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Learn GarageBand tips and tricks

Take Control of Recording with GarageBand

by [Jeff Tolbert](#), [Macworld.com](#) | Jul 4, 2008 12:36 am

Editor's Note: The following article is an excerpt from [Take Control of Recording with GarageBand '08](#), a \$10 electronic book available for download from [TidBits Publishing](#). The 122-page ebook will show you how to use GarageBand '08 to create musical compositions with vocals, drums, guitars, MIDI keyboards, and more. Its companion volume, the 110-page [Take Control of Making Music with GarageBand '08](#), guides you through creating songs using GarageBand's editing and mixing features with built-in loops.

It's no secret that GarageBand is entry-level music editing software. For the non-musician getting started, a peek at the controls and settings in Pro Tools or Logic Pro can fry synapses faster than a late 1960s road trip on the Rolling Stones' tour bus. But at the same time, GarageBand can perform feats that aren't immediately obvious.

Double-track vocals and guitars

Double-tracking

is an old technique for thickening vocals and other types of tracks. The idea is that you record two takes of the same part and lay them on top of each other. The resulting product has a thicker sound and a unique quality. Double-tracking can also hide minor tuning flaws in vocal tracks. The two versions blend together and mask the out-of-tune bits.

To double-track a part, simply duplicate the original track (choose Track -> Duplicate Track or Command-D) and rerecord your part onto the new track.

The trick to double tracking is that the two versions have to be as identical as possible, at least if you want the effect to be invisible. There's certainly nothing wrong with playing the second part differently and panning the two parts away from each other. This will add thickness as well as a not so subtle stereo effect. Feel free to try adding reverb or other effects to the second track for variety.

Tip

: Double-tracking isn't the only method of thickening a track. Other techniques include:

- Add chorus.
- Duplicate the track and offset the new track ever so slightly. It's tricky to move a track by tiny increments in GarageBand, but it can be done. You need to zoom the timeline way in to do it.

Make your own loops

The wonderful thing about GarageBand's loops is that you can play them in any tempo and key that you want. Starting with GarageBand 2.0, it's a cinch to do this with your own recordings as well:

1. Trim the track down to the portion you want to use as a loop. To do this, position the playhead at the start of the desired bit and choose Edit -> Split (Command-T). Do the same at the end of the segment.
2. Make sure the desired loop is selected and choose Edit -> Add to Loop Library.
3. Name the loop, select Loop or One Shot, and choose scale, genre, instrument, and mood descriptors.

That's all there is to it! Look in the loop library to find your loop alongside the others.

Tip

: Selecting Loop creates just that—a loop. It scales to the tempo and key of your song just like the loops Apple ships with GarageBand. One Shot is meant for things like sound effects and cymbal crashes that don't need to conform to a particular tempo or key.

Turn your guitar into a bass

So you have an electric guitar, but you don't have a bass. You could play bass lines on a MIDI keyboard, but maybe you lack one of those as well, or you want a more natural-sounding bass part. Here's a little trick to turn your guitar into a bass (virtually—don't worry, no power tools are required and your vintage axe won't be damaged):

1. Record your guitar playing the bass line an octave higher than you want it to sound when you're finished.
2. Open the Track Editor and move the Region Pitch slider down to -12. This transposes the guitar loop down one octave. Your guitar should sound a lot like a bass.
3. To make it even more realistic, double click the track header to open the Track Info pane. Play with the following effects settings until you like what you get:
 - Turn on the Compressor and move the slider to about 30.
 - Activate the Equalizer. Boost the bass a bit to cut the midrange.
 - Add some Amp Simulation. Try American Clean with a touch of gain. Turn the bass up, the midrange down, and set treble and presence to taste. Or, try one of the Bass Amp presets.



Figure 1: Click the Media Browser button to open (you guessed it) the Media Browser.

Combine two GarageBand projects in one song

You may occasionally find that you want to import another GarageBand project into your current song. For example, you may have a project (or a portion of a project) that would work perfectly as the intro to the current song you're recording. Or perhaps you have two versions of the same song that you want to combine into one (a la The Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever"). With GarageBand 3.0 you can now do this with ease:

1. Open the Media Browser by clicking the Media Browser button in the lower right corner of the GarageBand window. (See Figure 1.)
2. Select the Audio tab at the top of the Media Browser and select GarageBand/GarageBand to open your user's ~/Music/GarageBand folder in the Media Browser. (See Figure 2.)

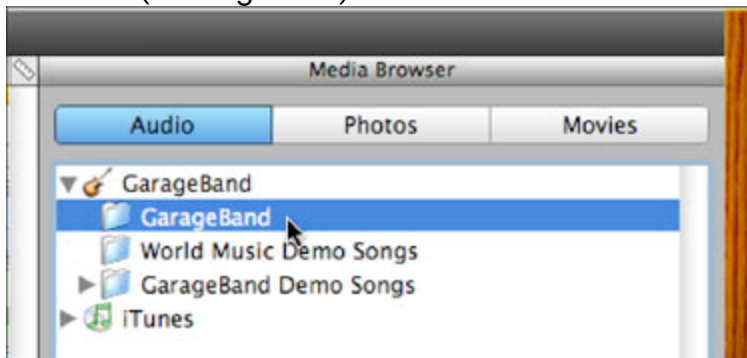
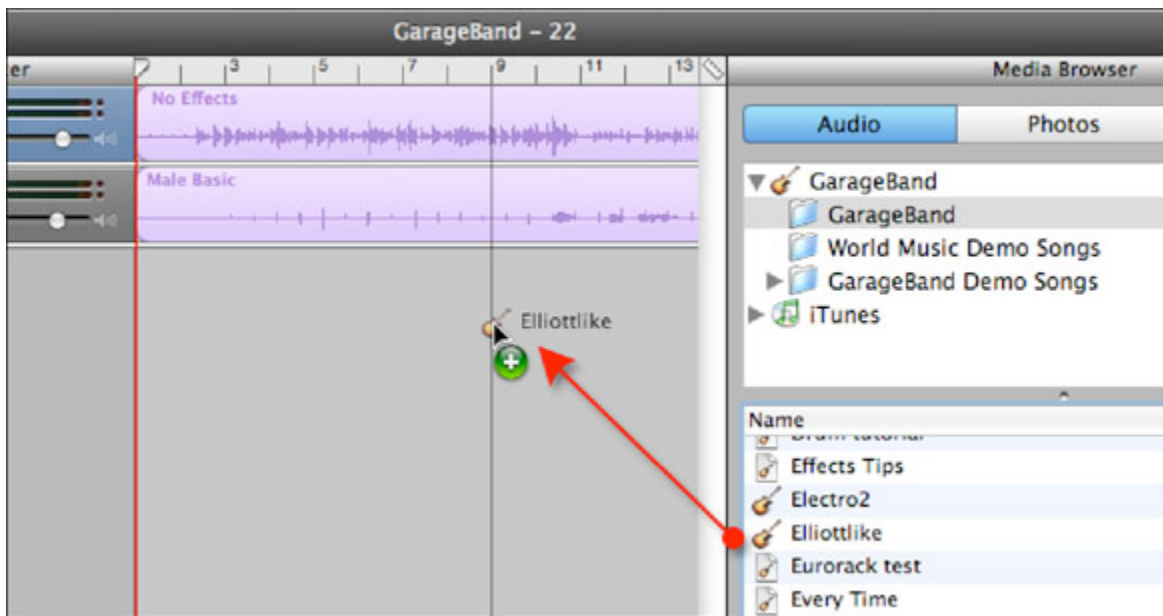


Figure 2: Select the GarageBand folder to access your GarageBand projects in the Media Browser.

3. Double-click the project you want to import in the bottom half of the Media Browser. If you haven't opened it from within the Media Browser before, GarageBand tells you the project was not saved with an iLife preview and asks if you'd like to open it in GarageBand so you can save it with an iLife preview. Click Yes. GarageBand opens the project and creates a mixdown.
4. Close this project and open the original song.
5. Open the Media Browser again and drag the song you just converted into the current project (as shown below).



Drag the song you want to import into the timeline just like you would a loop.<

The song appears as an orange region with a small guitar icon next to its name in the timeline. This indicates it's an imported project. To edit the imported song, do the following:

1. Double-click the imported region in the timeline. This opens up the Track Editor.
2. Click Open Original in the Track Editor.
3. Make any changes you want to the imported project, then save and close it.
4. GarageBand opens the project you started with, informs you that the imported project has been modified, and asks if you want to update the imported region. Click the Update Region button.

That's it. This process is a bit cumbersome if you are making frequent changes to both projects. It may make sense to finalize one of the songs as much as possible and then import the finished one into the other project. This will save you a lot of back and forth later on.

Note

: If you store your GarageBand projects somewhere other than the default location, you may not be able to access them from within the Media Browser. In this case, you can copy the project into your Users/

your name
/Music/GarageBand folder and access it from there.

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Jeff Tolbert is a Seattle-based musician who moonlights as an author. His latest books are [Take Control of Recording with GarageBand '08](#) and [Take Control of Making Music with GarageBand '08](#) (TidBits Publishing Inc., 2008).

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