

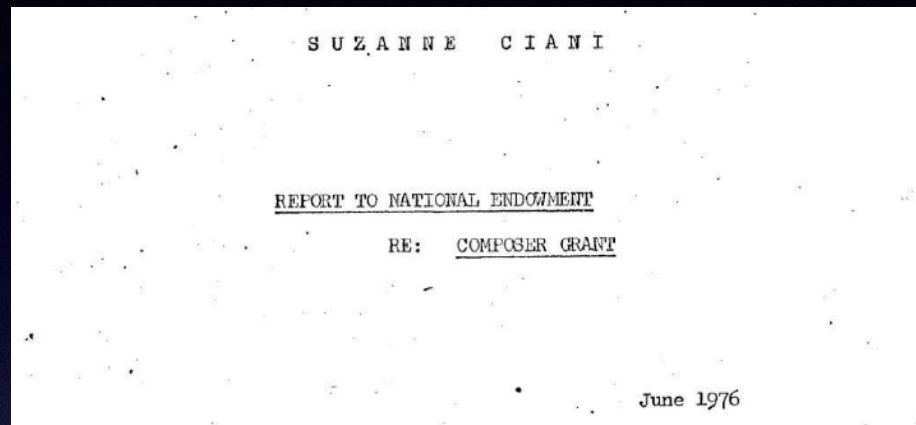
Strategies for Developing a Modular Synthesizer Performance

Circuits in the Woods
October 24, 2026

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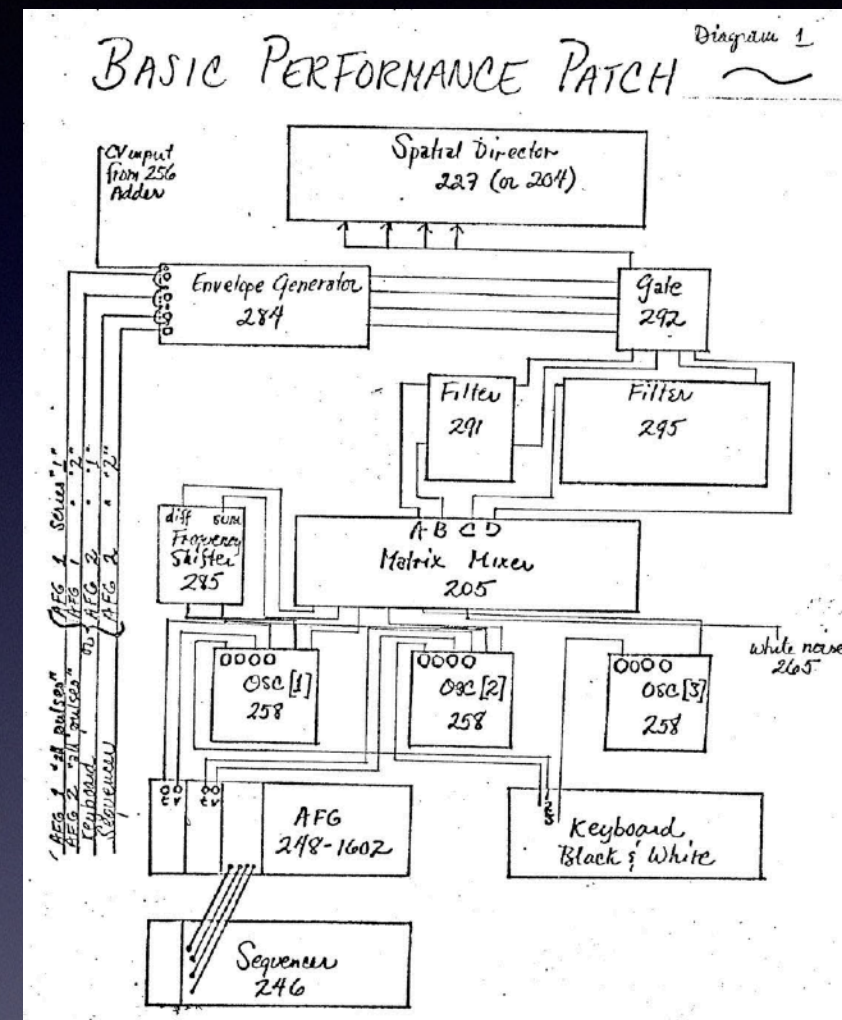
Buchla 200 series performance patch

Distinct musical ideas

Pitch rows

Rhythmic improvisation strategies

Transitioning between musical ideas



Updated version: <https://echo.orpheusinstituut.be/article/suzannes-buchla-cookbook>

Designing a System

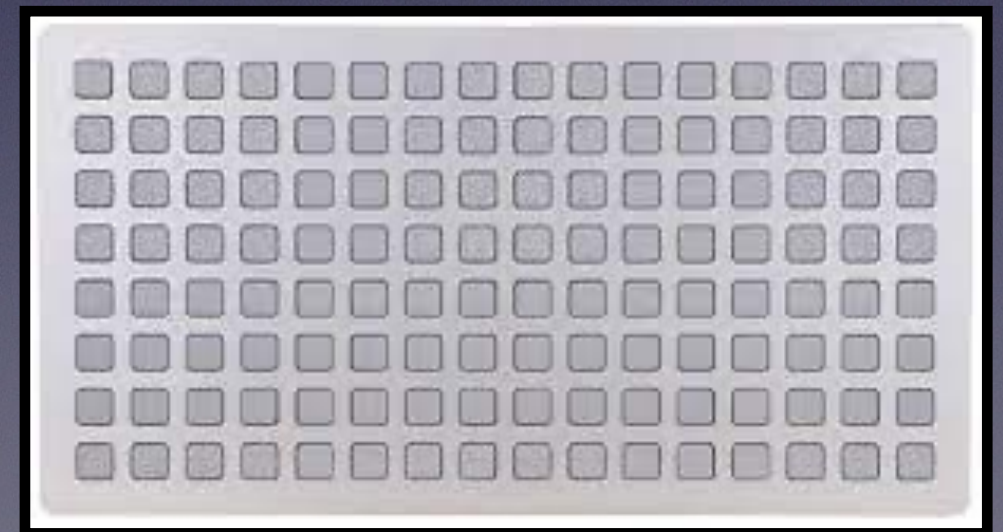
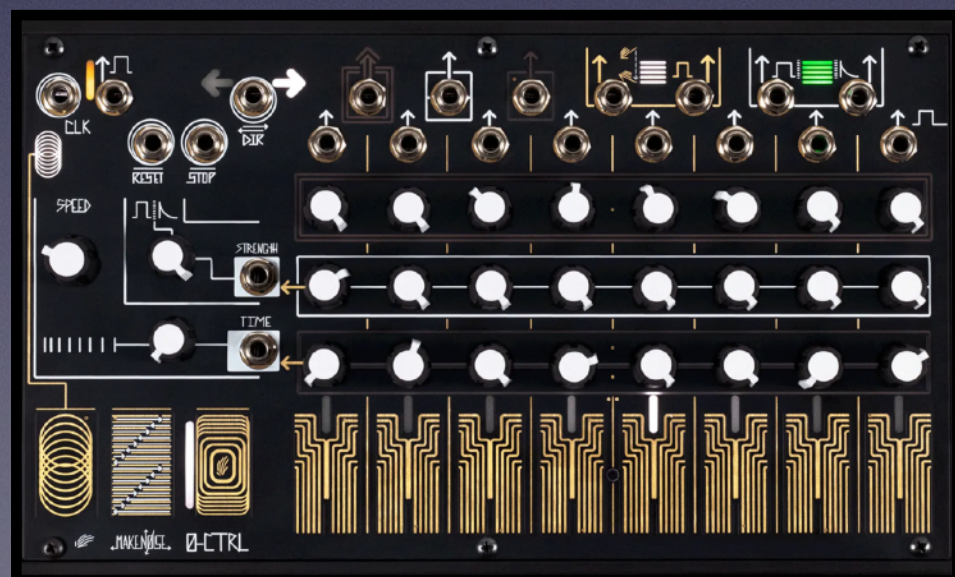
- There were 18,925 modules listed on Modular Grid yesterday morning. Choose wisely.....
- Choose modules in the audio signal path that each have a distinct character.
- Choose modules in the control signal path that can do more than one thing.
- Design your system so that everything is easily accessible.
- Separate audio modules from control sources
- Arrange modules for short, direct patch cord connections when possible.



Sound Modules



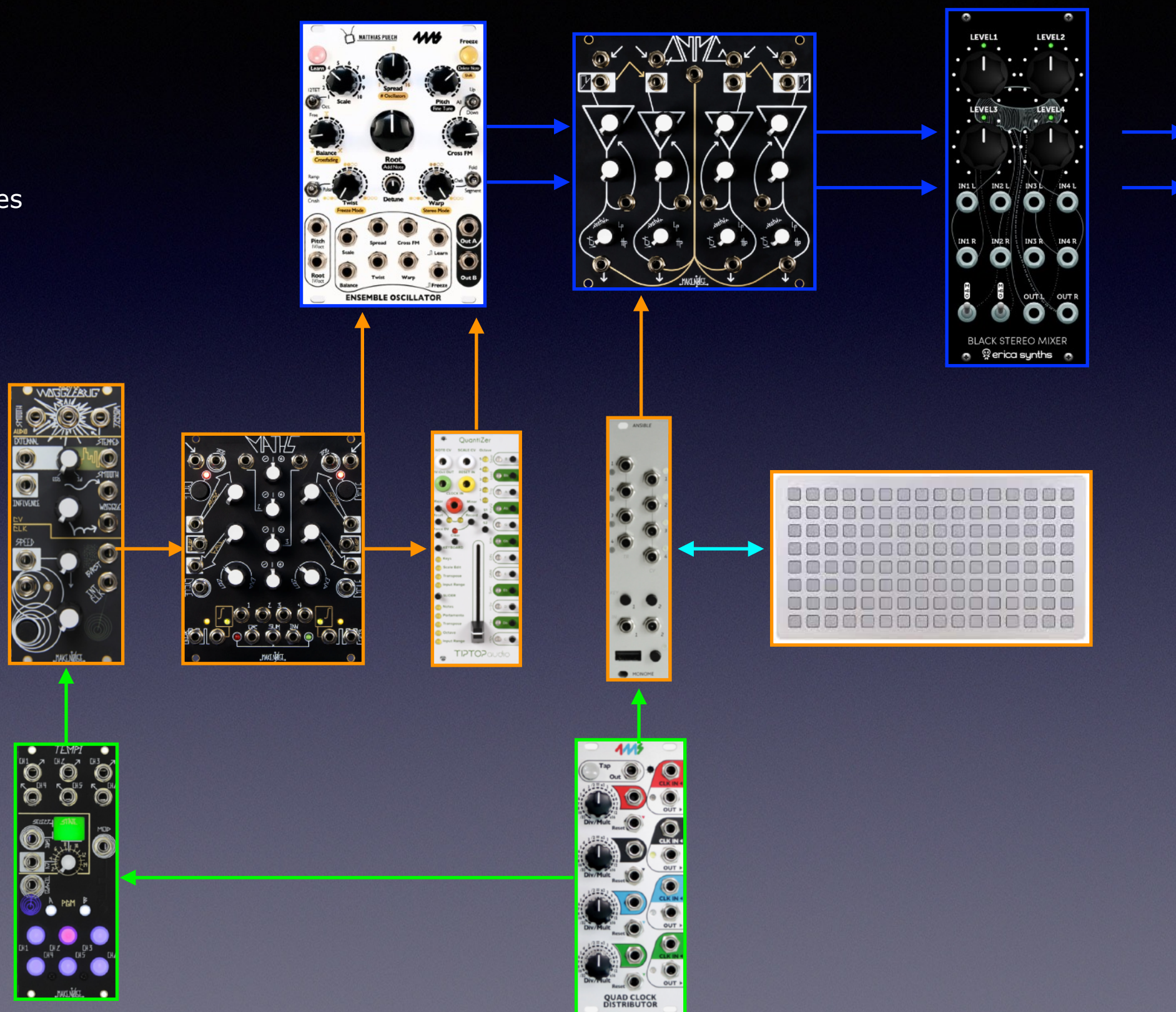
Performance Control



System 1

Functions

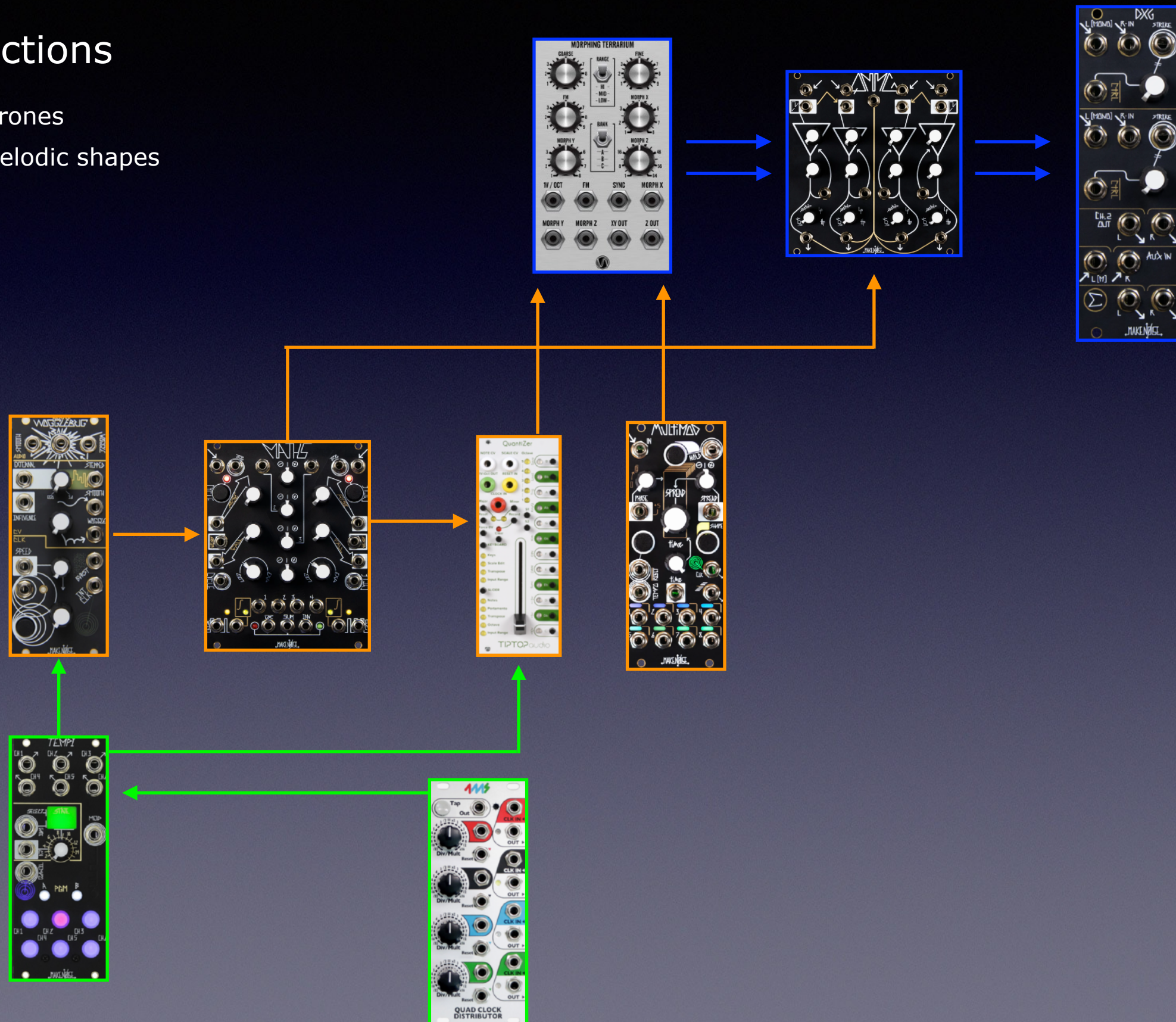
- Drones
- Melody
- Rhythmic Pulses



System 2

Functions

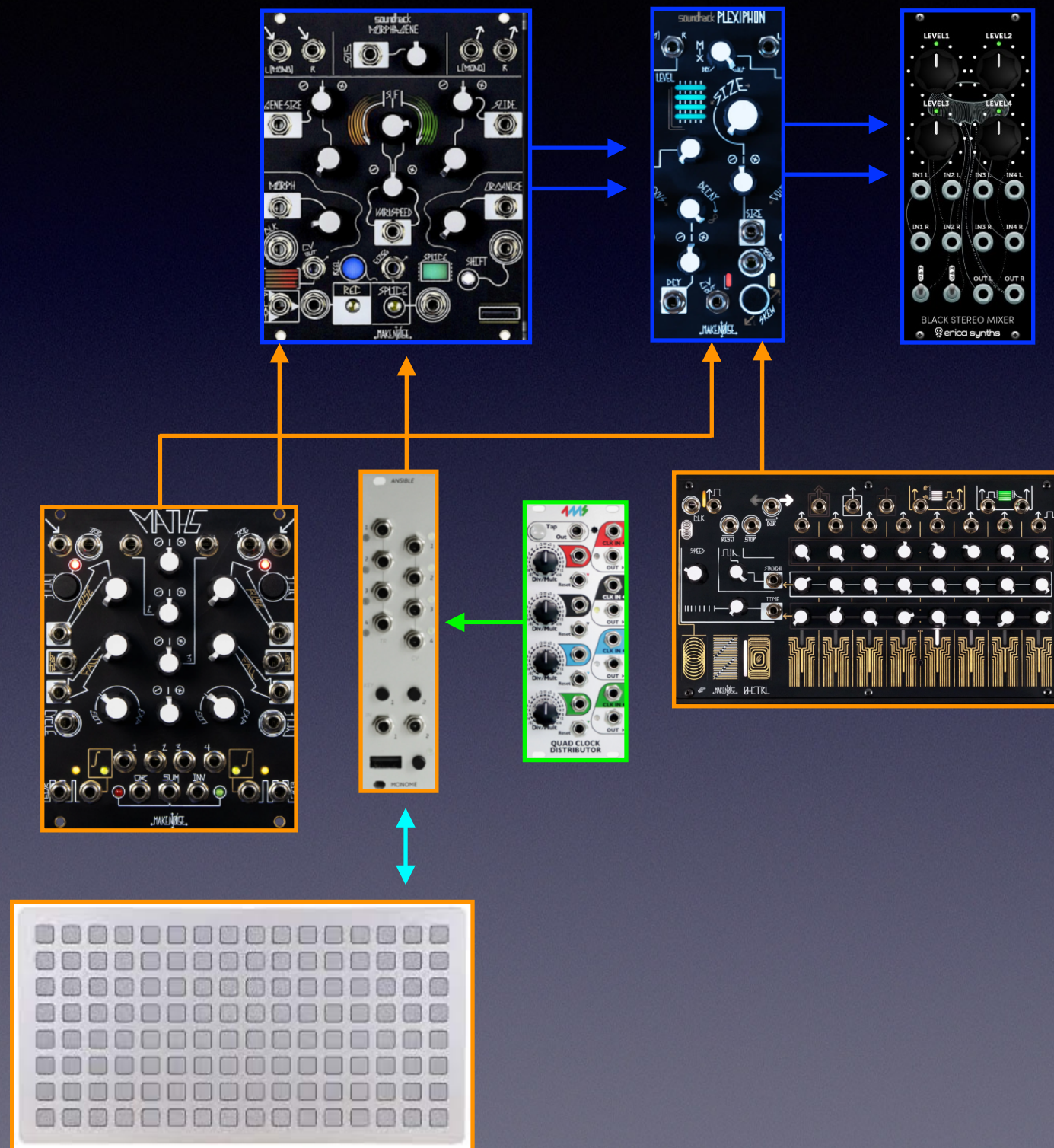
- Drones
- Melodic shapes



System 3

Functions

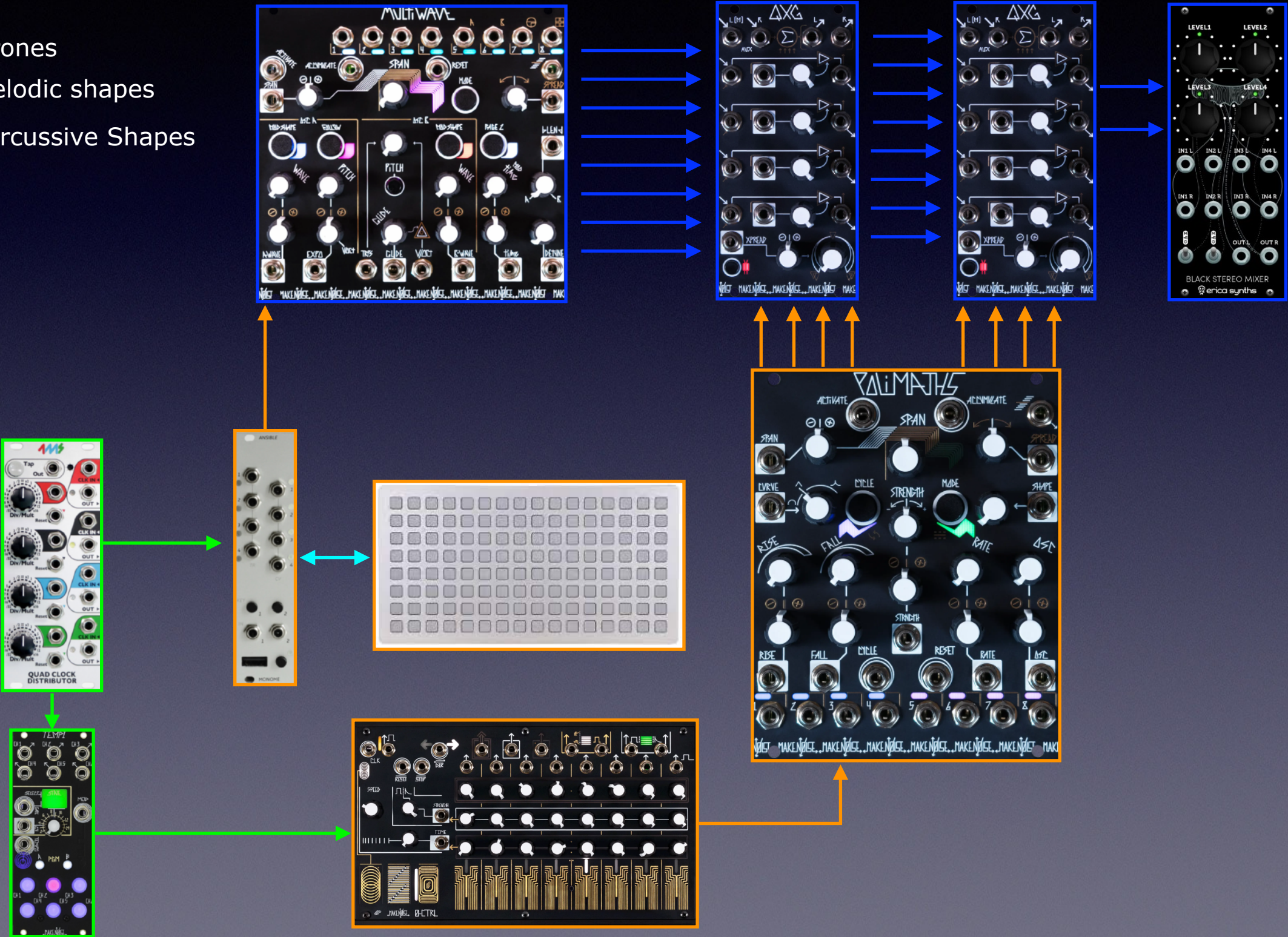
- Drones
- Sample loops
- Percussive Sounds



System 4

Functions

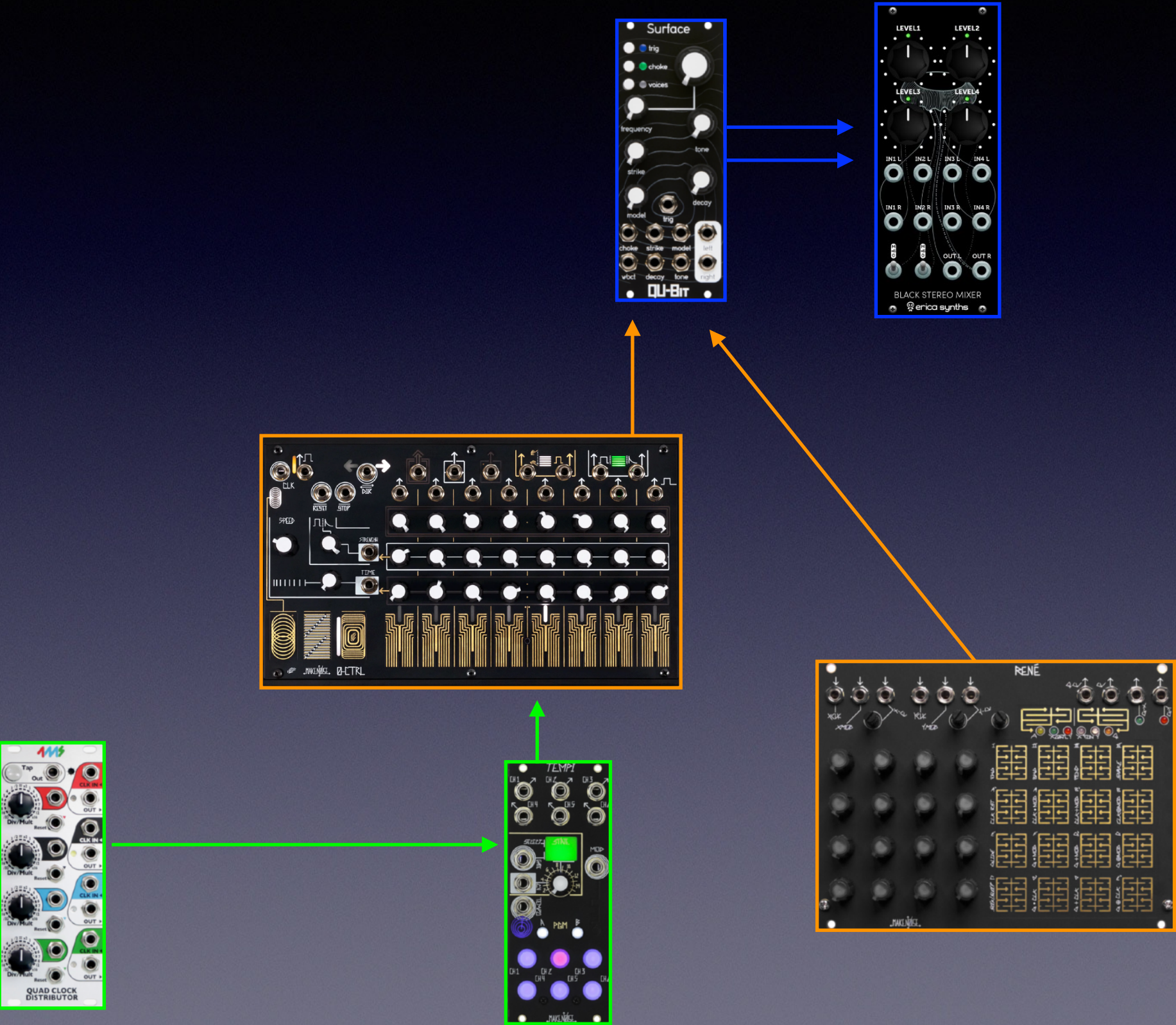
- Drones
- Melodic shapes
- Percussive Shapes



System 5

Functions

- Melodic shapes
- Percussive Shapes



Form Organized by System

Each system represents one main sound source

Guiding Principles

- Each system represents one main sound source.
- Systems can be performed solo or in combination with other systems.
- Each system can be transformed to serve different musical functions.
- Limit each system to 6-8 useful variables that can be easily remembered.

System 1: Ensemble Oscillator

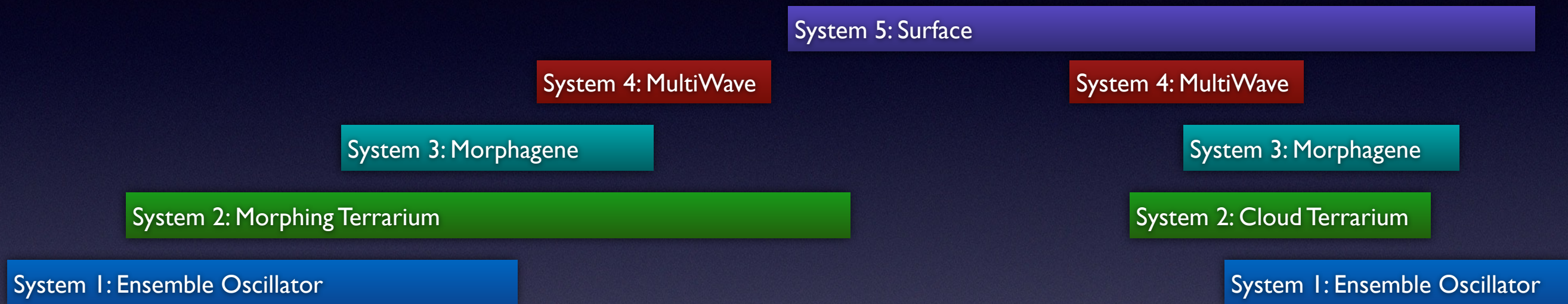
System 2: Morphing Terrarium

System 3: Morphagene

System 4: MultiWave

System 5: Surface

Example Form



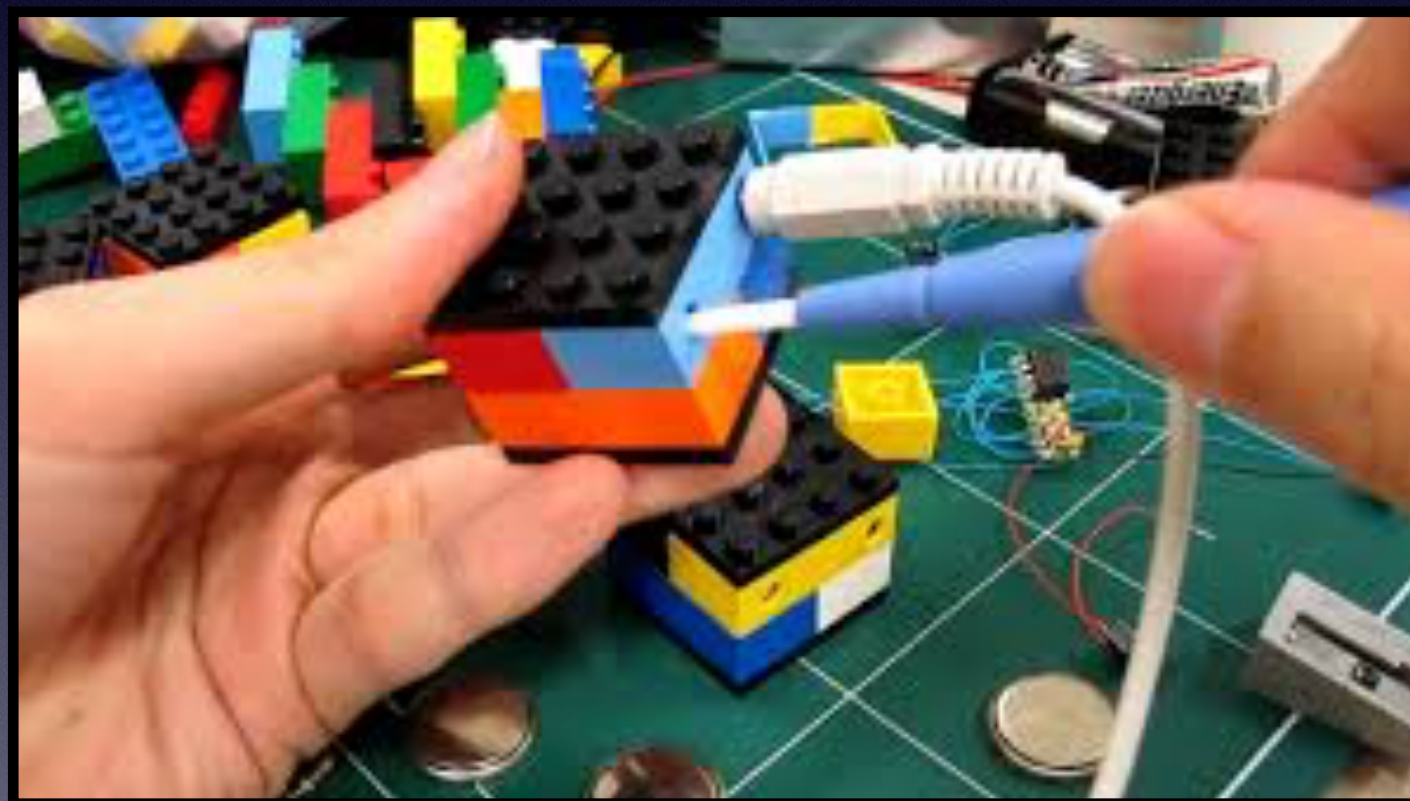
Some Things to Listen For

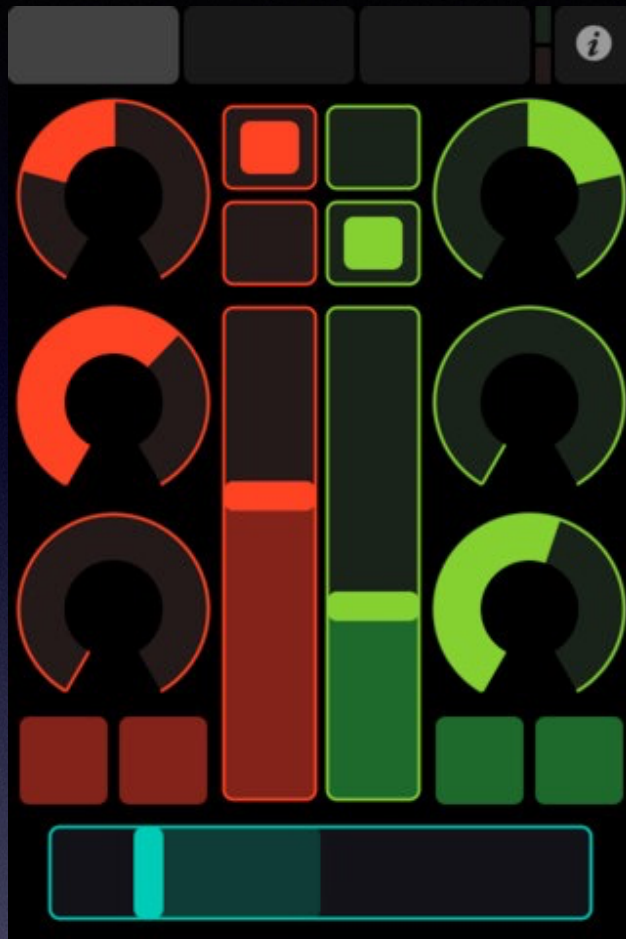
- Drones: sustained, textural sound
- Melodic gestures
- Rhythmic gestures: pitched or non-pitched
- Samples: audio recordings
- Audio fragments

Some Things to Think About

- Come up with a design and don't change it.
- Learn every module like the back of your hand
- Choose modules that are hard to learn so you will always need to do "research."
- Research will present new ideas and strategies, keeping you fresh
- Always make sure something is changing, static sound is boring...
- Practice each system separately.
- Practice smaller combinations of systems before practicing a whole set.
- Embrace failure.....
- Don't tell anyone when something doesn't work.

Questions?





Thank You

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