

Draw Free Rhythm Barline

Purpose

This plug-in allows composers to write music directly into Sibelius, without having to think about bar lengths or time signatures. They can simply enter notes, and when they want to draw a barline at the end of a bar, they run this plug-in. The plug-in draws the barline, and calculates the appropriate time signature. It then advances the note input caret ready for the next note. For some composers, this offers a much more natural approach to using Sibelius as a composition tool than what they've been used to.

Background

In Sibelius, there's no such thing as a bar of indeterminate length. Sibelius always knows exactly how long a bar lasts, and it always knows precisely the positions within that bar of the notes it contains. The total of notes and rests in a bar always adds up to the bar's full duration. Even for irregular bars, or for bars where you've artificially entered a different time signature, the bar still adds up correctly to the length Sibelius expects it to be internally.

This way of handling bars means you can't accidentally leave notes out of a bar, which is a useful feature for people using Sibelius to transcribe music. But it does force you to know how long a bar is going to be before you start writing into it, and that's not always such a boon for composers. Many people have asked over the years for a facility whereby you can just start inputting notes, and draw barlines as and when you decide you want them, as you can do in some other music processing packages (which, by the same token, allow you to make mistakes with bar lengths as a result). This plug-in uses some of the features available in Sibelius 5 to make this a working reality.

Instructions

For best results, follow the following guidelines:

1. Assign a keyboard shortcut to the plug-in. Use the Sibelius Reference to help you do this. The result will be that you can insert a barline simply by pressing that one button on your keyboard, so it won't interrupt your workflow at all.
2. Have your score in Panorama View.
3. Enter your notes into bars of 124/4.

Getting started with a simple score

Set up a score in Sibelius with a single instrument, with a 12/4 time signature, in Panorama View:



Then, start to input notes into the first bar, using your preferred note-entry method:



Finally, while the last note you've input is still selected, press your shortcut key to run the plug-in:



The barline is drawn, and the time signature is calculated. Then, the input selection is left for you at the beginning of the next bar, so you can get straight on with entering new notes.

Note that you can't draw a barline within a tuplet. If you try, the barline will be inserted at the end of the tuplet.

Of course, some bar lengths can have more than one valid time signature. For example, a bar of 2/4 lasts as long as a bar of 4/8. The plug-in will try to work out whether your music is in quarter notes (crotchets), eighth notes (quavers) or any other note value, and behave accordingly. To start off with, it will assume you're writing in quarter notes (crotchets), but if it gives you a 2/4 bar which you would prefer to be a 4/8 bar, you can change it yourself in the usual way. From this point on, the plug-in will opt for eighth notes (quavers) instead, whenever it comes across a bar that can be expressed in eighth notes (quavers).

Splitting bars

You might want to enter a huge string of notes, and then go back and insert barlines. Here's how to achieve that with the plug-in.

First, enter all the notes as before:



Then, select a note after which you want to insert a barline, and run the plug-in:



Turning time signatures off

A lot of composers write bars of different lengths without using time signatures at all. The plug-in will let you do that too. *With nothing selected in the score*, run the plug-in. A dialog appears, which among other things asks you if you want to use time signatures or not. If you choose not to, then the plug-in will still draw barlines where you want them, and split bars, but it won't show any time signatures.