Chapter 15

Ten Handy GarageBand Add-Ons

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In This Chapter

▶ Using Dent du Midi to make GarageBand work like a Karaoke machine

▶ Getting and staying in tune

▶ Playing with drum machines and guitar amp modelers

▶ Finding a free utility that lets you edit and modify Apple Loops

▶ Using your old VST plug-ins with GarageBand

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*A*s is the tradition here in Dummy-land, this chapter is part of The Part of Tens. That means it's guaranteed to contain a minimum of ten somethings — in this case, third-party software and hardware items that make GarageBand even better and more fun.

This chapter serves as a catchall for important stuff that isn't covered in the previous 14 chapters but should have been, and other stuff that I cover too briefly in previous chapters.

Any way you look at it, this chapter is chock-full of things that all GarageBand music producers ought to know about. Some are free, and others cost more than GarageBand itself, but what they all have in common is that they're worth knowing and may help you make better songs.

Using Dent du Midi for GarageBand Karaoke

One thing GarageBand doesn't do is import MIDI. So if you have a MIDI file with a fantastic arrangement of [*your favorite song name here*], you can't get those performances into GarageBand.

Or at least you couldn't before Bery Rinaldo released Dent du Midi, a fantastic free program that takes a standard MIDI file and creates separate software instrument files for each track it contains.

Here's a hot tip: If you don't happen to have MIDI files of your favorite songs, try the MIDI Explorer music search engine (`www.musicrobot.com`). It may not find a great rendition of every song every time, but it's the best I've found so far.

For more information, visit Bery Rinaldo's Web page:

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http://homepage.mac.com/beryrinaldo/ddm
```

Tuning Tunable Instrument(s)

Tune up before you record. I don't think I've mentioned this before, but it's really important. And, if you play guitar, bass, or any other stringed instrument, it's not only important, it's critical.

Your Mac has perfect pitch, so your software instruments are always in tune.

If even one string is even slightly out of tune, your track may sound lousy. Sometimes you can fix a bit of guitar out-of-tune-ness with Antares' miraculous Auto-tune plug-in (more on this later in this chapter), but if your guitar, bass, or other tunable instrument is out of tune, chances are your recordings of it will sound bad.

A few years back, your best bet would have been an electronic strobe-type tuner for $50 or $100. I've got a few of them (that still work), but because my guitar is plugged into my Mac already, I usually use a software tuner and just tune up while looking at my Mac screen.

Go to `www.versiontracker.com` and search for tuners. You can find a handful of them. Try them all to see which one you like best.

Chromatic Tuner

My favorite tuner is probably a $5 shareware program by Hidetomo Katsura called Chromatic Tuner, shown in Figure 15-1.
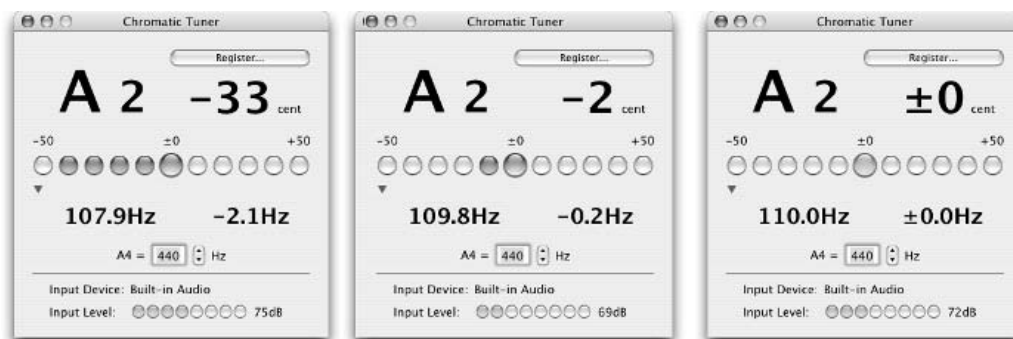
It's easy to use and easy to see, even when you're standing pretty far back from your Mac display.

You can try it for free and buy it for $5 from the following site:

```
http://homepage.mac.com/katsura/shareware.html
```

Figure 15-1:
My A string when it was very flat (left), a wee bit flat (middle), and perfectly on pitch (right).

At $5, it's a bargain. I paid for mine. If you decide you like it best, you should as well.

Audio Units tuner

If GarageBand is open, I often use an Audio Units plug-in instrument tuner that's free from emagic (the makers of Logic, an Apple-owned company). This tuner pops up on-screen when you choose it as an effect in the Track Info window, as shown in Figure 15-2.

You can grab the tuner at `www.emagic.de` in the Downloads section.

Figure 15-2:
emagic's et1 tuner works like a plug-in effect, so you can tune up right in GarageBand.
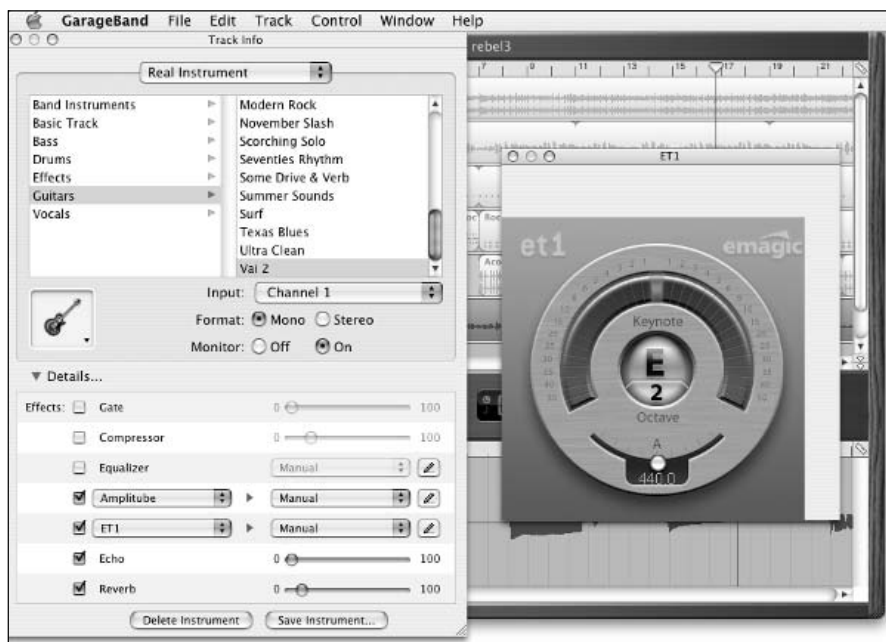
eMedia Tuner

Finally, if you own any of eMedia's (not to be confused with emagic's) excellent Guitar Method CDs (like I do), all of them include eMedia Tuner, which is shown in Figure 15-3. It's a perfectly good on-screen tuner, and it won't cost you a penny, assuming that you own an eMedia guitar instruction CD.

As shown in Figure 15-3, the top A is glowing yellow and the arrow is to the left of the line, meaning that the note is flat. The bottom A is glowing green and the arrow aligns perfectly with the line, meaning that the note is on pitch.
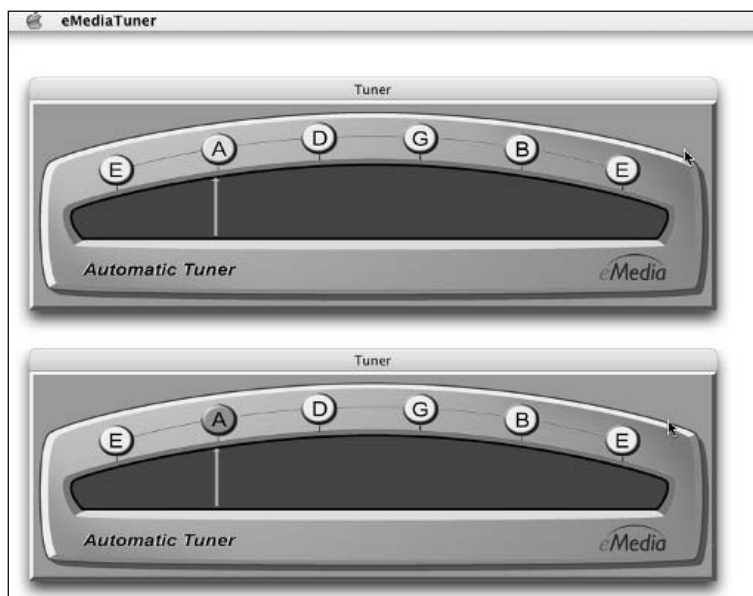
Figure 15-3:
Top: A flat note.
Bottom: The note is on pitch.

## Tuning Vocals and Instruments after the Fact with Auto-tune

Auto-tune is an amazing tool that you use to correct the pitch of vocals or other solo instruments in real time without distortion or artifacts. *Recording* magazine called it "the holy grail of recording" and "amazing." (And they were talking about version 1, which was released way back in 1997.) Both statements apply to version 4 in abundance, and I agree: Auto-tune is the holy grail of recording.

Calling Auto-tune amazing is an understatement: It's a miracle!

Version 4 of the Auto-tune plug-in was released during the writing of this book. It has an improved interface and several new features, as shown in Figure 15-4.

Figure 15-4: New in Auto-tune 4 are a virtual keyboard and a number of additional controls.
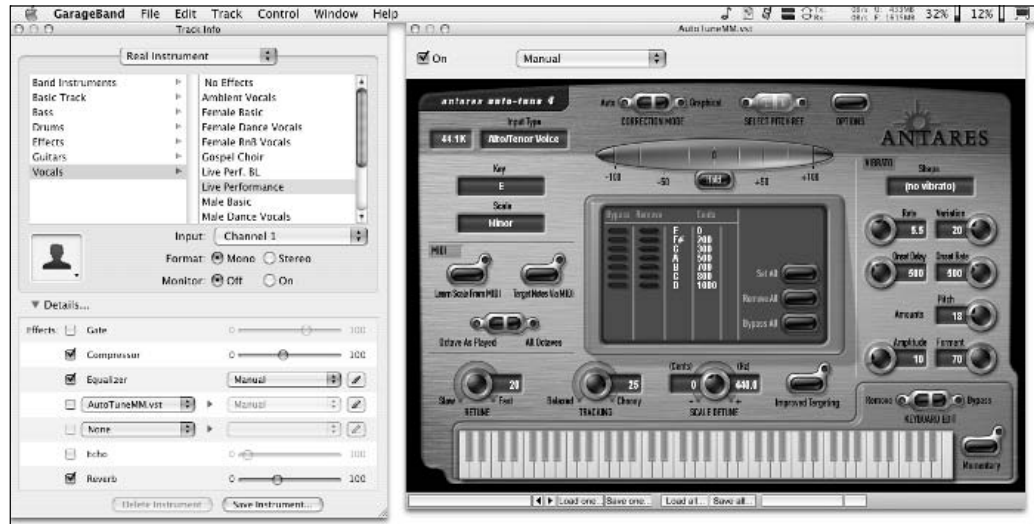
Auto-tune 4 is still the same price — $399 — and I know it isn't cheap. If you can afford it, your vocals will sound like a million dollars.

RANT & RAVE

That's not a bad return on your investment of four hundred bucks!

Give the free 10-day trial version a spin, and I'm sure you'll consider it money well spent.

WARNING!

Several versions of the plug-ins are available; make sure that you download the Audio Units version.

For more info and the demo, visit www.antarestech.com.

Creating Drum Loops and Tracks with iDrum

iDrum is a drum machine for OS X and GarageBand. For $50, you get both a stand-alone application and an Audio Units plug-in for GarageBand. The stand-alone version looks the same as the plug-in but can be used without opening GarageBand.

It's possible to create your own drum tracks and loops without iDrum, but the GarageBand software instrument editor isn't designed for heavy drum programming. It's far more tedious doing it with GarageBand's built-in editor — and not nearly as much fun.

There's something gratifying about a drum machine. Programming drums on one can be soothing, hypnotic, energizing, and profoundly gratifying, all at the same time.

I think this bit from the iDrum Web page says it all:

> *Drum machine neophytes will get to experience the same magical 'instant-gratification' fun that hooked an entire generation of musicians on the hardware drum machines of yesteryear. Pros will find that there's simply no faster, easier way to access and manage large unwieldy drum sample libraries, get a phat beat going, and get it exported into the format you need (and for less money than a replacement pad for your MPC 3000).*

Find out more at `www.bitshiftaudio.com`.

Adding Extra Loops, Effects, and More with GarageBand Jam Pack

If you're having fun with GarageBand, you'll have three times as much fun with GarageBand plus the GarageBand Jam Pack, a $99 add-on to GarageBand that adds over 2,000 new loops, more than 100 new effects presets, and over 100 new instruments, plus more than a dozen new guitar amplifier models.

Figure 15-5 shows the Software instrument folder before (left) and after (right) adding the Jam Pack to my copy of GarageBand.

All of GarageBand's support files, including loops and instruments, are stored in the Library/Application Support/GarageBand folder. The instruments are in the Library/Application Support/GarageBand/Instrument Library/Track Settings/Software/ folder, and the loops are in the Library/Application Support/ GarageBand/Apple Loops/ folder.

I've heard complaints that the Jam Pack leans too much to rock, pop, and hip-hop and that it leaves orchestral, jazz, and other types of music out in the cold. The same can be said about the instruments and loops that come with GarageBand. My answer is this: That's probably true, but because rock, pop, and even hip-hop are the kinds of music I listen to and play, it's never been a problem for me. I expect to see additional Jam Pack offerings from Apple in the future.

Figure 15-5:
The default GarageBand Software instrument folder (left) and the same folder after adding the Jam Pack (right).
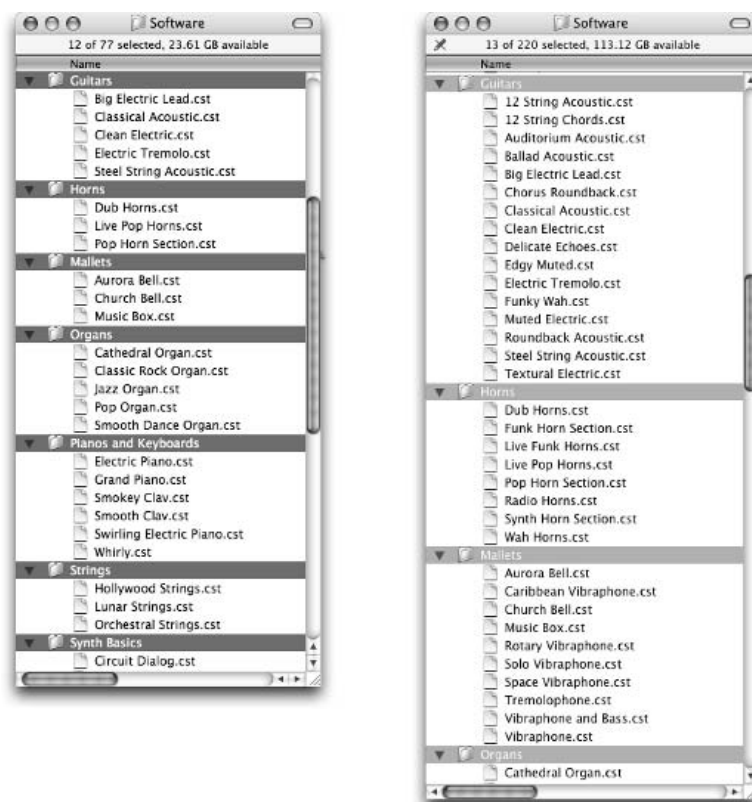
Adding Guitar Amps and Effects with AmpliTube

If you're a guitarist and you like GarageBand's built-in amplifier models, you'll love AmpliTube's never-ending assortment of amps, speakers, pre-amps, stomp box effects, and presets.

TIP

Even a mediocre guitar sounds great when you play it through AmpliTube, the plug-in that the pros use. AmpliTube (`www.amplitube.com`) is shown in Figure 15-6.

Hey, if it's good enough for Brian May (of Queen), it's good enough for me. I love this thing. It provides preamp, EQ, amp, cabinet, and mic modeling — a total of 1,260 amp configurations in all, and they're all based on classic modern and vintage guitar amps and effects.

Why, AmpliTube even has presets to make you sound just like your favorite guitarists — Stevie Ray, Carlos Santana, and The Edge, to name just a few.

In my case it's not *just like* them; rather, it's *kind of like them if you don't listen too closely.*

AmpliTube doesn't come cheap ($399), but it totally rocks and is a lot cheaper than 1,260 amps. I recommend it highly, especially if you're like I am and would enjoy having multiple guitar and amp sounds available without the expense of multiple guitars and amps.

Figure 15-6:
AmpliTube's
amp (top),
effects
(upper
middle), and
stomp box
(lower
middle)
windows,
plus a few
of the
available
presets
(bottom).

I recommend AmpliTube wholeheartedly. Four hundred dollars is a small price to pay for more than a thousand different guitar sounds.

Controlling GarageBand's Features with ShuttlePRO

The keyboard and mouse aren't the perfect input devices when you're producing audio (or video, for that matter). I don't expect you to consider grandiose solutions costing thousands of dollars, but I've found an inexpensive little desktop controller that's extremely useful when recording with GarageBand. It's called ShuttlePRO, a reasonably priced ($129), multibutton jog/shuttle controller made by Contour Design.

ShuttlePRO is a USB device with its own driver software; it comes preconfigured for dozens of audio and video apps, but not for GarageBand (as I write this).

No problem, though. The Contour ShuttlePRO software, shown in Figure 15-7, made it easy for me to set up all the buttons and knobs for GarageBand.

Figure 15-7: I set each button and knob to do what I wanted in GarageBand with the easy-to-use ShuttlePRO software.

In Figure 15-7, I'm setting the middle button in the second row to send a "space" character, which can play or pause GarageBand. I did the same for all the buttons and both knobs, and I was able to control my most-used GarageBand functions from ShuttlePRO instead of using the keyboard.

I've assigned the R key to Button 12, which means that when I press that button (the lowest one on the left), GarageBand begins recording. In addition to the Record button, I've configured other buttons to do the following and put little labels on each button to remind me what it does:

✔ Zoom in and out (on the Timeline)

✔ Turn Cycle Region on or off

✔ Turn the Metronome on or off

✔ Move the playhead to the beginning or end of the song

✔ Play, rewind, and fast forward a track

✔ Create a new track

✔ Record

✔ Mute

✔ Solo

And, of course:

✔ Undo

I used ShuttlePRO with Final Cut Pro and iMovie for many years but only recently realized that it would be wonderful for GarageBand, too. Because my ShuttlePro is old, I had to whip up the configuration settings for GarageBand (which was drop-dead simple). By the time you read this, I'll bet both ShuttlePRO and ShuttleXpress include GarageBand settings right out of the box. Even if they don't, it only took me about 5 minutes to configure all the settings for GarageBand.

I've never used ShuttleXpress, but the PRO model is a fantastic tool that can quickly pay for itself by saving you time whenever you record.

Check out ShuttlePRO at `www.contourdesign.com/shuttlepro/`.

Edit and Modify Loops with the Soundtrack Loop Utility

You can edit and modify Apple Loops with the Soundtrack Loop utility. The utility comes with Soundtrack and Final Cut Pro, but not with GarageBand. The tip is that you can download a copy, complete with PDF instruction manual, absolutely free from Apple, at the following Web site:

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http://developer.apple.com/sdk/
```

With this tool you can edit your loops or create new loops from scratch, adding all of the keywords and other information used by GarageBand and Soundtrack. If you want to make major changes to existing loops or use your own recordings to create loops compatible with GarageBand, this is the ticket (and it's free).

Converting VST Plug-Ins to AU Plug-Ins for GarageBand

The folks at Antares actually suggested this program to me when I asked about getting a copy of Auto-tune in the Audio Units (AU) plug-in format that GarageBand requires. They explained that they were working on one but that it wasn't done yet.

But, they informed me, if I wanted to use Auto-tune now, all I needed was this little $99 program from FXpansion Audio called VST to AU Adapter.

Of course, I got a copy the next day, and it converted my Auto-tune VST plug-in to an Auto-tune Audio Units plug-in that worked with GarageBand. It took less than a minute to set up and works flawlessly.

But it gets even better — I have used several audio programs over the years that use VST plug-ins, so I had a couple of dozen of them on my hard drive, including one of my favorite plug-ins, AmpliTube (which I discuss in the section "Adding Guitar Amps and Effects with AmpliTube," earlier in this chapter).

Guess what? VST to AU Adapter converted every single one of them — every VST effect that it found on my hard drive — to AU format. So now I get to use several dozen excellent VST effects in GarageBand in addition to Auto-tune.

If you have more than one or two decent VST plug-ins on your hard drive, FXpansion's VST to AU Adapter is well worth $99.

For more information, visit `www.fxpansion.com`.