Chapter 3

GarageBand Preferences: How Do You Like Yours?

In This Chapter

- Using the General pane
- Working with the Audio/MIDI pane
- Understanding the Export pane
- Gaining experience with the Advanced pane

Before you work and play with GarageBand, you should familiarize yourself with its four preference panes and their settings, as shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: The GarageBand preference panes (clockwise from upper left): General, Audio/MIDI, Export, and Advanced.

So, if you already know how you like to set your preferences, feel free to skip the rest of this chapter. You'll miss a couple of important warnings and a few bits of low humor, but not much else.

For the rest of you — and especially those of you new to GarageBand — I was being facetious with the chapter title. You probably don't know how you like your preferences, at least not yet. But you will in just a few short pages. This chapter helps you adjust each item in every preference pane, accompanied by the usual wit and wisdom and whatever else that I think you may find helpful.

Some of you may think that I'm putting the cart before the horse by covering preferences in Chapter 3, because the features that these preferences affect aren't introduced until Parts II or III. But there's a method to my madness.

I'm just going to take a quick look at every one of the little critters (that is, the preference panes and settings) so that you know what they are, where they are, and how to configure them appropriately. For many of you, I'm hoping to do this *before* you try and make music that matters.

The General Pane: No Pain, in General

General, meet the readers; readers, meet (the) General (pane). Using the General pane is generally pretty painless. I examine each option, starting at the top. To get to the General pane, choose GarageBand➪Preferences (keyboard shortcut: ⌘-,) and make sure that General is selected in the navigation bar at the top of the Preferences window.

Metronome radio buttons

The General pane has the following Metronome radio buttons at its top: the During Recording and the During Playback and Recording radio buttons.

To make a choice that suits you, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- **To play or sing "in time" with a song's time signature, tempo, and other tracks, use the Metronome every time that you record a track.** Just remember that YMMV (your mileage may vary). Some musicians have perfect time and can literally play entire pieces without missing a beat. I'm such a lousy musician that I can't stay in time, even with the Metronome clicking away.

- **You may prefer to toggle the Metronome on and off — something that I do often.** To do so, choose Control➪Metronome or press ⌘-U. You can tell whether the Metronome is on (without listening) by looking for a check mark before Metronome in the Control menu. If it is on and you choose Control➪Metronome or press ⌘-U again, the check mark disappears and the metronome shuts up.
- **You can't toggle the Metronome on and off during recording or playback.** If you try to, GarageBand does receive your message. It just doesn't do anything about it until you stop or pause the recording or playback. When you click the Play button or press the spacebar, the song begins to play and you hear (or don't hear) the Metronome.

When I start a new project, I use the Metronome during playback to rehearse parts without recording them and to try out different tempos for a piece. But as soon as I've got drum and/or bass tracks — and maybe a guitar or keyboard part or two — I turn the Metronome off and leave it off. By this point, the other tracks should be in time with each other, so I should be able to keep time with them when I'm playing or singing, without the annoying tick of the Metronome in my ear.

As the song's track count increases, it gets harder to hear the Metronome anyway. That's why you may want to record your rhythm tracks — mostly drums and/or bass — first.

Just know that the Metronome is there if you want it, during recording or playback. It can be turned on and off in a heartbeat from the Control menu by pressing its keyboard shortcut — that is, unless that heart happens to beat while you're playing or recording.

Do not choose Control➪Metronome or press ⌘-U a second time before you pause/stop the song. If you do, you'll undo what you just did, which would lead you to believe that nothing happened. But something did happen — it just happened twice, putting it back the way it was.

As of version 1.0.1, GarageBand acts this way. I hope this is changed in later versions; I don't like stopping what may be a perfectly good take (which can be quite rare for me) just to turn the Metronome on and off.

If you're playing or recording, follow these steps to toggle the metronome on or off:

1. **Press the spacebar (to pause recording or playback).**
2. **Press ⌘-U (to turn the Metronome on or off).**
3. **Press the spacebar (to start playback) or press R (to start recording).**

This method is fast, I never do it twice and confuse myself, and I don't have to reach for the mouse or use a menu.

Ask me before you discard any unsaved changes

The Ask Before Discarding Unsaved Changes check box determines whether you see a warning message (shown in Figure 3-2) after you make changes to an instrument or preset and attempt to switch to another instrument or preset.

Figure 3-2: This important warning will never appear again if you deselect the Ask Before Discarding Unsaved Changes check box.

By default, this warning is on — and with good reason. Although Part II is really the place to find out about tweaking software instruments and presets, I walk you through this process now so that you understand why I think it's important to leave this option selected.

After I spent an hour working with the settings of the Grand Piano, adjusting equalization, echo, and other settings so that it sounded superb to my ear, I accidentally tried to switch to a different instrument, and the lifesaving warning shown in Figure 3-2 saved my bacon.

The warning shown in Figure 3-2 wouldn't have been any help if I weren't paying attention. The default button in the warning dialog box is Don't Save. If you aren't paying attention and click this button (or press Return), you lose any changes that you've made to the instrument or preset.

Because I liked the way my Grand Piano sounded, I did want to save my settings, so I clicked the Save button, and the dialog box shown in Figure 3-3 popped up.

Figure 3-3: Rename your instruments and presets before you save, or you'll lose the old versions.

The dialog box in Figure 3-3 is another one with which you need to proceed with caution. The default button in the Save Instrument dialog box (Figure 3-3) is Save. If you click the Save button without typing a new name, you lose the fantastic Grand Piano that came with GarageBand — the one that was configured by a professional musician and/or producer and is one of the nicest things about GarageBand. You'll still have your tweaked Grand Piano, for better or worse, but the original made-by-a-genuine-audio-pro Grand Piano is gone (at least until you reinstall GarageBand or replace it from a backup).

I really like GarageBand's Grand Piano. My piano may sound good to me now, but I sure don't want to replace that trained professional's Grand Piano. And in a few days, I'm likely to think that mine sounds like — well, like it isn't so good.

Always rename your instruments or presets before you click the Save button to save them. As shown in Figure 3-4, I append a descriptive word or two to the instrument's original name so that I can tell what instrument it is supposed to sound like.

If you later decide that your changes aren't as good as you thought, you can always delete them.

You may not know how to save an instrument or preset yet (a task that I explain in Part II). But this is another occasion where the sooner you get the right info, the less likely you are to lose the good stuff to carelessness, inattention, or accident. Blowing away a default instrument or preset isn't

the end of the world, but it can be a hassle to undo. Unfortunately, the Undo command doesn't work after you click the Save button in the Save Instrument dialog box.

Figure 3-4: If you don't rename an instrument before saving it, you could blow away the hard work of a trained professional.

The good news is that you can work around this minefield of dialog boxes: When you've painstakingly tweaked the settings for an instrument or preset, and everything is just the way you like it, save your settings right away by clicking the Save button in the Track Info window. Although we all lose useful stuff occasionally, you'll lose less good stuff if you save it immediately each time you tweak a preset and are happy with the result.

Anyway, as the punch line to a joke I've long forgotten goes, "Don't do dat!"

Keyword browsing

The Filter for More Relevant Results check box does exactly what it says: If you deselect this check box, you see more loops, but many of them don't sound good in your song.

It may seem that finding more loops would be a good thing, but resist the temptation — it's not. Try it if you have the time, and you'll see my point.

I always keep this check box selected. You can deselect yours if you like, but if you do, I hope you enjoy spending quality time with loops that sound lousy in your composition.

'Nuff said.

Resetting the keyword layout

The Loop Browser (which I cover in detail in Chapter 5) uses keywords to describe the sounds that are in the loops. The keywords are on buttons (in one of the Loop Browser's two views) and can be easily customized. The Reset button fixes your mess when you decide that you hate what you've created.

Click the Reset button, and GarageBand, polite little program that it is, asks whether you're sure, as you see in Figure 3-5.

Clicking the Yes button blows away any customizations that you've made and resets the Loop Browser button layout to its default — the way that it looked the first time you launched GarageBand.

Blowing away these customizations isn't a big deal; you don't lose sounds or settings. Only the names and positions of the keywords in the Loop Browser are changed.

Figure 3-5: Are you sure that you want to reset the order of those buttons?

The Audio/MIDI Pane

Most Macs have audio input and output ports, and many Macs have built-in microphones and speakers in addition to their ports. If you have a FireWire, USB, or PCI card audio interface, this interface has an audio-in and an audio-out port — or more likely, ports.

The Audio/MIDI pane is where you select the input and output that you want GarageBand to use. It's also where you optimize GarageBand's performance. Last but not least, this pane tells you how many MIDI devices GarageBand recognizes at the moment.

To open this pane, choose GarageBand➪Preferences (or press ⌘-,) and click Audio/MIDI at the top of the Preferences window. The following sections explain your options.

Audio ins and outs

The first items in this pane are the Audio Output and Audio Input menus. If your Mac has more than one audio input (for example, the built-in audio-in port plus a FireWire or USB audio interface) or output (for example, the built-in headphone port or a FireWire or USB audio interface), this is how you tell GarageBand which input or output to use.

Refer back to Figure 3-1. You see that two inputs (recording) and two outputs (playback) are available. These options reflect the built-in audio-in and audio-out ports on my Mac, plus the two additional ports on my Digidesign Mbox audio interface. (See Chapter 2 for details about ports and audio interfaces.) You can only see the Input menu in Figure 3-1, but the Output menu offers the same two choices.

That's it. If you only see one input and output choice in either menu on your Mac, wave bye-bye to them. You won't have to use them much until you add a new audio device to your setup, and you can ignore the upcoming warning.

If you see two or more input or output choices in either menu on your Mac, read the upcoming warning carefully.

If you see two or more choices in either menu *and* you like to plug and unplug your audio devices with reckless abandon (like yours truly), you should read this warning even more carefully, because it's even more likely to apply to you.

When you don't hear what you expect to hear, or the sound is not coming from the speakers or headphones that you expected to hear it from, don't panic. GarageBand (version 1.0.1) has a maddening tendency to change these inputs and outputs for no apparent reason and without your express permission, written or otherwise. So, if the music stops when you least expect it, look at these two menus first.

Here's another tidbit: When you choose a new input or output, GarageBand, always the model of politeness, asks whether you're sure and informs you that the change might take a minute, as you see in Figure 3-6.

Figure 3-6: This may take a minute — or two.

Optimizing your buffers

Next on the Audio/MIDI pane are the Optimize For radio buttons. Here's the scoop on your options:

- **Maximum Number of Simultaneous Tracks (Large Buffer Size):** If you see GarageBand error messages about the number of tracks, amount of RAM, processor speed, or anything else that is affecting your ability to record or play a song with the small buffer setting in effect, try selecting this radio button.

  The large buffer lets GarageBand play more tracks at once — as it says — but there's an insidious price to pay. This price is known as *latency* in the audio vernacular; this is the delay between the time a sound is made (by singing or playing) and the time that sound is heard. The delay is longer if you have a large buffer. The higher the latency, the harder it is to play and sing in time with other tracks. Latency sucks. Even though latency is measured in milliseconds, it still hurts your ability to do good work.

  Things are different when you're doing postproduction work — adding effects, setting levels, and so on — or when you're just listening to a track without recording anything. If this is the case, selecting the Maximum Number of Simultaneous Tracks (Large Buffer Size) radio button may improve GarageBand's performance.

- **Minimum Delay When Playing Instruments Live (Small Buffer Size):** If your Mac has enough horsepower and RAM to run GarageBand decently, select this radio button. It should be the right setting for you most of the time. It's the setting to use to avoid as much latency as possible. (Most higher-quality audio gear has extremely low (or zero) latency. That's part of the reason why it costs more.)

My advice: Use the large buffer only when the small buffer setting makes GarageBand complain. If you have a fast G4 or any G5 and lots of RAM (fast hard drives don't hurt, either), you may never need to use the large buffer setting, even with songs that have 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, or more tracks.

Were you humming *Snoopy vs. the Red Baron* after reading *10, 20, 30, 40, 50, or more* in the previous sentence? I was listening to the song. Don't know what I'm talking about? Get a hold of the 1966 hit by Florida's first (and probably only) faux-Brit pop/rock novelty act, The Royal Guardsmen, and you will.

GarageBand's performance, and the myriad things that you can do to improve it, is a recurring theme of this book. You hear lots more on the subject in many other chapters. So if changing buffer settings doesn't do the trick for you, something that you find in another chapter may.

Knowing your MIDI status

The last item in the Audio/MIDI pane is the MIDI Status item, which reports how many MIDI devices GarageBand believes are connected to your Mac at the moment. So, MIDI Status isn't a preference. It just displays a bit of information.

Back in Figure 3-1, the upper-right window shows my PowerBook, which has no MIDI devices connected to it. As you can see, MIDI Status detected 0 MIDI devices.

Now look at Figure 3-6. This is my other Mac, the G5, which has one MIDI device connected. As you can see, MIDI Status detected this device.

Now wave bye-bye to this feature. You probably won't need to look at it again. Not only is GarageBand smart enough to count the MIDI devices for you, but it's also polite enough to let you know each time that number changes, as you can see in Figure 3-7.

Figure 3-7: GarageBand politely informs you every time that a MIDI device is disconnected (top) or connected (bottom). Sweet!

The Export Pane

This pane is used to set your desired playlist, composer, and album name when you export a finished song into iTunes. As usual, you get to the pane by choosing GarageBand➪Preferences (or by pressing ⌘-,) and clicking the Export button in the navigation bar at the top of the window. When you're ready to export a song, GarageBand uses the information in the three text fields, as shown in Figure 3-8: iTunes Playlist, Composer Name, and Album Name.

Figure 3-8: GarageBand uses these tags by default when I export songs to iTunes.

So when I export a finished song by choosing File➪Export to iTunes, as shown in Figure 3-9, the song arrives in iTunes with the information that I typed into the Export pane already entered for me in iTunes, as shown in Figure 3-10.

Figure 3-9: I'll send this finished version of *Carmelita* to iTunes now.

Figure 3-10: Yep, GarageBand got it right: My artist name is Doctor Mac, a.k.a. Reese Peace, and my album is called *Smell the Glove XIV.* Nice job!

Notice that iTunes picked up the composer and album names that I typed into GarageBand's Export pane. That's nice, but what's nicer is that iTunes also picked up the title of the song — something I never typed into GarageBand or iTunes!

The Advanced Pane

The Advanced pane doesn't contain anything advanced. My guess is that Apple is trying to keep you from changing these settings unless someone else tells you to.

You find three pop-up menus here: Maximum Number of Real Instrument Tracks, Maximum Number of Software Instrument Tracks, and Number of Voices per Instrument, as shown in Figure 3-11. The idea is that you can adjust these settings and affect GarageBand's performance.

My advice is to set all three menus to Automatic and forget about it. Just leave 'em alone unless GarageBand begins spewing error messages at you.

If you are having performance problems, and changing the Optimize For setting (in the Audio/MIDI pane) doesn't help, you can try making changes in these menus next. Choose the lowest (or second-lowest) setting in each one for the first change that you make.

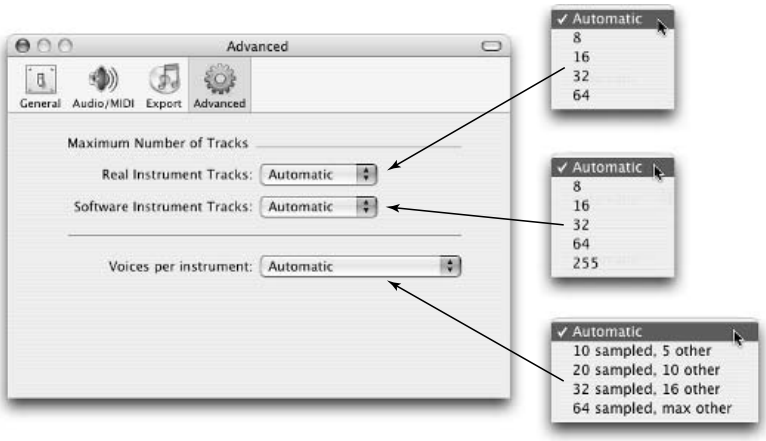

Figure 3-11: There's nothing advanced about these three menus that you find in the Advanced pane.

As you may remember from my Audio/MIDI pane discussion in the section "The Audio/MIDI Pane," earlier in this chapter, I promised to talk about GarageBand's performance (and what you can do about it) many times throughout this book. This was one of them.