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Overview

BB (Band-in-a-Box) is a great program to use as a “practice buddy”, to listen to a tune before taking the time to learn it on the dulcimer, and for experimenting with different chords. However it is quite daunting to get into and figure it out. Here are the common things I do with it in hopes that it will help you become productive with it more quickly.

When installed Band-in-a-Box creates a directory named **C:\bb**. In addition to this I created a directory **C:\bbmusic** in which to store all my song/tune files in sub-directories for each type of tune (reels, jigs, waltzes, etc.). In this way upgrades to BB will not lose or affect any of my song files, plus I can more easily backup just my bbmusic directory. I suggest you do the same by following the instructions in the next section. The remainder of this document will assume that is the case.

NOTE that the screen shots in this document are from Band-in-a-Box 2014 which was a major UI change from prior versions. In future versions they could change as well but hopefully not as drastically. This document should be helpful in any case.

Initial Setup

In the Workshops page of my website I have provided a **BBMusic_setup.zip** file that when you unzip it to your C: drive will create a C:/bbmusic directory with sub-directories for reels, jigs, and waltzes. Each of these sub-directories will contain a template BB file for that type of tune, to make it easier to enter new tunes of that type, plus one tune so you can quickly experiment with playing tunes without having to first enter one.

The top-level bbmusic directory also contains a JWREEL style you will need to copy into your bb directory and install per instructions in the **bbmusic\BB_install.txt** file. Jigs and waltzes use styles that

BB comes with. The BB_install.txt file also contains instructions on setting up a few defaults that will make using BB easier for you.

Opening and Playing Tunes

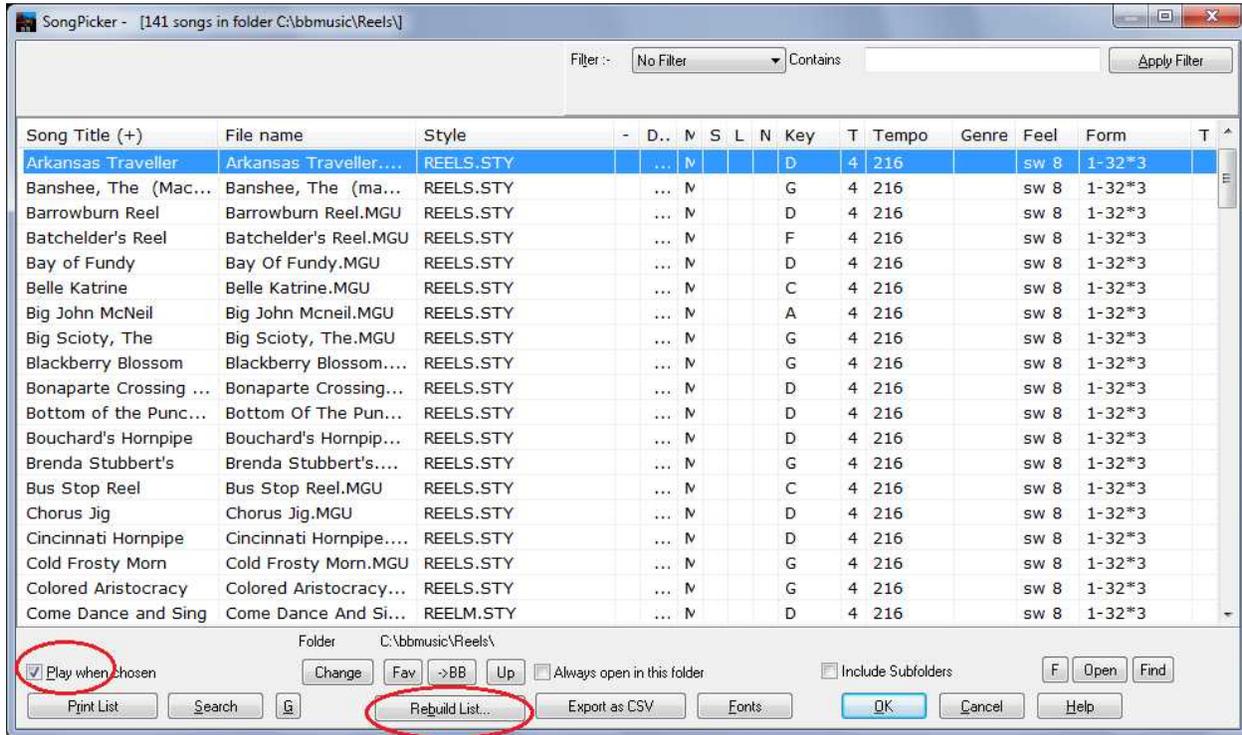
When you first start BB press the Open button (circled in red below), position to a sub-directory in your bbmusic directory (such as Reels), and select any file to open. Then just press the Play button to begin playing it with the lead-in clicks.



To play another song in the same directory just press the song picker "Song" button (circled in red above). This will show you all the song files in that directory with the name of each song title (vs. the filename) and some other information for each song. Of note in this dialog box (pictured below):

- I have "Play when chosen" checked so once I select a song and the dialog box closes it starts automatically playing the song without me having to also press the Play button
- The first time you use this picker, or whenever you add or remove songs to the directory you need to press the "Rebuild List" button to rebuild the list so all songs in that directory will appear in the list.

- NOTE that each directory has its own list, so each sub-directory that you make any changes in you will need to rebuild the Song Picker list.



Once loaded, if you want to start playing a song from a specific measure you can either press the From button and specify the measure number, or just double click on that measure in the chord sheet. In this case you will not hear any lead-in clicks.

To mute an instrument/part (for when you want to play that part along with the other instruments in the arrangement) right-click the part near the top of the screen ("Melody" in this case) and select Mute. When muted the part will appear red (see below). Un-mute it the same way. To practice chording you'll probably want to mute the Piano part.





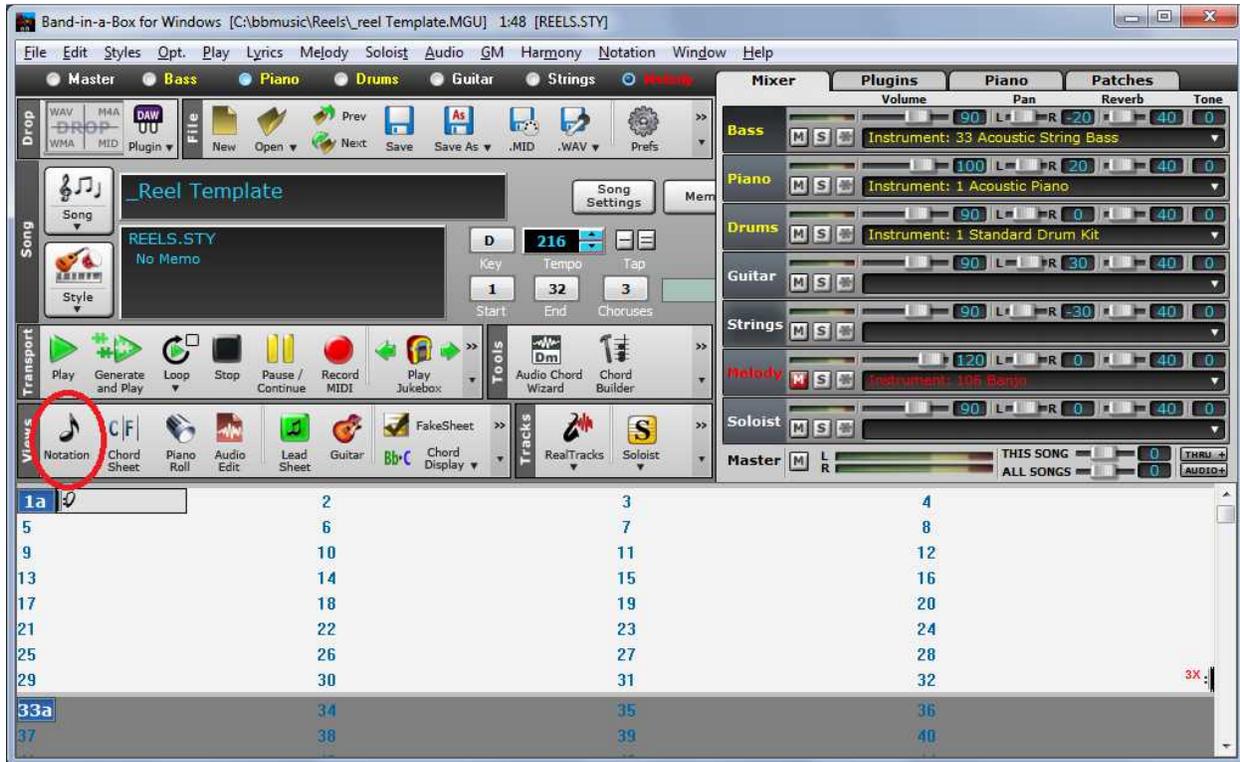
Here are other important buttons and controls (shown above) for changing and controlling playback. You can hold your mouse pointer over each of them to get a popup help:

- The **key signature** dropdown (“D” above) – changing the key automatically changes both the chords and transposes the melody notes
- **Tempo** (“216” above) – clicking in the up and down buttons next to it changes the tempo 5 beats per measure at a time. Right-clicking them changes it one BPM at a time.
- **Number of measures** in each chorus (ie. tune) (“32” above) – most tunes will be 32 - (2) 8 measure A parts and (2) 8 measure B parts. Some waltzes can go to 48 or 64. “Crooked” tunes can be anything
- **Number of choruses** in the song (“3” above), or how many times to repeat the full tune before stopping
- **Loop button/checkbox** (on the Transport ribbon menu) – left click and select “Loop of Entire Song Enabled” and the song will start over each time it ends until you manually stop it by pressing the Stop button. I sometimes check this when practicing a new song over and over, but make sure you leave it unchecked before saving the song...

Entering and Changing Notes

I generally enter melody notes first as I find it easier to play back the melody by itself to make sure I entered it correctly before adding the chords. Then I add the chords.

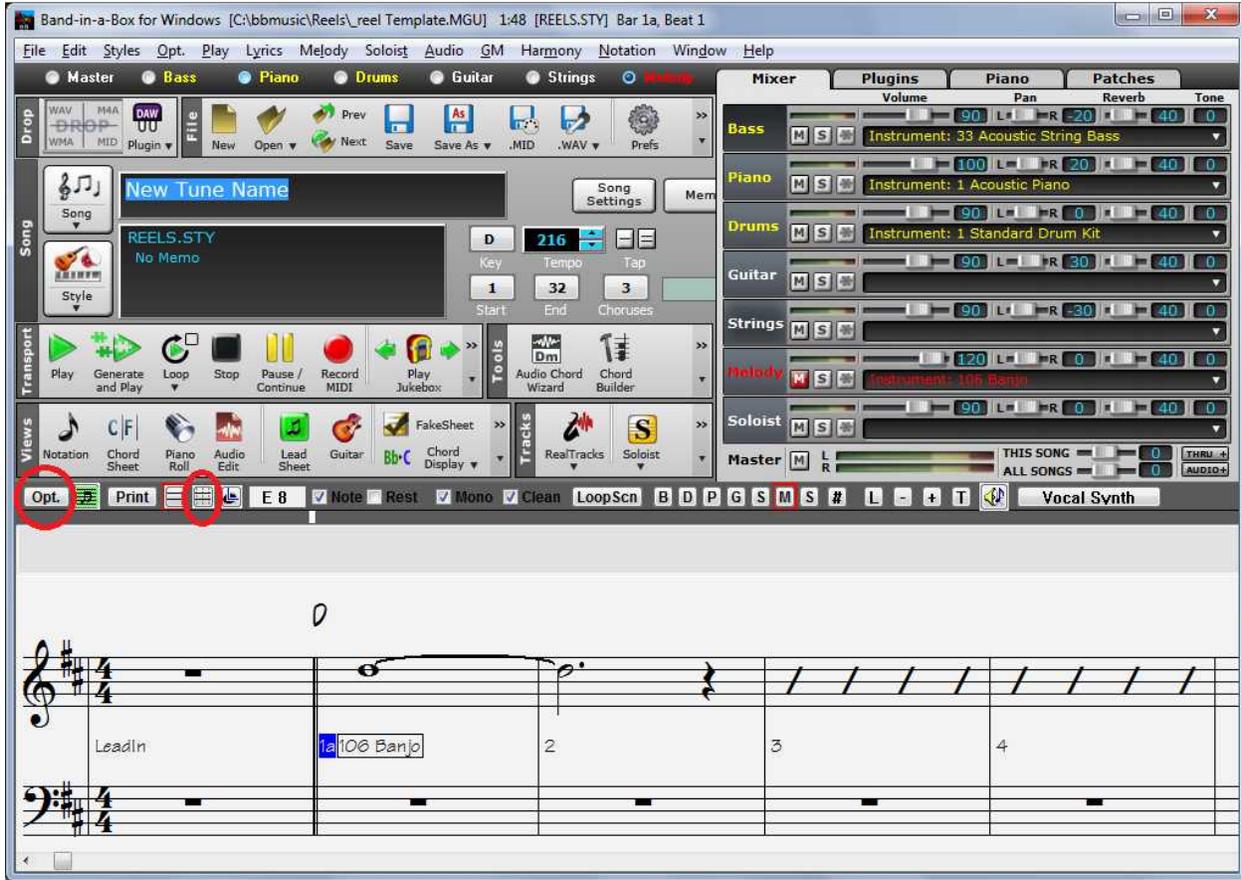
To create a new song I recommend starting with the Reel, Jig, or Waltz template song file in each of their corresponding sub-directories. Here’s what it will look like when you first open them (except the style for Reels is now JWREEL.STY, not REELS.STY):



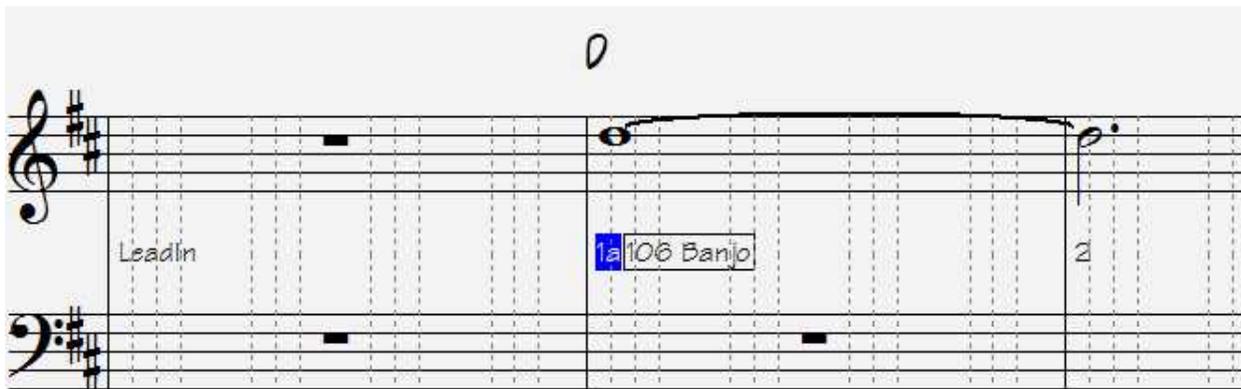
Then immediately do the following so you won't mistakenly change the template:

1. If needed is change the key via the Key dropdown box
2. Enter the tune's name replacing "_Reel Template"
3. File > Save As... and give it a filename that is similar to or the same as the tune name (so you can recognize it easily)

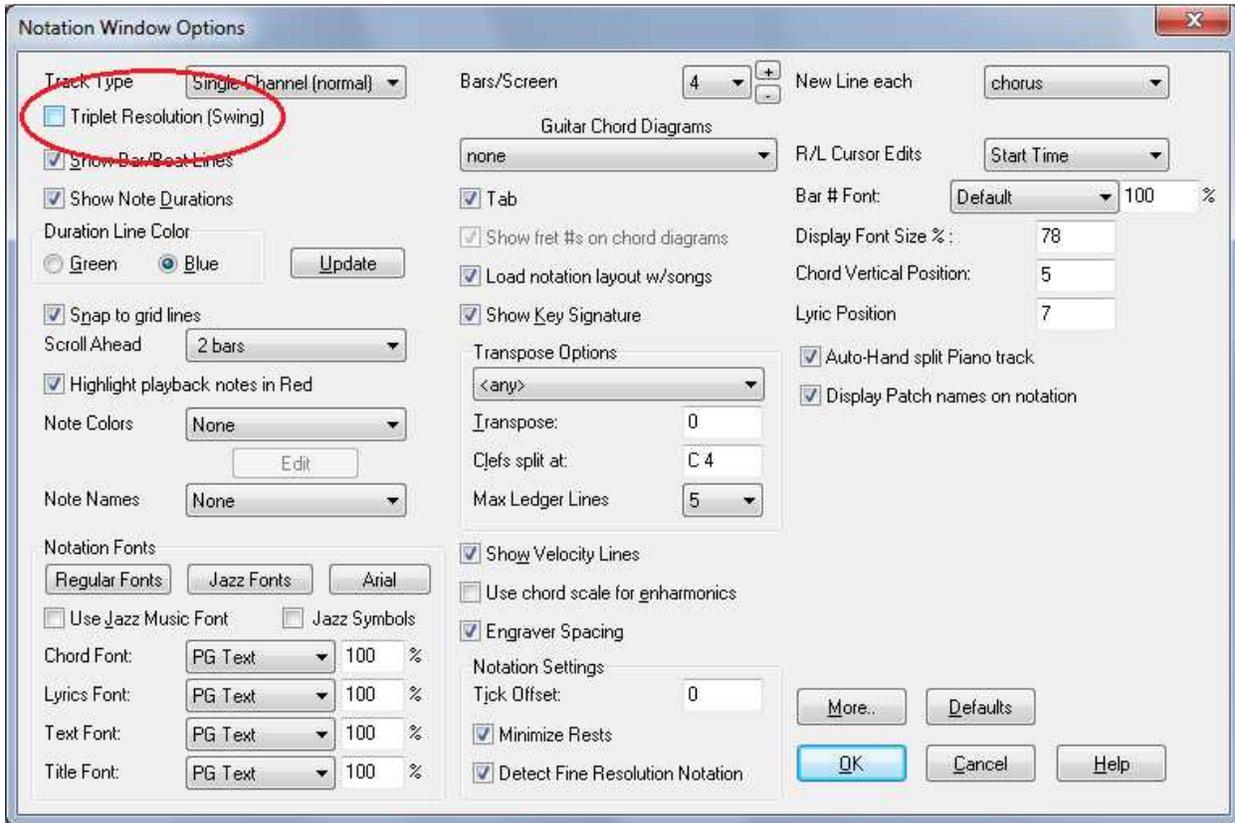
Then press the Note button (circled in red above) to change the chord sheet to Notation view (shown below). NOTE that there is one note saved in the template that you will probably be changing or removing. This is only so the file gets saved as an *.MGU file instead of an *.SGU file. In case you were wondering...



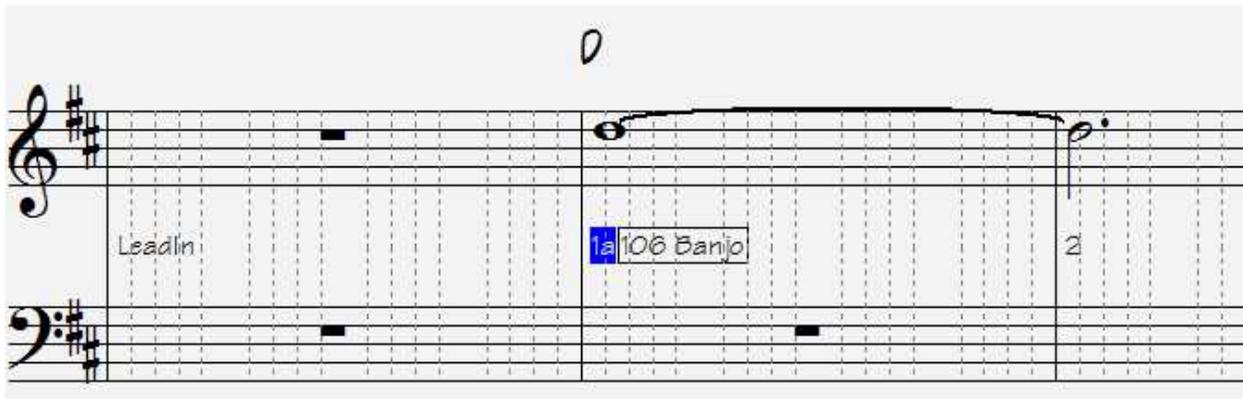
To be able to enter notes you need to press the **Editable Notation button** (the right circled button above). The music staff will then change and look like this, with each beat in a measure having 3 dotted lines:



For Reels and Waltzes you need to next press the **Opt. button** and uncheck the Triplet Resolution (Swing) checkbox (for jigs you want to leave it checked):



After pressing the OK button the music staff will look like this (4 dotted lines per beat). Now you are ready to enter eighth and sixteenth notes properly:



To enter a note click your mouse pointer on that notes position on the staff which intersects with a dotted vertical line. For whole, half, and quarter notes click on the staff at the first dotted line in the set of 4. For eighth notes you'll use either the first or third dotted line.

Whenever you enter a new note BB will change the note before it to be the correct duration based on the time/distance between it and the note you just entered. In the following sample note how BB changed the first D note (in measure 2) to a dotted quarter note based on where the next note E in the measure was entered.

If you make a mistake you can just drag the note to where it should be, or just click elsewhere on the same dotted line to replace the bad note. It works this way because the Mono checkbox is checked. To be able to enter multiple notes on the same dotted line (for double strikes) you need to uncheck it.

When you are all done entering or changing the melody:

1. Press the Non-editable button to the left of the Editable Notation button to remove the dotted lines and make the notes non-editable. You will want to do this to prevent an errant mouse click from changing all your hard work
2. Press the Notation/Chord Sheet Window toggle button to return to chord sheet mode
3. Press Ctrl-S or the Save button to save your work

IMPORTANT Things to Know:

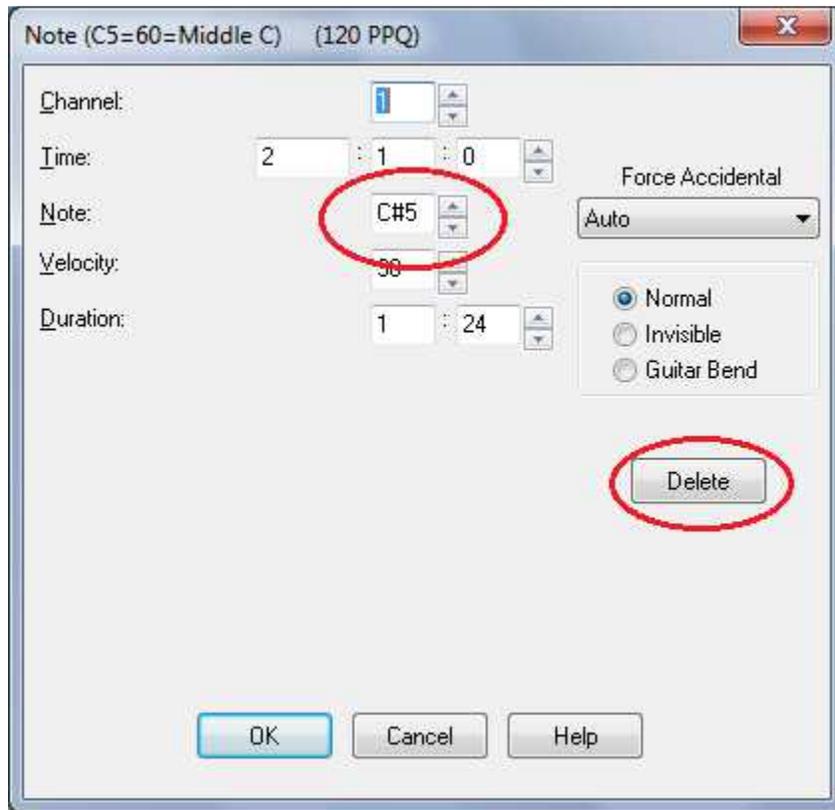
The Style is what determines the time signature (reel, jig, waltz, etc.). Feel free to change the style for a song and then play it to hear the difference. You may find styles you like better than the ones I've chosen to use.

Remember to frequently press Ctrl-S to save your work

To enter any note below middle C

1. Enter a middle C or D note at the position (ie. dotted line) where you want the new below-C note to be
2. Right-click the note you just entered and select Edit Note... to bring up the dialog box below
3. Click on the Note spinner button to lower the note to what you want, and then press OK

You would use the same dialog box to change a note to an accidental (C natural in this example, because in the key of D all Cs are C#s).



To remove a note completely right click on the note, select Edit Note..., and then press the Delete button

Entering and Changing Chords

To enter chords press the Notation button to go back to the chord sheet. Then simply click on the first measure and:

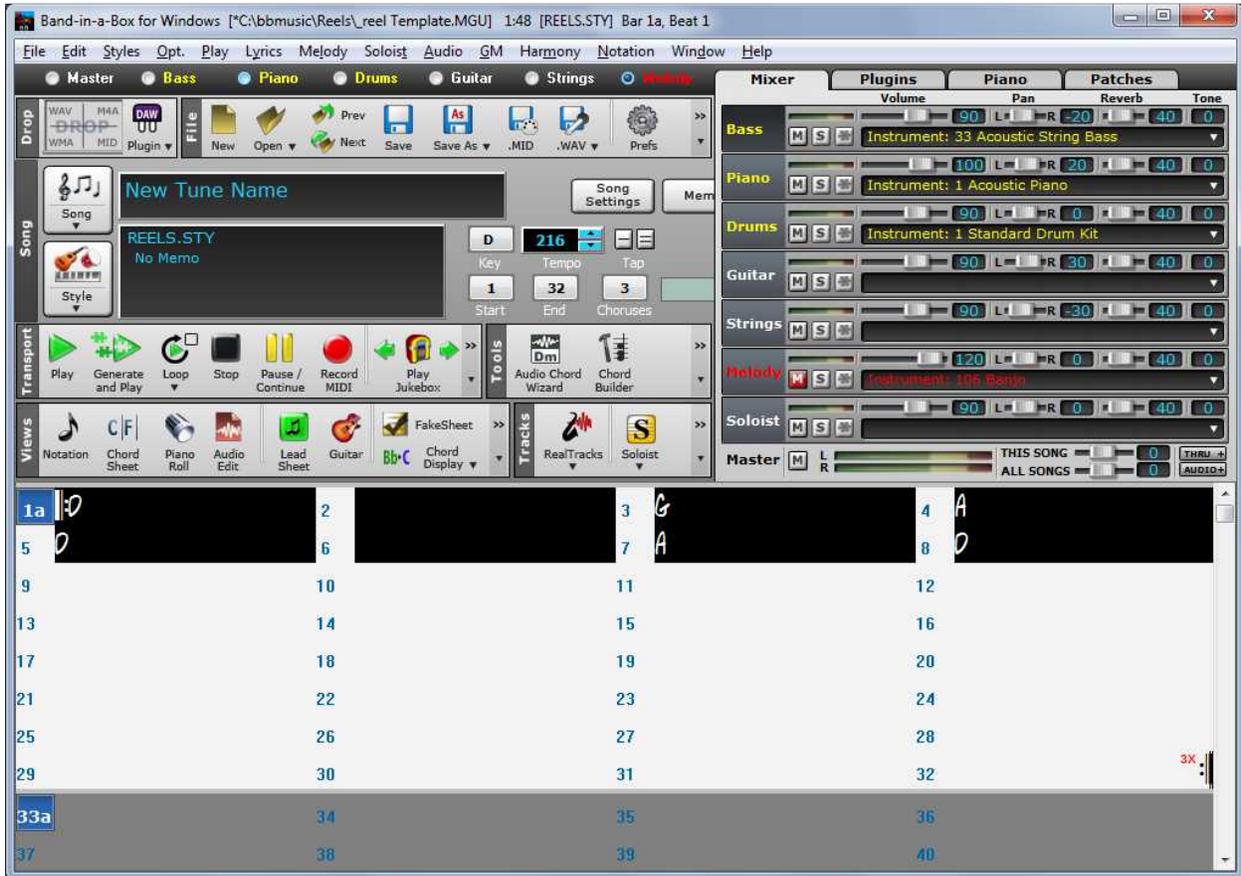
1. enter the first chord letter
2. right arrow to the next measure where there is a chord change and enter it

Note that each measure on the chord sheet has 2 slots or half positions. If a measure has a chord change in the middle of a measure enter the 2nd chord in the 2nd half of the measure, otherwise you need to press the right arrow key twice to move to the next measure. You can see an example of this in the jig screen below.

In rare cases where there are quick chord changes and more than two chords in a measure, you can enter 2 chords in each half measure position by separating them by a comma before pressing the right arrow.

To completely remove a chord: position to that chord in the measure and press the Delete key

After entering the 8 measures of chords for the 1st A part, if the chords for the 2nd A part are the same I highlight all of them in the first 8 measures by dragging my mouse from the first measure to the 8th, copy them with a Ctrl-C, click on measure 9, and then paste with a Ctrl-V. You can use Edit menu commands to do this as well.



For the B part I do the same but starting at measure 17, after clicking once on the measure number 17 to turn it blue (this is how BB knows where parts start and end).

Jigs

Jigs (in 6/8 time) are not well supported in BB, although this may have changed in this new release (I haven't had time to experiment). In the past here's how I've gotten them to work:

- I use the ZZIrish style – not great but it works – feel free to try the others and see if you like them better
- I enter 2 jig measures in each BB measure using Triplet Resolution (that we turned off for Reels and Waltzes). Consequently...
- The Number of Measures setting for jigs is 16, not 32

- Each triplet note gets entered on it's own dotted line in Editable Notation mode. See example below. Quarter notes take up two dotted lines as at the beginning of measure 1 below
- In the chord sheet, each jig measure occupies one chord "slot" so that there are 2 jig measures per numbered measure on the chord sheet. If you have a chord change within a jig measure (as in measures 4,8,12, and 16 below) you enter the two chords separated by a comma and they will go into the same "slot"

The Practice "Lightning Round"

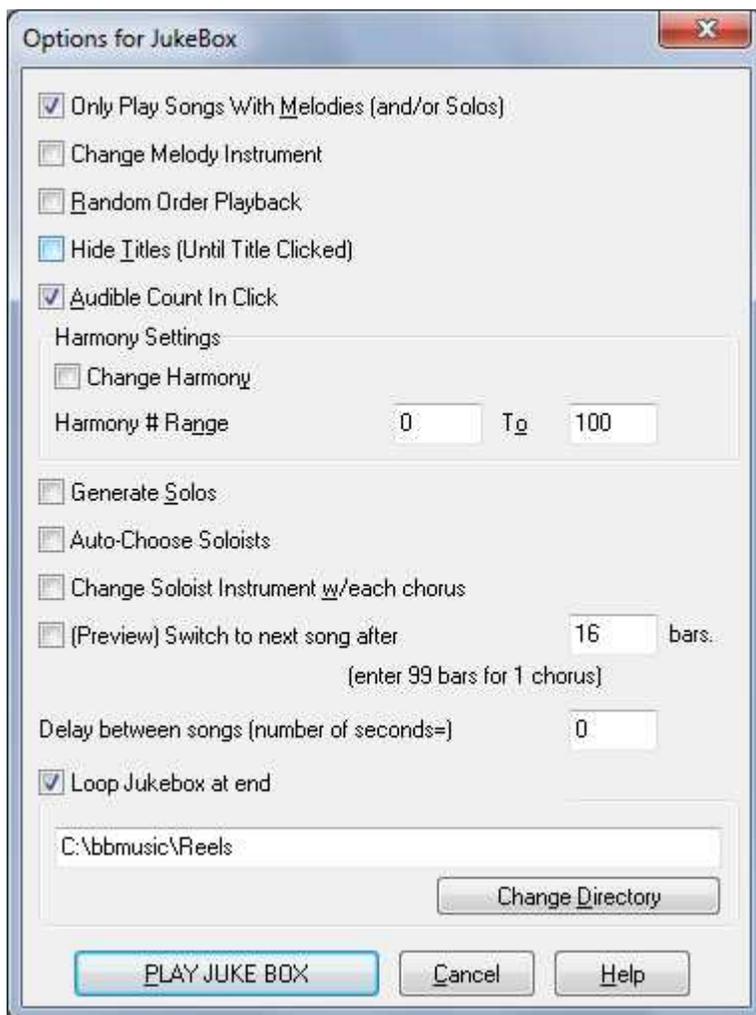
The Reels, Jigs, and Waltzes directories contain all the tunes currently in my repertoire. After you've entered all the tunes in your repertoire BB makes it easy to quickly practice all of them, one right after the other. I call this the Lightning Round. It's not only a good way to practice all of them quickly, but it will let you know which ones you've forgotten and need to work on more.

To start a "lightning round" practice you are going to use BB's Juke Box feature:

1. Position to the subdirectory whose type of tunes you will be practicing by opening any file in that directory
2. Press the **Play Jukebox** button



3. In the dialog box that comes up set all the checkboxes to match the example below, and verify that the directory is the one whose type of tunes you want to practice



When you press the Play Juke Box button be ready to begin playing one tune after the other in alphabetic order by filename (or title, I can't remember which). While in Juke Box mode you can move forward or backwards a tune at a time using the green arrow buttons on either side of the Play Juke Box

button (just like a CD player). This is very handy to practice a particular tune over again without stopping the Juke Box, which will annoyingly cause it to start over at the beginning the next time you press Play Jukebox.

The "Lightning Round" is also good for practicing your ability to quickly get into the next tune in a medley while finishing playing the current tune.