tracker 3, which would be based on the Windows platform instead of DOS, like the old FT2 was.

Starbreeze soon found out that Salvador was bringing life back into the old FT2 project (and I'm sure they were very proud to see their legacy being brought back to life), but due to some copyright infringement they could not allow him to use the name "Fast Tracker 3", upon which Salvador changed the project name to *Skale Tracker* which is now currently in BETA 0.81 - certain features within the program are still either missing or temporarily disabled, despite that although the program is extremely functional and chances are you won't even notice wich features aren't working yet.

With a little historical and technical background you should now have an idea of the concept of what Skale Tracker is. Now it's time to experience the raw power first hand and learn how to use this little wonder for yourself.

Getting started.

The first thing you need to do is get yourself a copy of Skale Tracker. You can download the latest version (0.81) HERE - and don't worry, the program is 100% freeware (thanks Salvador, you rock!). Skale Tracker runs on both Windows 9x/2k/XP and under Linux.

Next you will download the 'synchaoz drum tutorial package' (sdtp_v1.zip), it holds the instruments which we will be using in this tutorial. You can find it HERE. It is compressed in ZIP format, and will require an unpacker which supports the ZIP format. The official ZIP packer/unpacker 'WinZIP' can be found at www.winzip.com as a shareware version. Among other excellent programs that support ZIP files are *WinACE* and *WinRAR*.

Now that you have the latest Skale Tracker and the drum tutorial package you will need to install them on your harddrive. First unpack Skale Tracker to a directory of your own choice, eg. "C:\Music Programs\Skale Tracker\". Next you must unpack the 'synchaoz drum tutorial package' (sdtp_v1.zip) to a folder of your own choice. I would suggest unpacking it into a subfolder within your Skale Tracker directory, eg. "C:\Music Programs\Skale Tracker\Instruments\".

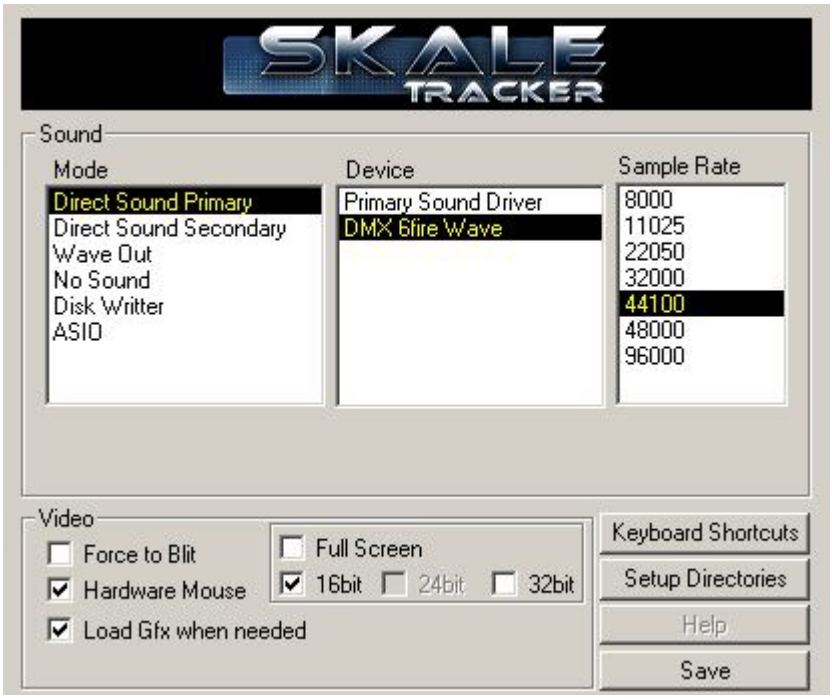
You should now have everything installed and ready to go. Almost...

Setting up the beast.

Before we can start the tutorial, you will need to setup Skale Tracker correctly. Follow these steps closely:

1. Go to the folder where you installed Skale Tracker.

2. Run the file "ConfigSkale.exe". An options window should appear with 3 small white boxes and some buttons.



3. In the "Mode" window there should be a list of available sound modes which your

computer is configured with. You should mark either "Direct Sound Primary" or "Wave Out" by clicking on it. It should then highlight.

4. In the "Device" window you should see a list of all the available and correctly installed sound cards in your computer. Highlight the desired card you wish to use with Skale Tracker.

5. In the "Sample Rate" window you will see several different sampling rate frequencies (depending on your soundcard's capabilities). I suggest highlighting "44100" which corresponds to CD quality and is the most common 16bit sound sample rate used by most audio applications.

6. In the "Video" section you can choose a couple of options on how you wish Skale Tracker's graphical interface to be shown. I suggest that you mark the "Hardware Mouse" and "Load Gfx when needed" boxes and make sure that the "Full Screen" button is NOT activated. We will be running Skale Tracker in windowed mode for this tutorial so you can read the lessons while having Skale Tracker running. However the choices are yours, and you should select what suits you best.

7. In the lower right corner you will see 4 different buttons. These are used to manually configure the keyboard layout and the default directories which Skale Tracker will utilize for loading songs, instruments, samples and so on. The first thing we need to do is reset all of the keyboard mappings back to Skale Tracker default. Do this simply by clicking the "Keyboard Shortcuts" button, and then click the "Reset all Keys" button in the new window that appears, then click "OK". Next we will setup the default folders. To do this we will first need to create some directories on the harddrive which will be used to store instruments and songs. I suggest that you create at least 4 folders within your Skale Tracker directory. They are as follows:

\Skale Tracker\Songs\ - The songs folder will be used for saving your songs in.
\Skale Tracker\Instruments\ - The instruments folder will be used to save Skale Tracker instruments (.ski files) in.
\Skale Tracker\Samples\ - The samples folder will be used to save Wave samples into (.wav files)
\Skale Tracker\Unsorted samples\ And the Unsorted samples is a good addition for putting in all your untested instruments and samples downloaded from the internet.
Of corse these are just suggestions. Do as you will.

8. Now click the "Setup Directories" button and a new window appears. We only need to setup the top 3 directories for Module, Instrument and Sample.

9. Click the "Module" button and browse to the folder you just created in your Skale Tracker directory, eg. "C:\Music Programs\Skale Tracker\Songs\", then hit "OK". Do the same with the Instrument and Sample button, pointing to their respective folders.

10. Click "OK", click "Save".
HINT: For power-users who are familiar with various configuration procedures, you can manually configure all these things in the "Skale.cfg" file which will be created after running the config utility. However this should only be done if you are sure that you know exactly what you are doing!

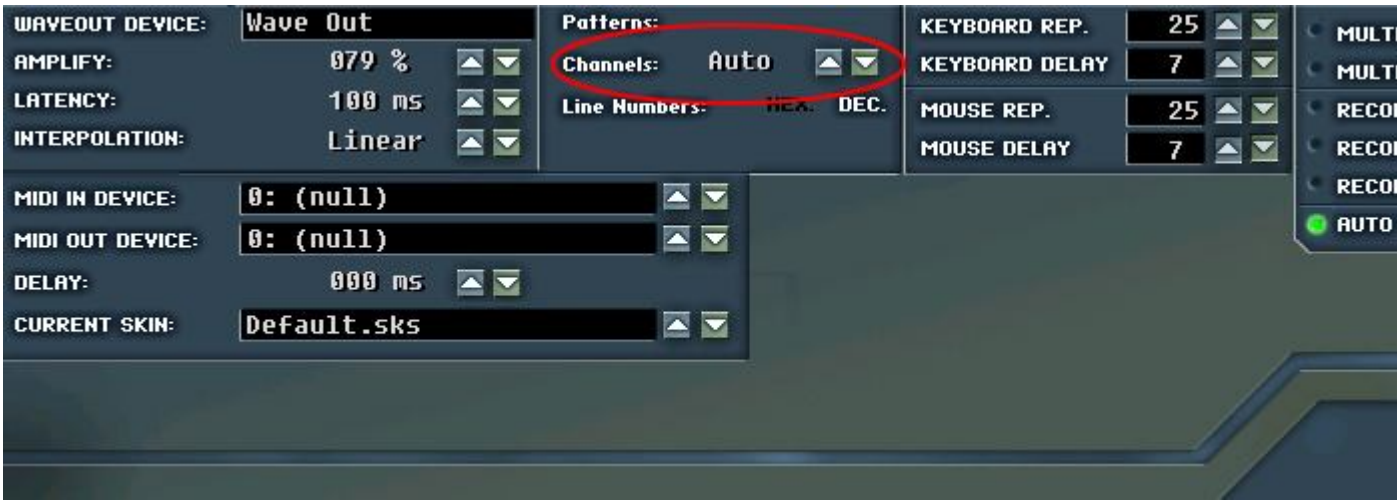
We're almost done now, just a few more steps.

11. Start Skale Tracker by clicking the "Skale.exe" file, and Skale Tracker should start up for the first time. A small notice pops up telling you that the program is still in beta. We've already covered all this, so just click "OK". You are now looking at the Skale Tracker interface.

12. In the middle section of the top part of the program there are two rows of buttons that give access to various parts of the program's features and elements - this is our General Options panel.

In the second row, button number 4 from the bottom up is called "Config". Click it. A new screen appears in the top, where you can see some of the options that we configured beforehand. There are also a few new options that we did not see in the config tool.

13. In the middle section there is a box labeled "Patterns:", underneath that it says "Channels: Auto" and two 'arrow' buttons to the right. Click the 'down' arrow and you will see some changes in the tracks below. Keep clicking untill it says "Channels: 08". Then click "Save" and "Exit".



Congratulations! You've succesfully setup Skale Tracker and you should now be ready to start tracking!

sYnCHAoZ' Skale Tracker Drumming Tutorial

Lesson 1 - The basics

Starting Skale Tracker

First things first we need to learn how to load and organize our instruments into Skale Tracker. In the upper right part of the Skale Tracker interface you will see your *instrument banks*. Each line is one *instrument bank*, capable of holding either a Skale Tracker instrument (.ski file), a Fast Tracker II instrument (.xi file) or a Wave sample (.wav file). You will notice that you can only view 8 *instrument banks* at any given time, however pressing the "A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H" buttons will switch to a new *instrument cluster* of 8 additional *instrument banks* respectively. Furthermore you can switch the entire *instrument container* by pressing the "Swap Bank 00-7F/80-FF" button, which will give you an additional 8x8 *instrument banks*, adding up to a total of 128 independant *instrument banks* each capable of holding 1 instrument or sample of infinite size and quality.

KNOWLEDGE: Skale has an advanced feature that allows for multi-instruments, which are instruments capable of holding 16 different other instruments within, filling only 1 instrument bank, thus technically allowing for a total ammount of samples: 16x8x16 totalling to an astounding 2048 samples. Creating and managing such multi-instruments will however not be covered in this tutorial.

You should now have a basic understanding of how the instrument banks work, so now we will load our tutorial instruments. Follow each step closely.

1. Click the "Disk Options" button in the *General Options* menu.

2. On the far left side in the "Items to load" menu, highlight the "Instrument" button (a small 'bulb' lights up when you have selected it correctly).
NOTE: Since we have already defined our default instrument folder and extracted the tutorial drum package files into that directory, you should already see the 8 instrument files in the browser window.

3. Highlight the first *instrument bank* 01 in our *instrument cluster* on the right side, and then click the file named "tKick.ski". You have now loaded the kickdrum sample, and the name should be displayed in *instrument bank* 01 as "tut Kickdrum".

4. Next we will do the same procedure for the remaning 7 instruments, assigning them to each their own *instrument bank*. Highlight *instrument bank* 02 and click the file "tSnare.ski", loading the Tut Snaredrum into bank 02. Proceed with loading all of the other instruments into the remaining 6 empty banks in the following order:

Bank 03: Tut Crash Cymbal L (tCrashL.ski)
Bank 04: Tut Hihat Open (tHihaO.ski)
Bank 05: Tut Crash Cymbal R (tCrashR.ski)
Bank 06: Tut Ride Cymbal (tRidecym.ski)
Bank 07: Tut Splash Cymbal (tSplash.ski)
Bank 08: Tut Hihat Closed (tHihatC.ski)

When finished, your *instrument cluster* should look like this.

WARNING: If you highlight an instrument bank and load a sample, and then afterwards load a different sample into the same bank, the previous instrument will be overwritten without notice!
HINT: You should always load instruments in the respective usage priority. If you know that you will be using the kickdrum and snaredrum very often throughout your song, you should load them in banks right next to each other in the same cluster. This makes it easier and faster to select them for usage.

Congratulations, you have now mastered loading instruments into the instrument banks.
End of Lesson 1. Continue to Lesson 2.

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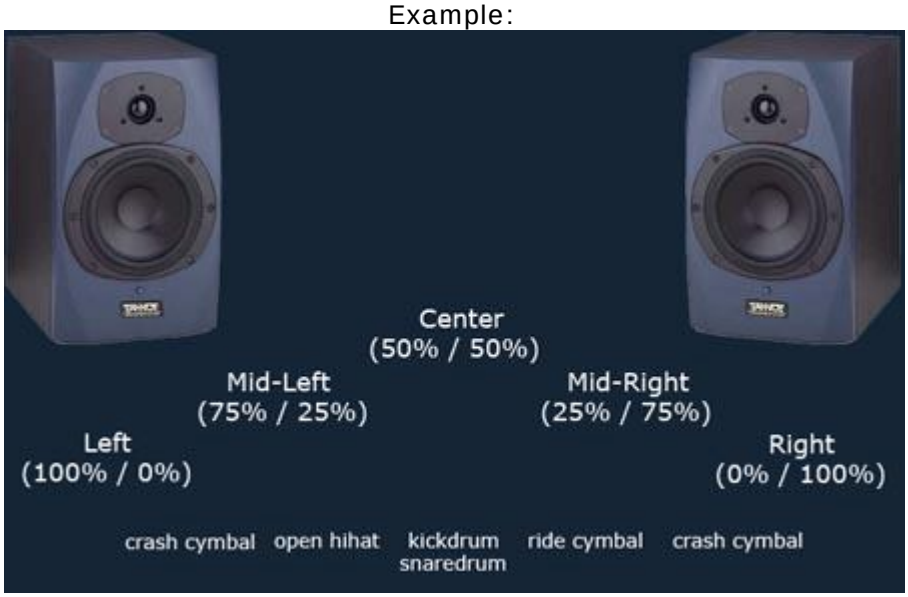
Lesson 2 - Basic instrument management

Now that we know how to load and organize our instruments it is time to learn how to customize and manage them.

Skale Tracker has a built in *wave editor* and an advanced *instrument editor* with which you can shape and mold your instruments and even add some basic effects.

Typically drums don't need much editing from within Skale Tracker. There are however a few basic mastering tips and tricks for crash cymbals and the likes that we will apply to make our drumtrack sound more convincing. The most basic trick here is to place certain elements within the drumset in different sound channels. The kickdrum and snaredrum should always be in center channel, with equal volume in the Left and Right channel. The Hihat should be slightly more powerful in either the left or right channel, and the Ride Cymbal likewise, but opposite of the Hihat.

Example:



As you can see, the Kickdrum and Snaredrum is in dead center of the stereo mix, while the Hihat is slightly more in the Left channel, and the Ride Cymbal is slightly more in the Right channel. The Crash Cymbals are almost in the outmost Left and Right channels. Tomdrums usually span from the Left channel, to center to Right channel, giving them a stereo-pan effect when played in succession. Splash cymbals can be placed variously, depending on how many you wish to use.

We will now edit some of the instruments to fit the stereo mix better, as per displayed above. Follow these steps closely.

1. Select the "Tut Crash Cymbal L" in the *instrument bank* 03 by highlighting it.

2. In the *General Options* click the button "Instr. Edit" and a new window appears in the bottom half of the interface.

This is the instrument edit section where you can edit your instruments and apply various cool stuff. We will not cover this section in this tutorial, since it is a bit advanced and would require an entire chapter of its own.

3. On the top right side of the *instrument editor* you will see some sliders that can be moved around. We will only be modifying the "Panning" value which is defaulted to 80, which equals Center (50% left channel, 50% right channel). Since we don't want our Crash Cymbal to be in the center of our stereo mix, we are going to slide the ruler to the left side, untill it reaches the value of 40, placing the Crash Cymbal in the mid-left channel (75% left channel, 25% right channel).

NOTE: Advanced users can define these values in the effects string of the track itself, enabling you to pan the instrument in a full stereo mix spectrum from channel to channel instantly without editing the instrument file itself, giving you 100% control of the placement and panning of the sound. This will not be covered in this tutorial.

4. Now that we have edited our first Crash Cymbal to be in the mid-left channel (with the hex value 40), we will do the same with the "Tut Crash Cymbal R" only opposite of the first, meaning that you should highlight the *instrument bank* 05 containing the afore mentioned instrument, go to the "Instr. Edit" section, and set the "Panning" value to D0, which equals to the mid-right channel (25% left channel, 75% right channel).

5. Now highlight your Open Hihat instrument "Tut Hihat Open", again go to the

instrument editor, and set the Panning value to 60, which equals half-mid-left channel (60% left channel, 40% right channel). Do the same with the "Tut Ride Cymbal" only opposite, setting its panning value to B0 (40% left channel, 60% right channel). We will not modify the Splash cymbal, thus leaving it in the center channel (50/50) like the Kickdrum, Snaredrum and Closed Hihat.

You now know the basic setup of the key elements within a drum mix, and you even know how to pan them into the right settings using the *instrument editor* section. Time to move on to Lesson 3.

sYnCHAoZ' Skale Tracker Drumming Tutorial
Lesson 3 - Tracking

We have our instruments loaded, organized and edited to suit our drumtrack, and now comes the big step - start tracking.

Make sure that no buttons in the *General Options* menu is activated, and that your assembly tracks (patterns) are visible. You will see that you have 8 different channels visible currently, ranging from channel 0 to 7. Each of these *tracks* function as an independant stereo channel which are all played simultaneously. You can add up to a maximum of 64 of these tracks. Each track has several different elements, they are as follows:

1 - The first string is the *track position string*, showing the 'ticks' in the track rhythm. KNOWLEDGE: A 'tick' in a rhythm is the number of notes that are present. In a 4/4 rhythm there are a total of 64 ticks, however if the rhythm is counted in 4th notes, there is only 4 of the 64 ticks in the rhythm that are counted as 'valid', these are tick 00, tick 16, tick 32 and tick 48 - which in terms means that only 4 of those 64 ticks are played. If the rhythm is counted in 8th, there are 8 of the 64 ticks that are counted, they are tick 00, tick 08, tick 16, tick 24, tick 32, tick 40, tick 48 and tick 56. Next comes a 16th rhythm, then 32th rhythm and finaly a 64th rhythm, where all of the 64 ticks are counted as active, which means that if it was played on a guitar, you would have to hit the string 64 times within the speed of a 4/4 rhythm, which is almost humanly impossible.

2 - The second string is the *instrument string* where you place each instrument-note to be played.

3 - The third string is the *instrument bank number*. Whenever you type in an instrument in the *instrument string*, the *bank string* will automatically apply the number corresponding to the instrument used. You can manually edit this string and point it to another *instrument bank*, upon which that instrument will be played instead.

4 - The fourth string is the *volume string* where you can manually type in the volume (from 01 to FF) at which the instrument is played in that particular line. But you must note that typing in a volume value in this string, only applies the volume change while the line is active, after which the volume changes back to default volume unless you apply another volume value immediately after.
NOTE: When working with the *volume string*, the value 00 equals to non-active, meaning that there will be no volume change, and the instrument will simply play at its default

volume.
HINT: Advanced users can also define volume values in the *effects string*, with the command C00-CFF, where C00 equals to complete mute, the instrument will not play at all, and CFF is the maximum volume defined by the Mixer section of the respective instrument. This will not be covered in this tutorial.

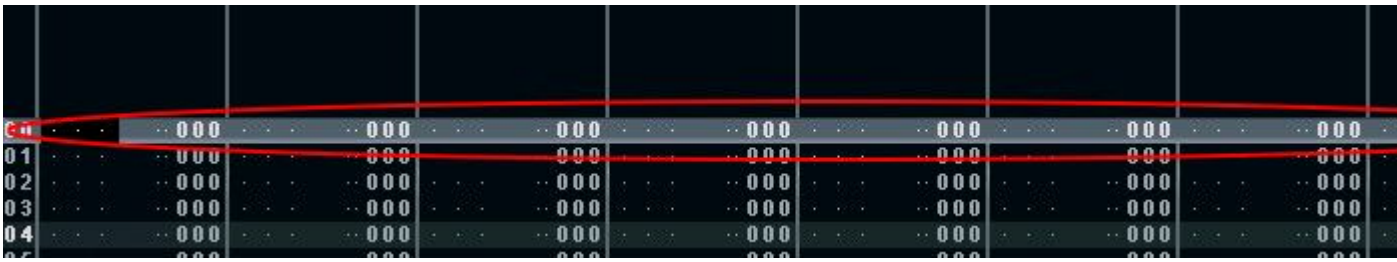
5 - The fifth and last string is the *effects string*, in which you can really utilize some of Skale Trackers powerfeatures. We will be using this string only very little, and I will certainly not cover all of the advanced values and possibilities this string holds.

I'm sure that you by now are pretty eager about getting started with actually making some drumbeats, there are still a few very important things that needs to be covered, but we can do this as we go. So with no further delay, let's start tracking!

We will now create a basic and simple 4/4 drum rhythm with bassdrum, snaredrum, two crash cymbals and open hihat. Follow these steps closely.

1. Select the Tut kickdrum in bank 01.

2. Take a look at track 0. You will notice that there is a bright greyish line all across the tracks on track position string 00. This is your *edit- and playbackline*, with which you edit the tracks. When you start playing a song, the tracks will begin rolling downwards, and each time an instrument note passes the *playback line* it is played. Try clicking the "Play song" button in the *General Options*.
HINT: Play Pattern and Play Song buttons are also by default bound to the ALT GR and the right CTRL keys respectively.

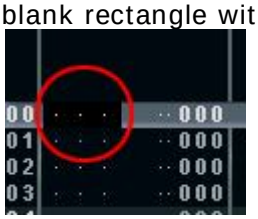


As you can see the pattern starts moving, and the *edit- and playbackline* remains stationary in the middle. This line will always remain at its current position, only the track itself moves. There is of corse no sound since we have not yet tracked anything into the pattern. We will do this in just a minute. Stay with me a little longer, just a few more things.

3. Stop the song by pressing the "Stop" button in *General Options*. If you are now somewhere in the middle of the pattern, which you most likely are, you need to scroll back to the beginning of the pattern (track position string 00). Now is a good time to learn how to navigate in your track. To move up and down in the track you can use the key arrows on your keyboard. Try pressing the UP and DOWN key, and you will see that the track moves one step each time you press the key. You can also use the Page Up and Page Down to make large jumps of 16 lines, and the HOME and END keys will instantly bring you to the begging and end of the track respectively. Press HOME now to return to line position 00.

4. You now need to learn how to move your *Edit Marker* around. Your *Edit Marker* is the

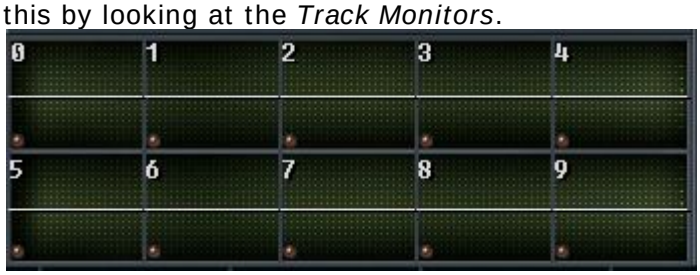
blank rectangle within the *Edit Line*.



It is with this rectangle that you type your instrument notes into the track itself. You can move it up and down with the keys we covered in step #3. However up untill now now it has only been positioned in track 0, you can move it sideways by pressing the LEFT and RIGHT keys on your keyboard. Try pressing the RIGHT key now. You will notice how it moves to the right and becomes smaller. It is now positioned in the first part of the *Instrument Bank String*.
Press the RIGHT key again twice, and it will move into the *Volume String*. Press it twice once more, and it will be in the first of the three *Effect Strings*. Now press three times more, and it will have moved to the next track, resting in the *Instrument String* of track 1. If you press the TAB key, it will jump directly into the *Instrument String* of channel 2. Press tab again and you will be in the *Instrument String* of track 3, and so forth.

5. Move your *Edit Marker* back to the *Instrument String* of channel 0. The easiest way of doing this is to press TAB. If you accidently TAB it too far, just TAB it again untill you are in the right track or you can tab it backwards by holding the SHIFT key while pressing TAB.

6. Notice that you currently have 10 tracks open (counting from 0 to 9). You can see this by looking at the *Track Monitors*.



We do not wish to have 10 channels open for our drumtrack, so we will now remove 2 of them by clicking the "Remove" button in the bottom left of the *General Options*. You will see channel 8 and 9 disapearing from the *Track Monitor*. These two buttons "Add CHN." and "Remove" are used to either add or subtract active tracks from your project. Try clicking the "Add CHN." as many times as possible, and notice how the ammount of tracks increass up to a maximum of 64 (counting 0 to 63). You can, if you so wish, use all of these 64 tracks simultaneously as you see fit. But for our tutorial, 8 channels will suffice. Remove the tracks untill you have only 8 active left (counting from 0 to 7).

7. Now begins the fun. Make sure that your *Edit Marker* is in the *Instrument String* of channel 0, and that you have the kickdrum instrument highlighted in bank 01. Now press the key "Q" on your keyboard, and you will hear the instrument play.
KNOWLEDGE: Most instruments have their natural pitch of sound defaulted to the key "Q" on the keyboard. When creating drumtracks, you will usually want the drumsounds to play in their natural pitch at which they were originally recorded.

Nothing happens other than the instrument plays in your speakers. This is because we have not yet activated the *Record Mode*. We will now activate the *Record Mode* and start tracking our kickdrum.

8. Press the SPACE button on your keyboard and notice how the top and bottom edges of the entire Skale Tracker interface changes to a red color. This now means that *Record Mode* is active, and everytime you press an active key on the keyboard, it is recorded into the current active track.

9. With *Record Mode* active, press the Q key. Notice how the *Instrument String* in track 0 on line position 00 now changed into

00C-501--000

This shows that C-5 is the accord which has been programmed into that track, and the "01" indicates that it is the instrument in bank 01.

10. With *Record Mode* still active, scroll your *Edit Marker* down to line 08 with the DOWN key and press Q again. Now scroll down to line 16 and press Q again, scroll down to line 24, press Q, scroll down to line 32, press Q, scroll down to line 40, press Q, scroll down to line 48, press Q, scroll down to line 56 and press Q for the last time.
NOTE: In case you accidently type in a wrong note, or a note in the wrong line, you can always delete that note by moving your *edit marker* over the note and pressing the "DELETE" key on the keyboard. This will clear the entry on that current line in the current track.
WARNING: When deleting a note, do NOT use the BACKSPACE key to delete an entry in a channel. Pressing BACKSPACE instead of DELETE will delete the current entry, but it will also 'drag' all of the other notes in that track one step upwards, possibly causing serious mayhem in your track, setting the instrument notations slightly out of 'sync' with the others. Only use BACKSPACE if you know what you're doing!

11. Press the Play Song button (right CTRL) and see how the pattern begins moving, playing the kickdrum each time the *Playback Marker* passes the active lines. Also notice how the pattern loops itself and plays again from the beginning everytime it reaches the end of the pattern.

12. Stop the playback. Go to the beginning of the pattern (HOME). Now press TAB once, moving your *Edit Marker* to the *Instrument String* of track 1.
NOTE: Whenever you start a Playback of the song, Record Mode will automatically be disabled.

13. Select the Snaredrum in *instrument bank* 02.

14. Press SPACE to activate *Record Mode*, scroll down to line 04 and press Q. Scroll down to line 12 and press Q, do the same with lines 20, 28, 36, 44, 52 and 60.

15. Play the pattern again and notice how we now have a very simple drum rhythm.

16. Stop playback and go to the start of the pattern again (line 00).

17. Select the Crash Cymbal L instrument in bank 03, go to the beginning of the pattern (line 00, press HOME) and jump to the *Instrument String* of channel 2 (TAB).

18. Activate *Record Mode* and press Q.

19. Again make sure that you are in line 00 by pressing HOME. Select the Crash Cymbal R in *instrument bank* 05 and then jump to the *Instrument String* of track 4 and press Q.

20. Play the pattern. We've now added the left and right channel crash cymbals to the start of the drumtrack. Stop the playback again.

21. Jump back to line 00, select the Hihat Open in *instrument bank* 04 and SHIFT-TAB your way back to track 3 (or use the arrow key LEFT to skip back).

22. Activate *Record Mode* and press Q in line 00, scroll to line 04 and press Q, scroll to line 08 and press Q again, continue doing so in lines 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, 40, 44, 48, 52, 56 and 60.

23. Press Play and check out your new drumtrack!

The final step, and variably the most important, is to save our new drumtrack as a Skale Tracker Song Module (.skm) so that we can load it again some other time and enjoy the horrifying simplicity of it all.

24. Click the "Disk Options" button in our *General Options*.

25. In the "Items to load" menu on the far left side, make sure that you have the "Module" button activated.

26. Use the harddrive browser to browse to your "Songs" folder.

27. In the "Filename" box, left click once and give your drumtrack the filename "Tutorial Drum 1" and then click the "Save" button in the top.
A new window pops up asking you which format you wish to save your song in.

You can chose between Skale Tracker Module (.skm), Windows Audio Wave File (.wav), Fast Tracker II Module (.xm) and Protracker Module (.mod). We will save our song as a Skale Tracker Module (.skm) since this is the native format of Skale Tracker, and also provides the best overall sound- and samplequality. Make sure that "SKM" is active, and then hit the "save" button. Your song is now saved and you can load it again any time you wish!
KNOWLEDGE: When you save your song as a Skale Tracker Module (.skm file), it will save everything currently loaded and applied to the song. This means that all the instruments you have loaded, and all the modifications you have done to them, will be saved in the file itself. You do not need to save and load each instrument manually again at a later point. This however also means that the more, bigger and better quality samples you use in your song will dramatically increase the filesize on your harddrive when it is saved!
HINT: The "Filename" is the name with which the file will be saved on your harddrive. In the "Song Title" box on the right side of the interface you can give your song a title, which will be shown whenever you open the song in Skale Tracker or any other audio program supporting playback of Skale Tracker module files (.skm files).
WARNING: When saving your song you MUST make sure that you have "Module" highlighted in the "Items to load" menu. If you have for example "instrument" selected, it will save only the current highlighted instrument in the instrument bank, thus it will NOT save your song. Should you then exit the program you will lose your entire song with no means of undoing!

Ok, so our drumtrack is a bit boring and perhaps too simple. Well, let's spice it up a bit then. Continue onwards to Lesson 4.

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Lesson 4 - Semi-advanced drumtracking

By now you should have a small simplistic drumtrack. Perhaps a bit too simplistic. But as with all things in life, you must first learn to walk before you can, eh, run.

What we're going to do now is give our drumtrack some basic variation. As previously, follow the steps closely.

1. First of all we will just do a routine test and do a basic module loading procedure. If you still have Skale Tracker running, shut it down by pressing the "Quit Program" button in the *General Options*. You can also simply press the "ESC" button on your keyboard. A small window will pop up saying something like "Gotta go??" with a YES/NO button. Press YES and Skale Tracker will shut down.
HINT: If you do not see the *General Options* becuase you have some other section activated, look for any kind of Exit, Close or Quit button. Pressing this will exit the current section and return you to the *General Options*.

2. Now that Skale Tracker is shut down, start it again by clicking the "Sk@le076w.exe".

3. Once Skale Tracker is back, click "Disk Options", highlight the "Module" in the "Items to load" (although this should already be activated by default after af program restart).

4. Browse to your \Songs\ folder and open your newly created Tutorial Drum 1.skm file. The song will load in a instant, and you are back once more.

Now comes some vital features that are crucial to understand when tracking, so stay sharp.

First thing we will do is spice our drumtrack up a bit. We will make some simple variations in the kickdrum track and add a few more cymbals and such. Follow the steps closely.

1. Select your kickdrum in bank 01 and go to line 00 in track 0.

2. Activate *Record Mode* (SPACE), scroll down to line 14 and add a kickdrum hit by pressing Q.

3. Now scroll down to line 26, press Q, and in line 27 press "M".
This requires an explanation. The reason why we press "M" instead of Q in line 27, is

because we will simulate a dual-bassdrum-kick, as if the drummer hits the kickdrum very quickly in succession. By tracking this in two slightly different tones "Q" and "M", it sounds slightly more realistic than if we were to simply program the kickdrum in the exact same tone and pitch. It is not necesary to do so, but it is one of my small 'tricks' that I often use when creating dual-bassdrum blastbeats, and it works quite well.

4. Scroll down to line 42 and create a kickdrum with "Q", do the same in lines 54 and 62.

5. Now select your Snaredrum in bank 02 and jump to track 1.

6. Scroll your way to line 50 and add a Snaredrum with "Q", do the same in line 58.

7. Select the Crash Cymbal L in bank 03, jump to track 2 and give it a "Q" in line 32.

8. Now select Crash Cymbal R in bank 05 and add it to line 28 in track 4 with the Q key as usual.

9. Finally you must jump back to track 3, scroll to line 28 and delete the Hihat entry on that line by pressing the "DELETE" key on your keyboard. This will clear the entry on that line. Do the same on line 32 just below.
WARNING: Do NOT use the BACKSPACE key to delete an entry in a channel. Pressing BACKSPACE instead of DELETE will delete the current entry, but it will also 'drag' all of the other notes in that track one setp upwards, possibly causing serious mayhem in your track, setting the instrument notations slightly out of 'sync' with the others. Only use BACKSPACE if you know what you're doing!

10. Play the song and check out the new changes. As you can hear, the drumtrack has become more 'alive' and dynamic, simply by adding a few extra beats and strokes on the crash cymbals. Now is the time to expand our drumtrack, and add even more notes.

We will now create a new pattern. Patterns are the buildingblocks of a tracked song that make for variation and advancement in a song. Make sure that the *General Options* section is currently active. Look in the top left corner of the interface. You will see our *pattern-modifier*, which shows and controls the current number of patterns in our song.

Currently there is only 1 pattern, designated "00 00". This is the default pattern that Skale Tracker always creates when it is started.

The left value (marked in red) is the global *pattern-counter*. It shows the current number of the actual pattern of the total number of patterns in the song. If there are 5 patterns in a song, the *pattern-counter* will look like this:

00
01
02
03
04

And so forth. This number, the *pattern-counter*, will always increase by 1 each time a new pattern is added, and likewise decrease each time a pattern is removed. It cannot be manually modified.

The *pattern-number* however (marked in blue, see above picture) are the actual individual patterns themselves, they are the patterns that hold all of our notes and instrument placements. The number of this pattern can be modified by the user as he sees fit. To do so, use the arrow keys in the *pattern-modifier* section

Try clicking the "up" arrow. You will notice that the *pattern-number* changes its number to 01, however *the patter-counter* remains at 00. Also you will surely have noticed that your drumnotes has disapeared from the tracks below. This is becuase we have altered our current pattern to a new number, thus changed into a new fresh pattern. Click the "down" arrow and you will change the pattern back to 00 again where our drumnotes are safely stored. You can likewise add and remove new patterns with the "Insert Pattern" and "Remove Pattern" buttons.
WARNING:When editing a pattern, the changes will be global. This means that if you alter something in pattern 00, those changed will affact ALL current patterns with the number 00 in the entire song. If you wish to alter something in a pattern, but do not wish the changes to apply to all other patterns of the same number in the rest of the song, you must create a new fresh pattern and make the changes therein.

This might be a bit confusing at first, but fear not, we will start working with the patterns immediately, and you will soon get the hang of it. We're going to create some new patterns now, do some copying and pasting, and tracking some more drums. As usual; follow the steps closely and stay sharp:

Just in case something goes wrong now, you should save your song once more with the current changes. Save the song as "Tutorial Drum 2" in SKM format (see Lesson 3 if you don't remember how saving works).

1. Click the "Insert Pattern" in the *pattern-modifier* window (see above images). You'll now see an extra pattern being inserted as "01 00".

2. Play the song and notice how once the first pattern is done playing, it will move on to the next pattern, which is exactly the same as the first pattern we made since they are both pattern 00. Stop playback.

3. Make sure that you are in pattern 00 on position 01 (01 00). You can navigate up

and down between the two patterns with the scroll arrows to the right of the patterns.

4. Change the *pattern-number* to 01 by clicking the "up arrow".

You'll now notice that the drumnotes in the track have all disapeared. As explained earlier this is because we have now created a new and fresh pattern that has not yet been used for anything.

We now need to track our drums in this new pattern (01) again, however instead of typing each drumnote all over again, we will simply copy the entire contents of pattern 00 and paste it into our new pattern 01.

5. Using the pattern scroll, scroll up to pattern 00 and then hold down the CTRL key and press the F4 key on your keyboard. This will copy the entire current active pattern (00) to system memory.
WARNING:When copying a pattern the information in that current pattern will be temporarily stored in the system memory untill the memory is dumped or overwritten by new data. This means that you can only copy one pattern at any given time. Once that pattern has been copied, and resides in the system memory, copying a new pattern will replace the current pattern in the memory, so make sure that you paste the first pattern before copying a new one - otherwise you will have to do it over again, nothing serious, but it can be annoying.
WARNING:You cannot undo a paste. Once you have pasted something it will completely overwrite the existing content of the pattern, and it can no longer be undone in case it was wrongfully pasted. So be careful!

6. Scroll back down to pattern 01 and press the CTRL and F5 keys on your keyboard simultaneously. This will paste the current copied information from pattern 00 into pattern 01.
We now have 2 identical patterns but with each their own number, thus modifying one of them will not affect the other.

We will now modify our drumtrack in the new pattern 01 to create some more over-all dynamic drumming.

7. Select the "Tut Ride Cymbal" in *instrument bank* 06. Make sure you are still in pattern 01.

8. Jump to track 3 where the Open Hihat is currently tracked. Now activate *recording mode* and insert the Ride Cymbal in the same locations as the Open Hihat currently resides (line 04, 08, 12, 16, 20 and so forth, simply replacing the Open Hihat entries in that track).

NOTE: You do not have to delete a note in a track if you wish to replace it with another note - when entering a new note onto another the previous one will be automatically overwritten with the new one.

9. Now select your kickdrum and go to track 0, enter a note on line 02 with "Q" and another note on line 03 with "M". Then add a note in line 06 with "Q", delete the note on line 08 and add one on line 10, delete the two notes on line 26 and 27 and add one on line 30, delete the note on line 40 and add one on line 46, delete the note on line 56 and add one on line 58.

10. Now select the snaredrum and jump to track 1. Add a note with "Q" on line 18 and line 26, delete the note on line 58 and add new ones on lines 56 and 57.

11. Select the "Tut Crash Cymbal R" in bank 05 and then go to track 4 and delete the note on line 00 and add a new one on line 04 with "Q".

12. Now jump back to track 3 and delete the note on line 04 and line 60.

13. Lastly jump to track 2 and add a Crash Cymbal L in bank 03 on line 58.

14. Now select pattern 01 in the *pattern-modifier* window and add a new pattern with the "Insert Pattern" button.

Note how the new pattern has the same number as the current pattern that you have highlighted when you added it. Skale Tracker always 'copies' the current highlighted *pattern-number* when inserting a new pattern.

15. Change the new *pattern-number* to 02 (by using the pattern arrow keys).

16. With your new pattern 02 selected, select the kickdrum in bank 01 and add notes with "Q" in track 0 on lines 00, 10, 16, 26, 30, 32, 42, 50, 52 and 58.

17. Select the snaredrum, go to track 1 and add "Q" notes on lines 12, 24, 44, 46, 48, 49, 54, 56 and 60.

18. Now select the crash cymbal L, go to track 2 and add a "Q" note on line 00, 32 and 52.

19. Select the crash cymbal R, go to track 4 and add "Q" notes on line 00, 30, 44 and 60.

20. Now select the "Tut Hihat Closed" in bank 08, go to track 3 and add notes with "Q" on lines 04, 08, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 36, 40, 48 and 56.

21. Save your song again as "Tutorial Drum 3" in SKM format.

Now play the song and check out the changes and additions! Note how it playes the three patterns over and over. Try experimenting by inserting more patterns and changing them around between 00, 01 and 02 combining the 3 different patterns in various ways.

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Lesson 5 - Finishing touches

Wrapping it up and adding the final spice

Let's review again: We know how to configure Skale, how to load, manage and organize instruments, how to create basic drumtracks, how to create and manage song-patterns and how to save and load our songs.

So what else do we need? Basicly nothing more - we can produce a nice and dynamic sounding drumtrack which can easily be used as backing tracks for live play or guitar recordings. So in this last lesson all we are going to do is add a little spice to our drums, giving them an extra touch of 'realism' - and we will learn a little about using the volume-string as well.

Just in case you have been playing around and experimenting with your drumtrack from last lesson we're going re-load our latest saved drumtrack. By now you should know how to access the module loading procedure, so I am just going to tell you to load the module "Tutorial Drum 3.skm".
Once the song is loaded and you're ready to start, continue ever vigilant onwards with the steps:

HINT: Real-life drumplayers cannot strike each instrument of the drumset with the exact equal power and velocity on each hit - this is especially true with the hihats and ride cymbals, which produces a very overall dynamic and 'alive' sound. By slightly altering the volumes on the digital hihats and ride cymbals in our sampled drumtrack, we can imitate these 'unsteady' drum-strikes as if they were real drums played by a real person. Even though the listener might not actually be aware of the volume changes, his ears will still percieve the slight volume fluxations making it sound a bit more natural. The same rule of corse applies to all parts of the drumset, however the volume fluxations in the kickdrum and snaredrum are usually so small that it would make no difference, unless of corse they are played in rapid succession, such as is done with blastbeats or grind.

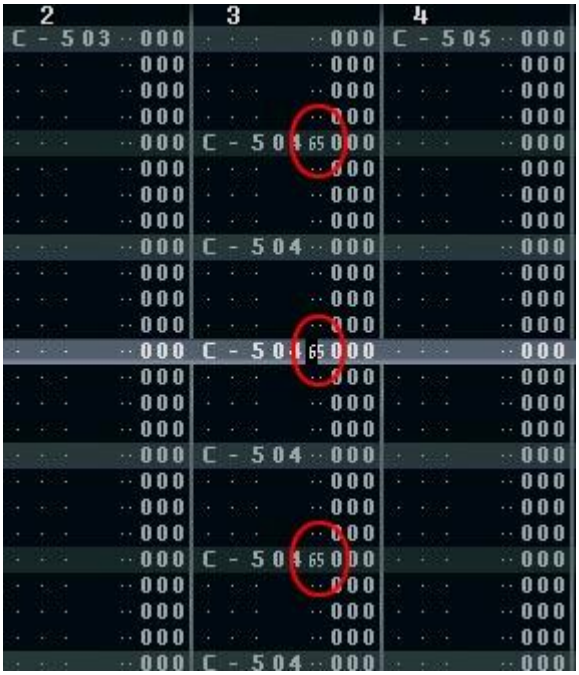
We're now going to make some volume changes in our Open Hihat track and the Ride Cymbal track.

1. Make sure that you are in pattern 00, then jump track 3 where the Open Hihat is located.

2. Now using the left/right arrow keys on your keyboard move your edit-marker into the *volume-string* (the string marked number 4 on the below picture).
Once you have your *edit-marker* in the *volume string*, you will notice that it contains 2 fields that you can move back and forth in - this is because the *volume-string* is a two-numbered string.

KNOWLEDGE: The *volume-string* can be used to define an instant-appliable hex-volume value from 00 to 80 (directly linked to the current value of the volume setting in the Mixer section) for each individual instrument on each individual line of each individual track. The value of 00 in the *volume-string* equals no volume change, thus the instrument will play at it's default volume as specified in the Mixer and Instrument Edit sections. The maximum value of 80 equals to the maximum current volume of the instrument as specified in the Mixer and Instrument Edit sections - so basicly it's the same as 00. Advanced users can also define this value in the *effects-string* with the hex-value Cxx, however unlike the volume string, the Cxx volume value in the *effects-string* is slightly different - C00 equals a volume of 0 for the current instrument, thus it is completely mute and will not produce any sound. This will however not be covered in this tutorial.

3. While still in the first field of the *volume-string* of track 3, scroll down to line 04 where the first Open Hihat note is, activate *recording mode* and type-in the value 65 in the volume string (type "6" in the first field of the *volume-string*, creating the value of 60, and then scroll up one notch and move to the second field of the *volume-string* and hit "5"). Do the same on lines 12, 20, 36, 44, 52 and 60. Now play the pattern and check it out.



4. Stop playback, go to pattern 01 and jump to the first field of the volume-string of

track 3 where our Ride Cymbal is located.

5. Activate *recording mode* and enter the volume value of 60 (you only need to type "6" in the first field, Skale then automatically adds a "0" to end of it, making it 60) on lines 12, 20, 36, 44 and 52. Check it out and comfort yourself that the ordeal is now over.
HINT: Notice that we only apply the volume changes to every second note and not all of them. Changing the volume of every second note gives the illusion of a drummer hitting the cymbals in a dynamic fashion where he strikes the first one hard and the second slightly softer. Entering more varied volume-values will increasingly make it sound even more dynamic, but be careful not to overdo it - giving a note a volume value of ex. 20, and the next note full volume will make it sound very awkward. Knowing and understanding which volume values should be used is a matter of experience and experimentation.

Congratulations, you've now completed the sYnCHAoZ' Skale Tracker Drumming Tutorial! From here on you're on your own. Remember, there's nothing you can't do as long as you have the will to try. I learned it all that way - experimenting and imitating. I suggest you play around with the given samples and create some new drumtracks on your own to really get a feeling for it. You can always refer to this tutorial if you get stuck or forget a certain feature/procedure. I have also made a small example drumtrack and included it in the drum package (sdtp_v1.zip) called 'Example.skm' for you to study and listen to - it uses the same samples as those we have been using in this tutorial. I wish you good luck and happy tracking ;)

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Finishing words and credits

Final thanks, credits and contact information

If you have gone through the entire tutorial and successfully completed all lessons, you have now reached the end of the endavour. You should have a basic understanding of how tracking works as well as some beginners knowledge and skills on creating your own drumtracks.

As a fitting ending I would like to compile a list of thanks and credits to a small ammount of people who have been directly or inderectly involved with the making of this tutorial.

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And everyone else at the Skale Tracker forums and those that know me on irc quakenet.

I hope my tutorial was of good use to you. If you wish to give me some feedback of a kind, you can drop me an email at *synchaoz@synchaoz.com* or you can visit my homepage online at www.synchaoz.com where you can sign my guestbook, browse around and download some of my music.

Have a good one!
sYnCHAoZ