Chapter 5

It (Usually) Starts with a Loop

*E*ven if you can't play or sing a note, you can have lots of fun using GarageBand's loops, which are prerecorded bits of music that require absolutely no talent on your part to sound great. In many cases, the fastest and easiest way to get a song started is to use one of the more than one thousand different loops that come with GarageBand.

What Is a Loop, Anyway?

A *loop,* in its simplest form, is a piece of music that can repeat (loop) seamlessly. Loops are designed this way; a good one can be repeated without missing a beat. When you repeat a loop, it's called *looping.* To use a loop you drag it onto a track (or onto the timeline, where a track is created for it automatically). But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Anyway, the thousand-plus little pieces of sound that came with GarageBand are called *loops.* If you repeat a loop seamlessly, the loop is *looped.* The act of doing so is called *looping.*

TECHNICAL STUFF In effect, the term *loop,* which indicates a repeating segment of music, stemmed from the fact that the first artists doing this (Eno and Fripp come to mind) would actually cut the magnetic recording tape and paste it back together in a loop that played continuously. It required multiple tape players and had to be awkward, but that's how looping got its start.

GarageBand has two kinds of loops: software instrument and real instrument loops, as follows:

✔ **Software instrument loops:** These are recorded using a MIDI keyboard or drum machine. Most of the loops that come with GarageBand are software instrument loops.

✔ **Real instrument loops:** These are recorded from an analog source (that is, electric guitars, basses, horns, wind instruments, and, of course, vocals). You don't find as many of these in the Apple Loops.

Spicing Up Your Songs with Loops

Entire music genres — dance, electronica, house music, rap, and many other kinds of music — have made an art form out of using loops. But don't let these genres limit your perception of how loops are used. In GarageBand, loops don't always have to be looped. In fact, many of GarageBand's loops sound better as a one-shot accent than they do when you loop (repeat) them more than once. Here are just a few of the possibilities:

✔ **Loops are often used as a background groove or as the central, driving theme of a song.** You can use a drum loop to provide the backbeat to your song or maybe just to keep the beat while you build other tracks with loops, instruments, and vocals.

✔ **Loops can also be used as musical punctuation marks.** You can make a horn part lurk in the chorus, or a funky guitar riff chug along in the verse. For better or verse (groan), a loop can be the perfect tool for your song, regardless of the sound that you seek (or you think you're seeking).

✔ **You can also use a loop to spice up a single chorus, bridge, or verse and make it just a little bit different than the other ones.** You can add a shaker or other percussion loop in the last verse and find that that was exactly what was missing in the song. Alternately, perhaps you need a bridge to break up a song. With three or four loops, you can make a bass line, drum fill, and horn riff that really punch up your song to the next level.

Finding Loops for Your Songs

Many loops are samples of music that were created by other artists. Other loops are entirely original work, including the loops that come with GarageBand.

REMEMBER

A debate has long raged on the ethics of making something new by using music samples (or loops) of another artist's work. In any event, you are free to use the loops that come with GarageBand any way you like, without further obligation. However, if you sample and loop a signature guitar riff by the Artist Formerly Known As Prince from his CD or tape, you run the risk of owing that mighty Minnesotan big bucks if and when your song becomes a smash-hit sensation. Here's the moral of story: When in doubt, ask for the artist's permission.

You don't have to confine yourself to the loops that Apple provided with GarageBand. Here are some other sources to check out:

✔ **Buy the GarageBand Jam Pack.** This costs a hundred bucks and gives you thousands of additional sounds, instruments, loops, effects, and so on.

TIP

The Jam Pack is a bargain if you're trying to make popular music. If you're trying to create other genres, particularly ones with orchestral instrumentation, it's not such a good deal, because it seems to be heavy with rock, pop, hip-hop, and urban loops and instruments and light on strings, horns, and other "classical" instruments. See Chapter 15 for more about Jam Pack.

✔ **Search for the free GarageBand-compatible loops on the Internet.** Within a few days of GarageBand's release, lots of free loops began showing up on the Net. Do a Google search for "GarageBand Free Loops" (include the quotation marks), and you'll find a ton of 'em.

TECHNICAL STUFF

The format for the loops that are used by GarageBand is known as *Apple Loops.* Other programs, including Apple's Soundtrack ($199), also use the Apple Loop format. Apple Loops can be found in your `Library/Application Support/GarageBand` folder and will have the `.aiff` file extension. They are uncompressed audio files that carry additional information that makes them work as Apple Loops.

TIP

If you want to create your own loops, you need the free Apple Loop SDK (Software Development Kit), which you can download from Apple's developer Web site at: `http://developer.apple.com/sdk/#AppleLoops`.

The SDK includes a tool called Soundtrack Loop Utility, which is the program used to create Apple Loop files. The kit also includes the guidelines for creating Apple Loops for use with GarageBand and Soundtrack.

Meet the Loop Browser

The Loop Browser is GarageBand's tool for managing the thousand(s) of loops in your loop library. The Loop Browser is where you find GarageBand's built-in loops, as well as any loops that you've picked up from other sources. You use the Loop Browser to find, preview, and select loops from your collection and then add them to tracks.

To take a look at this Loop Browser, you can make the browser appear at the bottom of the main window in one of the following ways:

- ✔ Click the little eye icon that's just below the tracks and Timeline zoom control in the lower-left corner of the main window.
- ✔ Choose Control⇨Show/Hide Loop Browser.
- ✔ Press ⌘-L. And yes, this Show/Hide Loop Browser command is indeed another one of those toggles.

Regardless of how you make the Loop Browser appear, when it does, the lower portion of the GarageBand window transforms into the Loop Browser, as shown in Figure 5-1.

Viewing loops in button or column view

The Loop Browser offers two convenient views — button or column — so that you can always find the right loop without working too hard. These views are as follows:

- ✔ **Button view:** This view gives you all the different categories that are available, including your favorites, in the form of ovoid buttons (refer to Figure 5-1). Click a button or several buttons, and the loops that match the clicked buttons are displayed in a list on the right side of the Loop Browser.
- ✔ **Column view:** If you're not the button type, GarageBand also offers the Column view. In Column view, you can browse your loops by genre, instruments, moods, or your favorites. Select a category in the leftmost column, and its contents appear in the column to its right, as shown in Figure 5-2.

Click the eye icon to toggle the Loop Browser open and closed.

Figure 5-1:
The Loop Browser hidden (top) and showing (bottom).

Figure 5-2: The Loop Browser in Column view.

Click to switch between button and column view.

REMEMBER

To toggle between the two views, click the icon in the lower-left corner of the Loop Browser (refer to Figure 5-2).

When you open the loop browser in Button view, as shown in Figure 5-1, it shows 30 buttons. If your display allows it, you can instead show up to 63 buttons if you follow these steps:

1. **Open the Loop Browser.**

2. **Move the cursor to the spot where you see the little hand in Figure 5-3.**

   Your cursor turns into a *grabber hand* like mine when it's over the right spot.

3. **When you see the grabber hand cursor, click and drag upward to see more buttons in the Loop Browser or downward to see fewer.**

Searching for a loop that you love

Finding a loop, of course, is the hard part, especially when you have thousands to wade through. GarageBand has the two views to help you, however. These views conveniently subdivide GarageBand loops into categories, instruments, genres, and more, as you may have noticed in the previous figures. From instruments to genres to style, Apple has done the heavy lifting; all you do is click buttons (or click the text in columns). GarageBand, marvel that it is, does the rest, filtering out loops that won't sound right in your song, based on the key and tempo that you chose when you started the project and your choices in the Loop Browser.

Figure 5-3:
Click on the
hot spot
(top), and
drag to
reveal more
buttons
(bottom).

Drag upward to see more buttons.

They say it's not the size of the tool, but the skill of the craftsperson. The following sections help you use GarageBand's tools to find just the right loop to craft a song.

Searching in Button view

The following steps walk you through a loop search in Button view:

1. **Start out with the Button view. If you're not already in Button view, click the Button View button in the lower-left corner of the Loop Browser.**

2. **Click one of the category buttons.**

   Figure 5-4 shows the 101 loops in the *Beats* category.

Figure 5-4:
The Loop Browser Button view, with only the Beats category selected.

That's cool but here's something even cooler: In Figure 5-4, the Beats button is highlighted. Some buttons have black text, and others have their name in light gray. This is the beauty of the Button view; GarageBand eliminates choices that don't fit your selection. (Look at the Organ button in Figure 5-4 to see what I mean).

3. **Now that GarageBand has narrowed things down to only loops that can work in this context, click more buttons to narrow your search further.**

   So, for example, clicking the Beats button alone yielded 101 loops. Clicking the Urban button alone got me 86 loops. But clicking both the Beats and Urban buttons narrowed the field to a more manageable nine loops, as shown in the right column of Figure 5-5.

4. **To further refine your choices, use the Scale pop-up menu in the lower-left corner of the Loop Browser.**

   Here's how the Scale menu options can further narrow your search:

   - Any
   - Minor
   - Major
   - Neither
   - Good for Both

5. **When you've narrowed your search enough to be manageable, listen to some of the loops (see the section, "Previewing Loops," later in the chapter.**

6. **When you find the appropriate loop or loops, drag them onto the timeline.**

Figure 5-5:
In this image, I've narrowed the selection to only loops that are in both the Beats and Urban categories.

Searching in Column view

Moving on to the Loop Browser's other view, the Column view is a lot like the Finder's Column view, so you should feel right at home with it. The following steps explain how a search in Column view works:

1. **Choose from By Genres, By Instruments, By Moods, or Favorites in the leftmost column, and the appropriate choices become available in the adjacent column to the right.**

2. **Choose from the choices that appear in the column to the right, and more choices will become available in the adjacent column to the right.**

3. **Choose one of the items in the third column, and the loops that match that criteria appear in the rightmost column, as shown in Figure 5-6.**

For example, in Figure 5-6, I chose By Genres⇨Electronic⇨Vinyl and found nine different DJ vinyl record scratches.

TIP

If you purchase the GarageBand Jam Pack for $99, you get a couple of dozen more.

Figure 5-6:
It won't
make you
an honorary
Beastie Boy,
but this
scratch may
hit the spot.

Search box

Using the Search box

Another tool that you can use is the Search box. If you type a generic term such as **Blues** in the search box at the bottom of the Loop Browser, you see a list of every loop Apple that is designated as Blues-like. Note that you cannot search for a loop by name using this method, even though it was the first thing that I thought about.

TIP

I don't use the Search tool; I found it to be unpredictable. The Button and Column views work for me and have become my tool of choice for selecting a loop.

Previewing loops

In the Loop Browser, after you find a loop that you think may fit the bill, you want to hear it, of course. So click its name in the list on the far right. A speaker icon appears before the loop's name when you click on it to indicate that the loop is currently playing. (Refer to Figure 5-6 to see the Speaker icon.) Now click the Speaker icon again to stop playing the loop.

This method allows you to quickly hear a loop without having to drag it into your song, listen to it, and delete it if you don't like it.

TIP

Better still, use the up and down arrow keys to navigate the list, and you can hear multiple loops in a row very quickly. You don't even have to wait for one loop to finish; just press the up or down arrow key and the next (or previous) loop starts playing almost immediately. This is wonderful when one name looks really good but has 43 available variations.

Keeping your favorite loops at the ready

Most people who use loops will have particular loops that they really like, or perhaps they will simply have loops that they want to be able to find quickly while they are working on a song. GarageBand has a Favorites list built into the Loop Browser, and it couldn't be easier to use. Here's how to use it:

✔ **Adding a loop to your Favorites:** When you find a loop that you like, simply select the Fav check box at the far right of the Loop Browser. This adds the loop to your Favorites list, which can be accessed through either the Button view or the Column view in the Loop Browser.

If you don't see a Fav column in the Loop Browser, either use the scroll bar below the list of loops or click the green gumdrop at the upper-left corner to fully expand the GarageBand window.

✔ **Removing a loop from your Favorites list:** This is simple, too. Just find the loop and deselect the Fav check box.

The fastest way is probably to find the loop in your Favorites category, but you can also find it any of the other ways you know (buttons, columns, search box) to deselect its check box.

The Favorites list is particularly handy when you find a loop that you like a lot, but the loop isn't quite right for the current project. Adding it to your Favorites list makes that loop easy to find when you're working on that next project where it will work perfectly.

Adding third-party loops to the Loop Browser

As I mention in the section, "Finding Loops for Your Songs," earlier in this chapter, you can find tons of free GarageBand loops on the Internet and in third-party packages. The question is, how do you make those loops appear in the Loop Browser?

The Jam Pack has its own installer, so you don't have to worry about how to install those loops. But because GarageBand offers no Import command, you may be at a loss as to how you add Apple Loops to your loop library. Here are the steps:

1. **Drag the loop onto the Loop Browser.**

2. **Drop it there, as shown in Figure 5-7.**

Figure 5-7:
Drag the loop file from the Finder and drop it into the Loop Browser to add it to your personal loop library.

When you drop the loop onto the Loop Browser, it is automatically placed in the appropriate location (the `Library/Application Support/GarageBand` folder). If the loop is a properly made Apple Loop, it will be categorized automatically; if it's not, it won't.

TIP

You can drag a folder or even a whole CD of loops onto the Loop Browser and all of the loops in all subfolders will be added.

Setting a Loop's Tempo

Each loop is created with its own tempo, which you can see in the Tempo column of the Loop Browser.

TIP

You can only see the Tempo, Key, Beats, and Favorites columns when the GarageBand window is expanded. Click the green gumdrop on the left side of the window's title bar to fully expand the window, or click and drag the lower-right corner of the window. Either way, when your window is about 1,000 pixels wide, the columns appear. To resize the columns, click and drag the column divider.

GarageBand can automatically change the tempo of any loop that you add to your song so that it matches the song's tempo. Even more intuitively, when you preview a loop in the Loop Browser, GarageBand plays the loop at the tempo of your song. Those crazy folks at Apple think of (almost) everything!

TIP

You can get an entirely different feel from a loop just by changing the tempo, or rather, by using that loop at a different tempo than what you see in the Tempo column. A slow, dirge-like drum loop may turn into something Latin-tinged or jazzy when you double its tempo. Think of the default tempos in the Tempo column as guidelines, and don't be afraid to experiment! To change the tempo, click and hold the tempo indicator, and a slider control pops up under your cursor. Drag it upward to increase the tempo and downward to decrease it.

Adding Loops to Tracks

TIP

I recommend laying down Software Instrument loops and tracks first, before you begin recording Real Instrument tracks. If you decide the tempo is too slow, or too fast, or the pitch is too high or low, you can change Software Instrument tracks without rerecording them. But if you record Real Instrument tracks first, and then decide a song is too slow, fast, high, or low, you'll have to rerecord all those Real Instrument tracks.

You add a loop to your song by dragging it from the Loop Browser to the Timeline. For example, Figure 5-8 shows the very tasty Blues Jazz Organ Riff 01 after I dragged it from the Loop Browser onto its own track on the Timeline.

Some loops are short and others are long, but most are 4, 8, or 16 beats in length. Don't worry much about length now, because as I explain the following sections, loops can be extended, shortened, or repeated indefinitely.

Dragging and dropping loops

You can drag and drop a loop in a few different ways:

- ✔ **Placing a loop on its own track:** Drag the loop into any empty spot on the Timeline, where a track of the appropriate type (real or software) is created for the loop automatically.

- ✔ **Inserting a loop onto an existing track:** Drag the loop onto that track, and GarageBand leaves it wherever you drop it on the track.

REMEMBER

The track, of course, must be the same type as the loop. Use green loops (software instruments) with green tracks and blue loops (real instruments) with blue tracks.

- ✔ **Moving a loop within or between tracks:** Drag the loop to its new destination and release it.

Figure 5-8:
Drop a loop
into a blank
spot on the
Timeline
(top), and
GarageBand
creates
a track to
hold it
automatic-
ally
(bottom).

There's no correct or better way to add loops to your song. If you have a
track of the proper type created already, you may want to drag the loop onto
it to keep your track count down. If you're just starting a song, you may want
each loop to create a new track. If the loop is being used as punctuation, you
may want to drag it onto existing audio and replace that audio with the loop.
It just depends what you're doing and the effect you're trying to achieve.

WARNING!

If something is on the track when you drop it, you will replace all or part of
that something.

Figure 5-9 shows what happens when you drop a loop onto a track that con-
tains recorded audio.

Figure 5-9: Dragging a loop onto an existing track (top) erases the part of the track that it replaces (bottom).

To put it another way, when I dragged a loop that was two measures long and dropped it at about 7 on the beat ruler (which is that number line at the top of the Timeline), two measures of my original recording (No Effects.6) disappeared, and the original region (No Effects.6) is split into two regions (No Effects.7 and No Effects.8). The two measures of the loop Acoustic Noodling 04

have replaced my original recording for those two measures (from 7 to 9 on the beat ruler).

You can drag as many loops onto one track as you like, but only one loop at a time can play in any single track. If you want multiple loops to play at the same time, you must put each loop on its own track.

Figure 5-10 shows a song that is composed entirely of loops.

If you've been following along at home, click the Play button or slap the spacebar now to hear your song o' loops.

Figure 5-10:
This song is 100% GarageBand loops, with no filler added.

Undoing and redoing a loop

If you drop a loop onto a track that has been recorded previously or has other loops in it, the loop segment that you're dragging replaces what you drop it on. In other words, if you drag a loop that's 4 beats long into the middle of a screaming guitar solo that you finally nailed after 56 attempts, the loop replaces 4 beats of your solo.

That's why GarageBand has an Undo feature — choose Edit➪Undo or press ⌘-Z. I'm not sure how many Undoes GarageBand allows you to do, but it's more than a handful. And did you notice the Redo command? Choose Edit➪Redo or press ⌘-Shift-Z to redo something that you've undone. You can

step forward or backward by repeating either command. This can be really useful for listening to something the way it sounded before you did whatever you just did, and the way it sounds after you did it.

WARNING!

As with any Mac program, however, Undo and Redo are linear, so pay attention lest you undo something you didn't want to undo.

Extending, shortening, and repeating loops

Not every loop works perfectly as is. When you drag a loop into your song, it's short — a lot shorter than your song unless you write extremely short songs. And, as you've heard several times, loops are designed to repeat (all together now) *seamlessly.* So, the next thing you need to know is how to loop a loop in a track. I start with that and then look at how you can make a loop longer (or shorter) without affecting that seamlessness. I also explain how to extend and shorten loops.

TIP

Before trying this exercise, it will be easier if you zoom in a little or a lot by sliding the Zoom controller to the right. It's harder to locate the correct area to click in when you're zoomed out (with the slider to the left).

Depending on where you click in a region, you see one of three cursors. When the cursor is over the right edge of a loop region (either type — software or real), it changes into one of two cursors, as follows:

- ✔ If you click in the top half of the right edge of a loop region, the loop pointer cursor — a vertical line with a circular arrow — appears.
- ✔ If you click in the bottom half of the left or right edge of a loop region, the resize pointer cursor — a vertical line with a straight arrow that points away from the region — appears.

When you click any other part of the region, the cursor is a plain arrow, or move, pointer. The move pointer is the one that you want when you're moving regions around within a track or moving them to other tracks.

All three pointers (also known as *cursors*) can be seen in Figure 5-11.

As you probably guessed, the loop pointer (the circled arrow) is the control for repeating (looping) a loop; the resize pointer (the straight arrow) is used for extending or shortening the length of a loop.

When you see the appropriate pointer, just click and drag. You'll know that you are repeating your loops if the outline of the track repeats and you see notches in the region denoting the repetitions (refer to Figure 5-10).

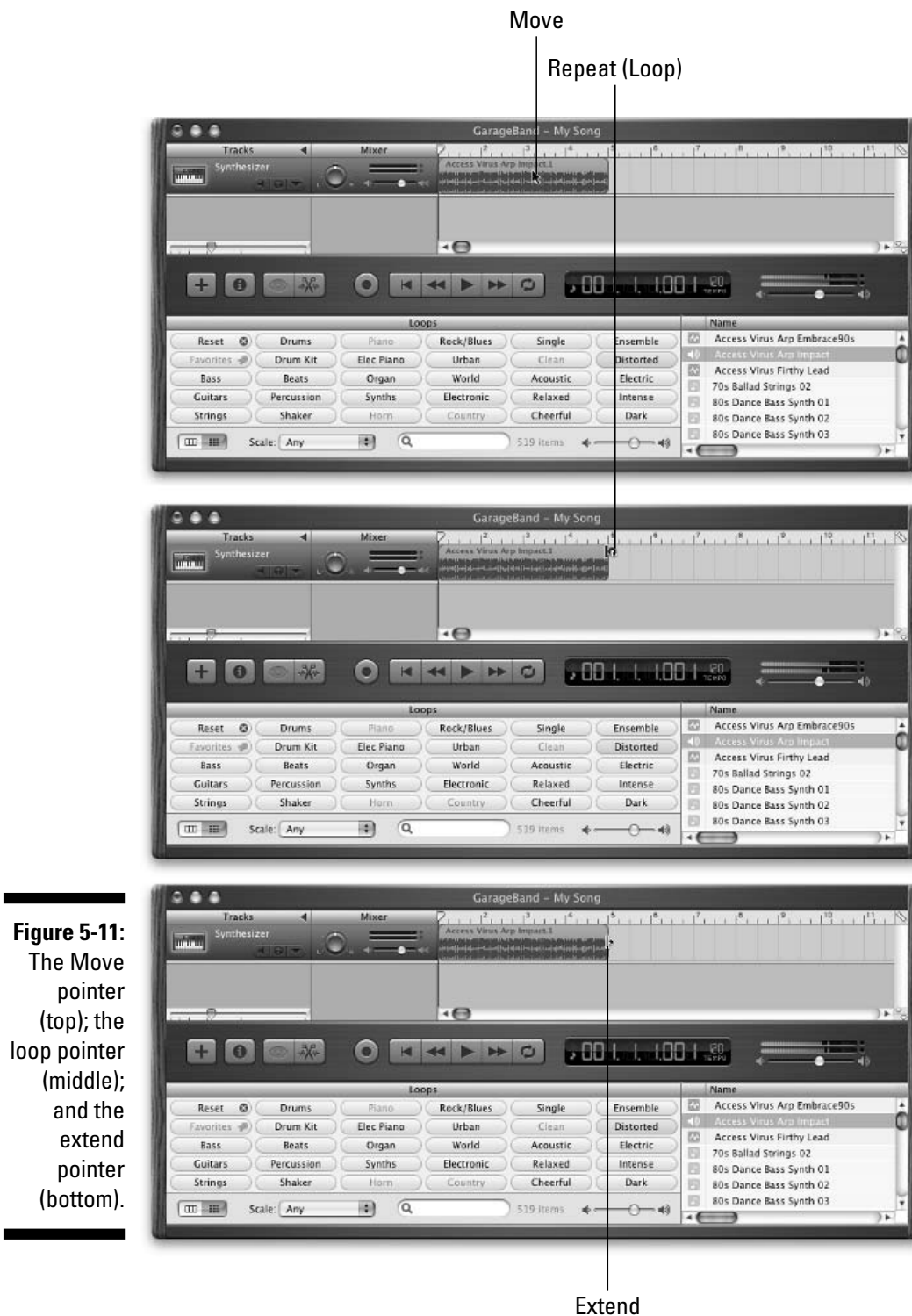If your region is smooth and notch-free, you are extending (or shortening) your loop.

Move

Repeat (Loop)

Figure 5-11:
The Move
pointer
(top); the
loop pointer
(middle);
and the
extend
pointer
(bottom).

Extend

TIP

Be careful when you extend, shorten, or repeat loops. Some loops can't be extended, but all loops can be shortened. Other loops can be extended but may only include empty space when you extend them (like the Funky Pop Bass 01 loop in Figure 5-11). It's also easy to extend, shorten, or repeat your loop to the wrong beat — or even slightly off beat. Use the guide marks in the beat ruler and the Snap to Grid feature (toggle it on or off) to help you. Finally, listen to the results before you do additional work on the project.

You can also edit loops in the same way you edit tracks. See Chapter 9 for more on editing.

Changing instrument and preset settings

Last, but certainly not least, way back in Chapter 3, I told you that you should never click the Save button after changing a preset without thinking about it first. And I said that if you don't change the filename before you click the Save button, you risk replacing an awesome-sounding instrument or preset that came with GarageBand with your own rendition, which may or may not suck. I stressed the importance of not replacing any of the Apple-supplied presets or instruments with your crude efforts, and promised that I would tell you more in Chapter 5.

Well, here we are in Chapter 5, and you can see the *more* part of the story if you select a loop in a trackand then choose Track➪Show Track Info or use the shortcut ⌘-I. This displays the Track Info window. Click details to expand the Track Info window, and you see all the settings that come with a loop. You can change presets for a loop here, and if you do, there's an important button that'll keep you from replacing the original presets with your changes.

It's the Make Preset command, and I urge you to use it whenever you create a sound that you like. If you use this command, you'll never make a fatal error and click the wrong button when the Do You Want to Save the File before Switching to a New One? alert box appears. After you click the Make Preset button, you can simply save the loop with your changes under a different name.

Editing Loops: A Preview

I explain some basic edits you can make to loops here. But you should also know that you can get really creative with loops with techniques you use to edit almost any track. For example, you can

✔ Split loops into different parts.

✔ Delete part of a loop.

> ✔ Move sections of a loop.
>
> ✔ Or rearrange the notes in a loop.

See Chapter 9 for details.

Reusing an edited loop in a different song

The fact that you can't save edits to a loop in the Loop Browser makes it harder to use edited loops in another song. But you can reuse that edited loop if you like by following these steps:

1. **Open the song that contains the loop that you want to reuse.**

2. **Copy the loop region to the Clipboard by choosing Edit⇨Copy or using the shortcut ⌘-C.**

3. **Open a different (or new) song, create the appropriate type of track for the loop (software or real instrument), and then paste it (choose Edit⇨Paste or press ⌘-V) into that track.**

   It's cumbersome, yes, but it makes sense within GarageBand's consumer-friendly approach to recording music. You'll never screw up one of the loops that came with the program — because you can't.