Creating Little Moments in Your Mix: Production Notes

When to Add (or Not Add) These Moments

Ask yourself: Should I fill this gap?

DON'T add when:

1. **It violates the song arc** — Save your tricks for later. Don't fill everything or the song becomes a blob. Build energy progressively:
    - Verse 1: minimal
    - Verse 2: add some moments
    - Chorus 1: normal
    - Chorus 2: add flourish
    - Chorus 3: level up
2. **Emotional weight requires the space** — If lyrics are heavy or there's an emotional solo, let the silence breathe. Sometimes the space IS the moment.
3. **The groove is already hitting** — Don't interrupt a good pocket just because you're bored. If it feels right without adding, leave it.
4. **Nothing you try actually adds** — If it's not helping, it's hurting. Try a few things. If none work, confidently leave it empty. Less is often more.

8 Techniques for Creating Moments

Recorded/Added Elements

1. Fills & Flourishes

- Little melodic twists that play off vocal pockets
- Can be subtle (distorted Wurlitzer, guitar flourish)
- Example: adding a simple guitar lick in the spaces the vocal leaves

2. Riffs

- Longer than fills (several bars)
- Introduce a new instrument line in later chorus repeats
- Creates more interest on repeat listens

3. Call & Response

- Add a response to the main line
- Common: telephone-style harmony response
- Pan responses slightly left/right for width
- Can be vocal doubles or instrumental answers

4. Motifs / Callbacks

- Copy something from earlier in the song to a later section
- Works across songs too (use elements from other tracks)
- Creates "I know that part!" recognition
- Listen for something the right length and rhythm, then try it

5. Ear Candy

- Subtle, often one-time sounds
- Percussion is great for this (clave, shaker, etc.)
- Accentuates/punctuates what just happened
- **Don't** repeat it if you need to leave space for a verse transition

Mixing/Production Techniques

6. Reverb Tail

- Automate a send to a longer plate reverb
- Extend/accentuate the tail on key words
- Great for quieter/emotional sections

- Example: 9-second plate reverb on a vocal "you" to fill the space

7. Delay Throws

- Duplicate vocal track with same processing
- Paste just the word you want delayed
- Set delay to 100% mix on that track
- Pan delays left/right for width
- Add subtle reverb after the delay
- Can be done in the box without automation

8. Swells (Reverse Sounds)

- Take a sustained sound (piano note, palm-muted guitar chord)
- Reverse it for a rising tension effect
- Great for transitions into new sections
- Regular swells (not reversed) also work

9. Spotlight Automation (Bonus)

- Automate volume up 1-2dB on key moments
- Draw attention to fills, flourishes, or drum fills
- Especially effective in sparse arrangements
- Creates energy without adding new tracks

Workflow

1. Build your fundamental tracks first
2. Listen through and identify lulls/gaps
3. Try 2-3 techniques in each spot
4. Keep what adds, discard what doesn't
5. Remember: sometimes the answer is nothing

"One thing at a time."