

## Chapter 9

# Editing and Polishing Tracks

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Figuring out when to edit tracks
  - ▶ Understanding the differences between software and real instrument tracks when you edit
  - ▶ Fixing mistakes
  - ▶ Rearranging regions
  - ▶ Sweetening
- 

**T**his chapter covers the details of editing tracks, which is your last sanity check before you mix and master your song. Here, I ask you to think about editing, arranging, and sweetening your song — all the things that you do to give it that little something extra that makes some songs more special than others.

First, I explain some basics: the best time to edit and the important differences between editing software instrument and real instrument tracks. Then, I cover easy ways to fix mistakes without recording the whole track over. You'll also find all-purpose editing techniques that can be used to improve an imperfect track as well as things that you may (or may not) want to add to the song before you mix.



Before you jump into editing, if you plan to do heavy experimentation on a song, save a copy of it before you begin by choosing File⇨Save As. Then, if your experiment goes awry, you can always go back to the way the song was, even if you've saved again and again while you experimented.

## *“When Should I Edit Tracks?”*

The acts of editing and sweetening aren't time sensitive and can take place at almost any point in production or postproduction. In other words, you don't have to wait until the tracks are in the can to edit, arrange, or sweeten them.

You can do anything any time you like. I prefer to do my editing, arranging, and sweetening after all (or most) of the tracks are in the can, but there is no right or wrong way.



It's okay to edit or sweeten at any point in the process, but you should try to do all the editing and sweetening *before* you mix and master. If you edit or sweeten a song after you mix and master it, you'll have to go through at least one more cycle of remixing and remastering. Because remixing and remastering can be a huge time sucker, I try to avoid these tasks whenever possible by doing all my editing and sweetening (or what I think is all of it) before I even begin a rough mix.

## Editing Software versus Real Instrument Tracks

Not too surprisingly, software instruments offer you the greatest control when it comes to changing almost anything, including individual notes. That's because, as you've heard before, when you play a note on a MIDI keyboard (or other MIDI controller) it sends information *about the note you played* to GarageBand. So, because software instrument tracks contain information rather than recorded sound (which is what real instrument tracks contain), you can do things to them you can't do to a real instrument recording such as change the intensity, pitch, duration, and sustain of a note or notes, or change the song's tempo — a little or a lot — without sacrificing sound quality. You can't do those things to real instrument tracks.

When editing software or MIDI instruments, you have all sorts of options. Here are just a few examples:

- ✓ **Change the tempo.** If you feel the song is too fast or too slow, you can change the tempo a little or a lot and your software instrument tracks will adapt to the new tempo instantly and sound wonderful most of the time.
- ✓ **Change the pitch.** If you attempt to sing the song but can't reach the highest notes, you can transpose the song into a lower key as long as it doesn't yet contain real instrument tracks.



Real instrument tracks can't have their pitch shifted in GarageBand, though it is possible using third-party plug-ins for GarageBand or a higher-end audio program such as Logic Pro or Pro Tools.

- ✓ **Rearrange the notes.** You can get away with some pretty drastic edits in a software instrument track. For example, moving a note to the left or right changes *when* it is played, and moving a note up or down changes which note (or, in the case of some instruments including drums, which instrument) is played. You can change the duration of a note by grabbing either edge and dragging to extend or shorten it. To duplicate a note (or notes), select it and then Option-drag it to another location in the Editor's Timeline.

I explain all the details of editing tempo, pitch, and individual notes in the section, "Editing Software Instrument Tracks," later in this chapter.

You have less control over fixing boo-boos in a real instrument (which includes vocal tracks), but although you can't change sour notes or make them play longer, you still have options.

You can do what the pros call a punch in or punch out. A *punch in* or *punch out* is the act of recording over a section of a track that you have already recorded, without touching the rest of the track. So, if you have a mistake in your bass line, guitar line, or even your vocals, you can punch in over the mistake and fix it.



I made it sound easy to punch in, but in truth, it's often very hard to do this properly. Whenever you have a recorded session and you try and replace part of that session, ambient noises are likely to be different, in the case of analog instruments, or you may have a particular room sound on the track that would make replacing part of it difficult or impossible. If you have a mistake of that magnitude, you may just have to re-record the whole track.

## Fixing Flubs and Faux Pas

GarageBand lets you disguise and fix mistakes in tracks in a number of different ways. I am a terrible musician and a worse singer, so fixing and disguising mistakes after the fact is almost always faster and easier than re-recording the whole track, at least for me. So the next time you lay down a track that's almost perfect, or find a flaw that you hadn't noticed before in a track, don't delete the track until you've tried some of or all the following techniques.



Every so often a track has problems that can't be fixed or disguised. In the beginning, you won't know until you try, so try some of the techniques discussed in this chapter before you press Delete. After a while, you'll have a sixth sense: You'll know whether a mistake is fixable the moment that you make it.

## *Punching in and out to replace part of a track*

If you make a mistake when you record a track, you can sometimes fix the mistake by re-recording the part with the mistake. In recording parlance, this is called *punching in* and *punching out*.



In the olden days, punching in and out was an exotic thing that was only done in the best studios using the highest of high-end audio gear. If you were recording at home, your gear was too noisy to get away with punching in much if at all. So if there was a mistake in a track, you either masked it as best you could with the available tools or re-recorded it. As time marched onward, the technique trickled down to consumer recording equipment; today, punching in and out has become a checklist item, available in almost every audio program available today.



Technically speaking, punching in using GarageBand is as easy as it can be; doing it well enough to fool your ears is what is challenging.

When you punch in and out in GarageBand, you choose which part you re-record by using the Cycle Region.



When the Cycle Region is turned on, the playhead loops back to the beginning of the Cycle Region every time it reaches the end. So the region plays (or records) continually until you click the Stop button or press the spacebar.

To punch in and out on a track, follow these steps:

1. **With your song open, click the Cycle button (the one with the curved arrows) or press C to activate the Cycle Region.**

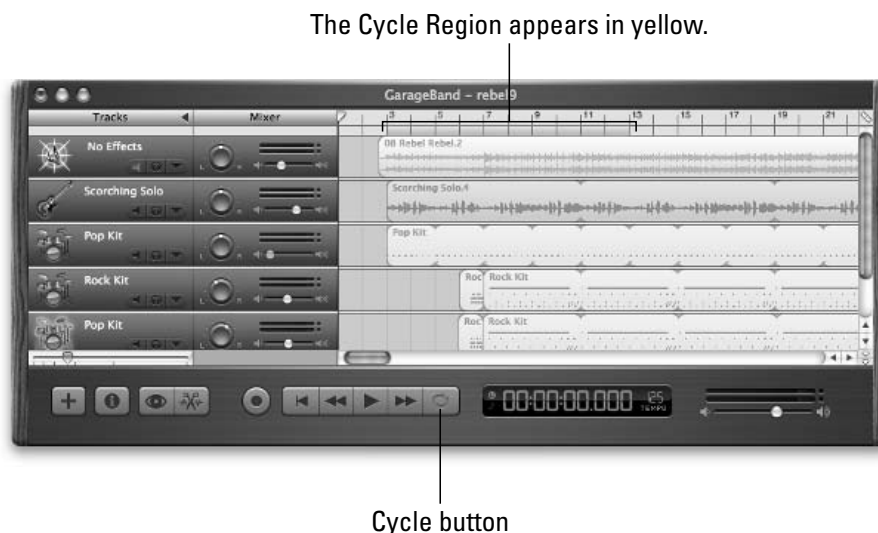
A yellow ruler appears under the beat ruler showing the Cycle Region, as shown in Figure 9-1.

The first time you use the Cycle Region, it appears at the far left end of the beat ruler, but if you move it, the Cycle Region appears where you moved it the next time you turn it on.

2. **Select the track that needs fixing.**
3. **Find the precise part that you want to re-record by moving the playhead and listening to the track.**
4. **Position the Cycle Region over the part that you want to re-record.**

Click and drag the middle of the yellow Cycle Region to move it; click and drag on either end to extend or shrink it.

**Figure 9-1:**  
Click the  
Cycle button  
to turn on  
the Cycle  
Region.



Use the Zoom slider to zoom in on the timeline if you need to.

Click Play or press the spacebar to play the contents of the Cycle Region. If it's the exact part you want to re-record, proceed to Step 5. If it's not, continue to move, expand, and/or contract the Cycle Region until it contains only the precise portion of the track you wish to re-record, and then proceed to Step 5.



It's almost impossible to perform a decent punch in without using GarageBand's Count In feature. Choose Control⇧Count In and select it. Count In is a toggle: It's on when there is a check mark next to its name in the menu.

**5. Click the Record button (the red dot button) or press R to start recording.**

**6. Play the part.**

If the track is a real instrument, only the first pass through the cycle region is recorded as you play. If you don't stop recording after your first pass, the second pass (and every subsequent pass) plays back what was recorded on the first pass.

But if the track is a software instrument, something different and very useful happens instead: Every pass is recorded and merged with the previous passes. So, for example, you can play snare drum on the first pass, the high-hat on the second pass, and the ride cymbal on the third pass. When you click the Stop button or press the spacebar, all three passes have been recorded on the same track. Neat, eh?

7. When you are finished playing the part, click the Play button or press the spacebar to stop recording.



Now listen to the track closely and if it's not what you want, try again.

When you're finished with this punch-in, don't forget to click the Cycle button or press C to turn off the Cycle Region.

## *Just undo it . . . and then redo it*

With GarageBand, it's easy to undo many mistakes immediately. You can undo the last thing that you did. But did you know that you can undo the next-to-last thing you did, and the thing before that one, and the thing before that, and so on?

The first time you use the Undo feature, it reverses the last change that you made. But tell GarageBand to undo a second time, and it undoes the action before that. You can continue to use Undo as needed.

Here's a quick list of undo and redo commands:

- ✓ **To undo the previous action:** Choose Edit⇨Undo or press ⌘-Z.
- ✓ **To redo what you just undid:** Choose Edit⇨Redo or press ⌘-Shift-Z; what you undid will be redone.
- ✓ **To get the ultimate undo:** Choose File⇨Revert to Saved, and your song goes back to the way it was the last time you saved it.



The Undo and Redo features are linear, so pay close attention. It's easy to undo something good — something that you *didn't* want to have undone — if you just keep pressing the shortcut without watching what happens each time. Instead of relying too heavily on the Undo and Redo features, save a copy of your song before you begin undoing or redoing by choosing File⇨Save As.

## *Splitting and joining tracks*

You can take any region on any track and divide it into two or more parts. This has many practical uses, but the one that you'll probably use most is deleting part of a region.

From a cough to a botched note, splitting a region is the most direct, easiest, and often the best way to edit out a part of a track that you no longer need.

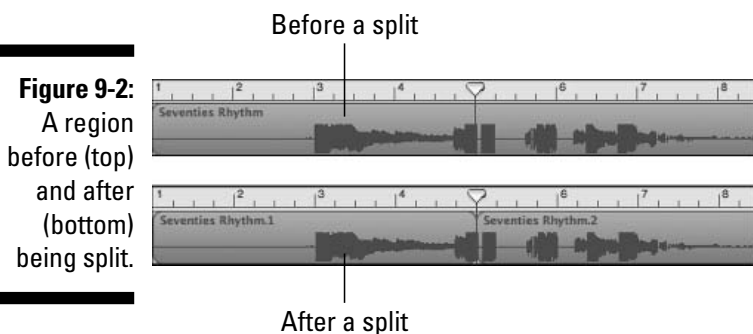


If you trim out “dead space” in live instrument tracks, your songs will have a brighter, cleaner sound. For example, if you start recording 12 seconds before the first note the guitar plays, you should trim out the 12 seconds of dead space before the guitar kicks in. The same thing goes for vocals — if you recorded air, trim it out. That dead space has noise in it. Deleting the dead space lowers the overall noise level for your song, so if you want the cleanest, brightest mix possible, delete dead space on any real instrument track if it’s longer than 2–3 seconds. It’s a big hassle, but your song will sound better for your trouble.

To split a region, follow these steps:

1. **To split a single region, click it once to select it; to select multiple regions, Shift-click or drag to select them all.**
2. **Move the playhead to the precise point where you want the split to occur.**
3. **Choose Edit→Split or press ⌘-T.**

The region will split into two regions at the playhead, as shown in Figure 9-2. Go ahead and try it out. I have all the time in the world.



**Figure 9-2:**

A region before (top) and after (bottom) being split.

You can split a region into as many regions as you want. If you’re cutting out part of a track, you may need to add a second split to isolate the section that you want to delete. After you do that, select the section of the track that needs to go and delete it by pressing Backspace or Delete.

## *Silencing mistakes with the Track Volume rubber band*

Some tracks just can’t be fixed. But even if nothing else so far in this chapter has helped, you can try using one more tool: the Track Volume rubber band. Basically, you make the mistake fade out gradually so that no one knows that the mistake was ever there.

Here's how to use the Track Volume rubber band to erase a mistake:

1. **Select the track that you want to adjust.**
2. **Make the Track Volume check box appear by clicking the little triangular Reveal Track Volume button under the track's name in the Tracks column.**
3. **Click the Track Volume check box so a check mark appears.**

The track volume rubber band control is now enabled.

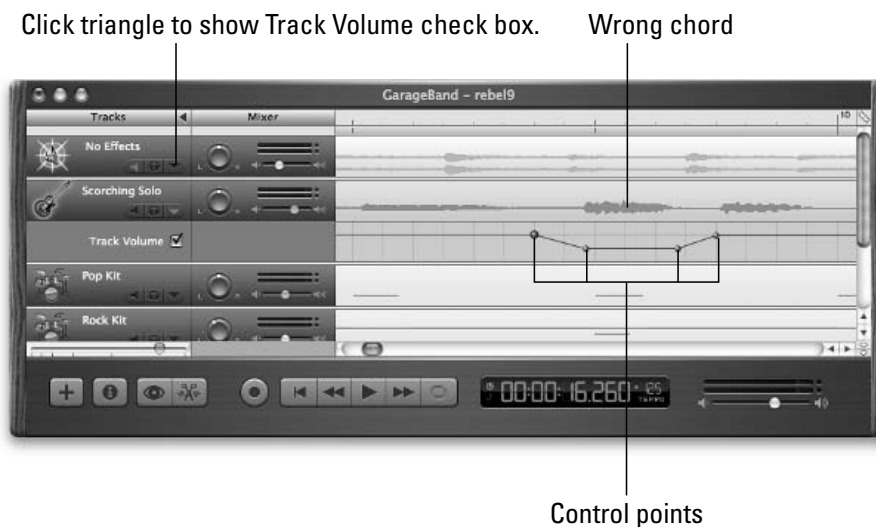
4. **At the point where you want to begin fading out the mistake, click on the rubber band to create a control point.**

It's best to start fading out before the mistake actually happens. If you fade out too quickly, it sounds goofy.

5. **Click near the beginning of the mistake, near the end of the mistake, and a few beats after the end of the mistake to create three more control points.**
6. **Drag the two control points in the middle downwards to reduce or eliminate the sound during that portion of the track, as shown in Figure 9-3.**

**Figure 9-3:**

I played the wrong chord, but the rubber band cheat makes it sound OK.



To find the exact location where you want to begin fading out and back in, move the playhead back and forth and click the Play button or press the spacebar to listen. When you find the location of the mistake, begin your fade out a few beats before the mistake occurs and begin to fade back in a little before the mistake ends.



This trick won't work every time, but if your song has enough other stuff going on, you can usually fade a mistake right out of the mix this way without anyone but you noticing.

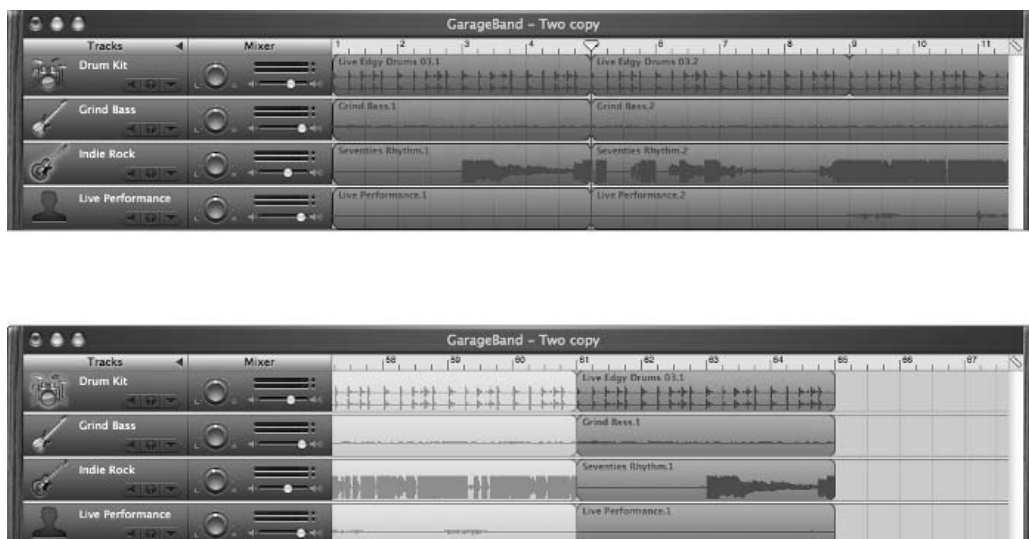
## Moving Regions

It's important to remember that with digital recording, you can easily move anything to anywhere. You can take any region and drag it anywhere on the Timeline, even to an entirely different track.

For example, perhaps you decide that the intro you recorded for a song would really make a much better *ending*. Just split all the tracks at the end of the intro (the start of the fifth measure in Figure 9-4). Then select the intro regions and drag them to the tail of the song, as shown in Figure 9-4.

**Figure 9-4:**

I split the intro at the end of the fourth measure (top) and then dragged all four intro regions to the tail end of the song (bottom).



You can move real and software regions anywhere on the Timeline with just one proviso: Software instrument regions can only go on a software instrument track, and real instrument regions can only go on a real instrument track.

## Editing Software Instrument Tracks

Software instrument (green) tracks offer the greatest flexibility for editing. You can, of course, choose a different instrument, but you can also change the pitch or tempo (and not just by a little), without ill effect. You can't do

those things to real instruments. If you alter their tempo or pitch very much, they'll sound unnatural — or worse.



I recommend laying down software instrument tracks first, before you begin recording real instrument tracks. If you decide that the tempo is too slow or too fast, or the pitch is too high or low, you can make the appropriate changes to software instrument tracks without re-recording the tracks. But if you record real instrument tracks first and then decide that a song is too slow, fast, high, or low, you have to re-record all those real instrument tracks.

## Changing the tempo

GarageBand lets you change the tempo of an entire song but not the tempo of an individual track. If you change the tempo of one track, you have to change the tempo of all the tracks.

If that's what you want to do — change the tempo of the song — click the Tempo readout on the digital display, as shown in Figure 9-5, and then use the slider to adjust your tempo. Slide it upward to increase the tempo and downward to decrease it.

**Figure 9-5:** To change the tempo of a song, click where it says 150 TEMPO, and a slider control pops up.



## Changing the pitch

If you can't sing the highest notes, or, as often happens to me, you can play the part more easily in a different key, you can change the pitch of any software instrument track at any time and it won't affect the rest of your tracks. But as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, changing pitch only works with software instrument tracks.

If you want to change the key of the whole song, you'll have to do the following for each instrument (except drums and percussion instruments).

Here's how to change the pitch of a software instrument track:

1. **Double-click the region you wish to change the pitch of or single click to select it and then click the Track Editor button.**

The Track Editor button appears in the lower-left corner of the timeline window; it looks like a tiny scissors cutting a little audio waveform.

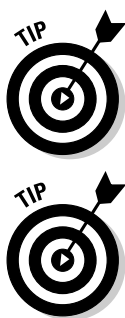
2. **In the Advanced panel, move the Transpose slider to the left or right to make the pitch of your loop rise or fall.**

The number that is changing is the number of half steps from the original pitch. You can also type the number into the box above the slider.

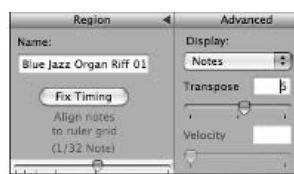
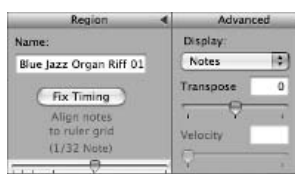
You may want to change the pitch by a little or a lot, depending upon your intent. If you can't quite hit the highest note in a song, dropping the song's pitch by one, two, or three half steps ought to do the trick.

I often make my software instrument tracks sound different by transposing them up or down a full octave, which is 12 half steps. Sometimes when I double-track an instrument, I'll transpose one of the tracks up or down an octave for a fuller sound. An added benefit of transposing by a factor of 12 is that you don't have to change the pitch of any other instrument tracks.

Figure 9-6 shows the Transpose slider, with the default setting of 0 on the left and transposed up 5 half-steps on the right.



**Figure 9-6:**  
You can change the pitch of your loop by moving the Transpose slider to the right or the left, or by typing a new value in the Transpose field.



3. Listen to the track by clicking the Play button or pressing the space-bar on your keyboard.
4. Adjust the Transpose setting some more if necessary.
5. (Optional) Click the Track Editor button again to hide the Track Editor portion of the timeline window.



Be careful if you change the pitch of just one loop or track. The new pitch needs to be in the same key as other loops and tracks, or it will sound icky. Without getting into a bunch of musical theory that is beyond the scope of this book (plus, I couldn't explain it to you, anyway), just remember to listen and confirm that everything sounds right after you adjust the pitch (or adjust most things, for that matter).

## *Rearranging notes in a track*

Now, without further ado, this section shows you how to do fine-tune editing in a software instrument track by rearranging the notes. Remember, in the Tracks list, Mixer, and regions in the Timeline, blue denotes a real instrument and green denotes a software instrument.



Before undertaking any major surgery on your song, it's a good idea to save a copy of the song first by choosing File⇨Save As and entering a new name for the file before clicking the Save button. That way if you screw things up totally, you can go back to where you were before you made the changes by opening the original (and un-screwed up) song file.

To edit a software instrument track, follow these steps:

1. **Double-click in the region that you want to edit, or single-click to select the region and click the Track Editor button.**

The Track Editor button appears in the lower-left corner of the timeline window; it looks like a tiny scissors cutting a little audio waveform.

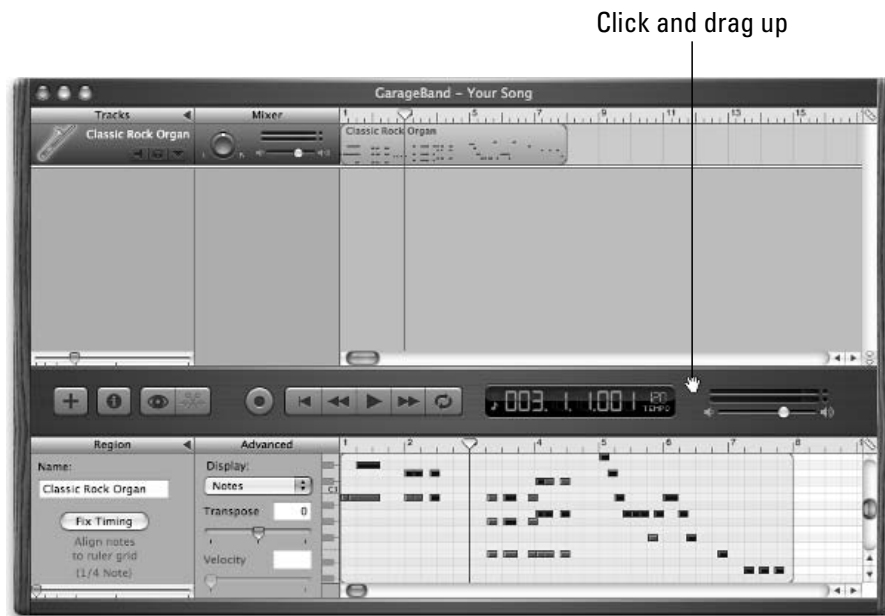
I chose the Classic Rock Organ software instrument in the Organ category. When I record, a series of dashes on a graph paper-like grid appears in the Track Editor.

Those dashes are the notes in your track. GarageBand displays notes in sort of a digital mode, as opposed to the traditional system, which uses a staff and note symbols. The dashes of various lengths that are displayed in a green track are the notes, and each horizontal line in that graph represents a different note on the musical scale and/or instrument, depending on the software instrument.



If you don't see the dashes after you record, use the scroll bar to scroll up and down until you find them, or click either of the magic spots, as shown in Figure 9-7.

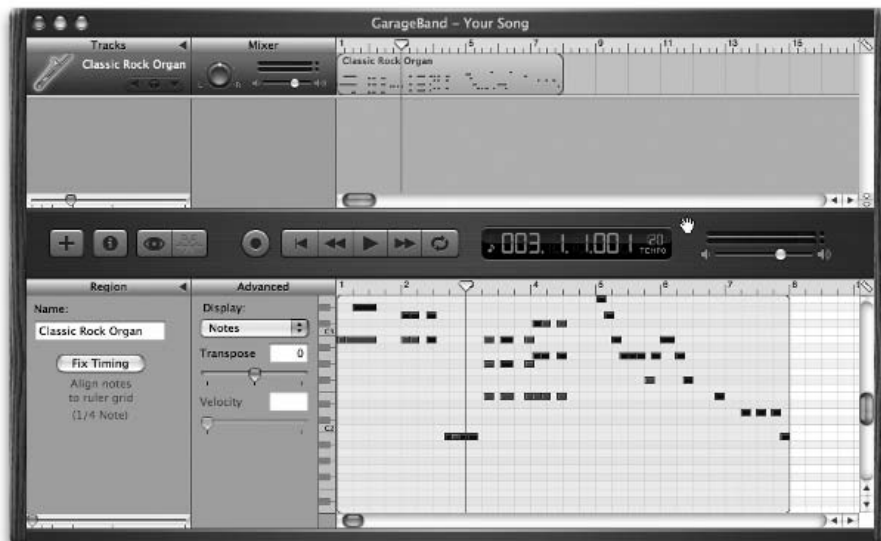
**Figure 9-7:**  
Click the  
magic spot  
and drag up  
to enlarge  
the Track  
Editor.



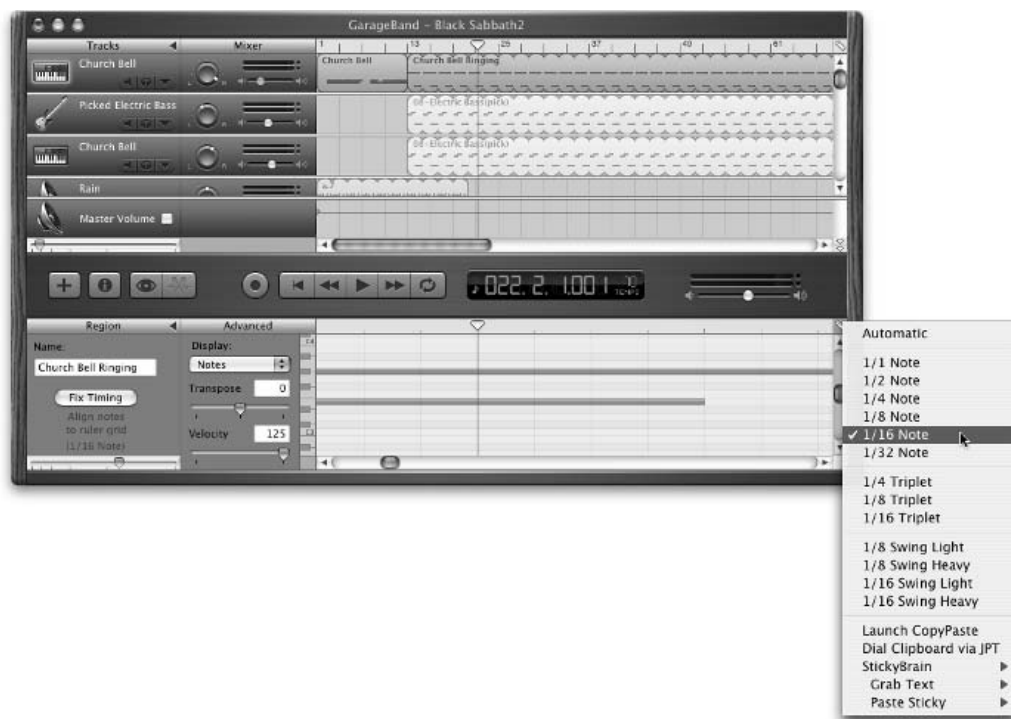
2. To expand the Track Editor, hover the cursor over either of the magic spots shown in Figure 9-7. When the cursor turns into a hand, you're over the right spot and can drag upward.

After you drag upward, you see the expanded Track Editor, as shown in Figure 9-8.

**Figure 9-8:**  
The  
expanded  
Track Editor;  
the dashes  
represent  
recorded  
notes.



3. To change the grid scale (the spacing of the vertical lines), click the Ruler icon in the upper-right corner of the Track Editor and select the beat structure that you want. (See Figure 9-9.)



**Figure 9-9:** Change the grid scale by clicking this Ruler icon.

4. Change the zoom in the Track Editor so that you can see the notes that you want to edit.

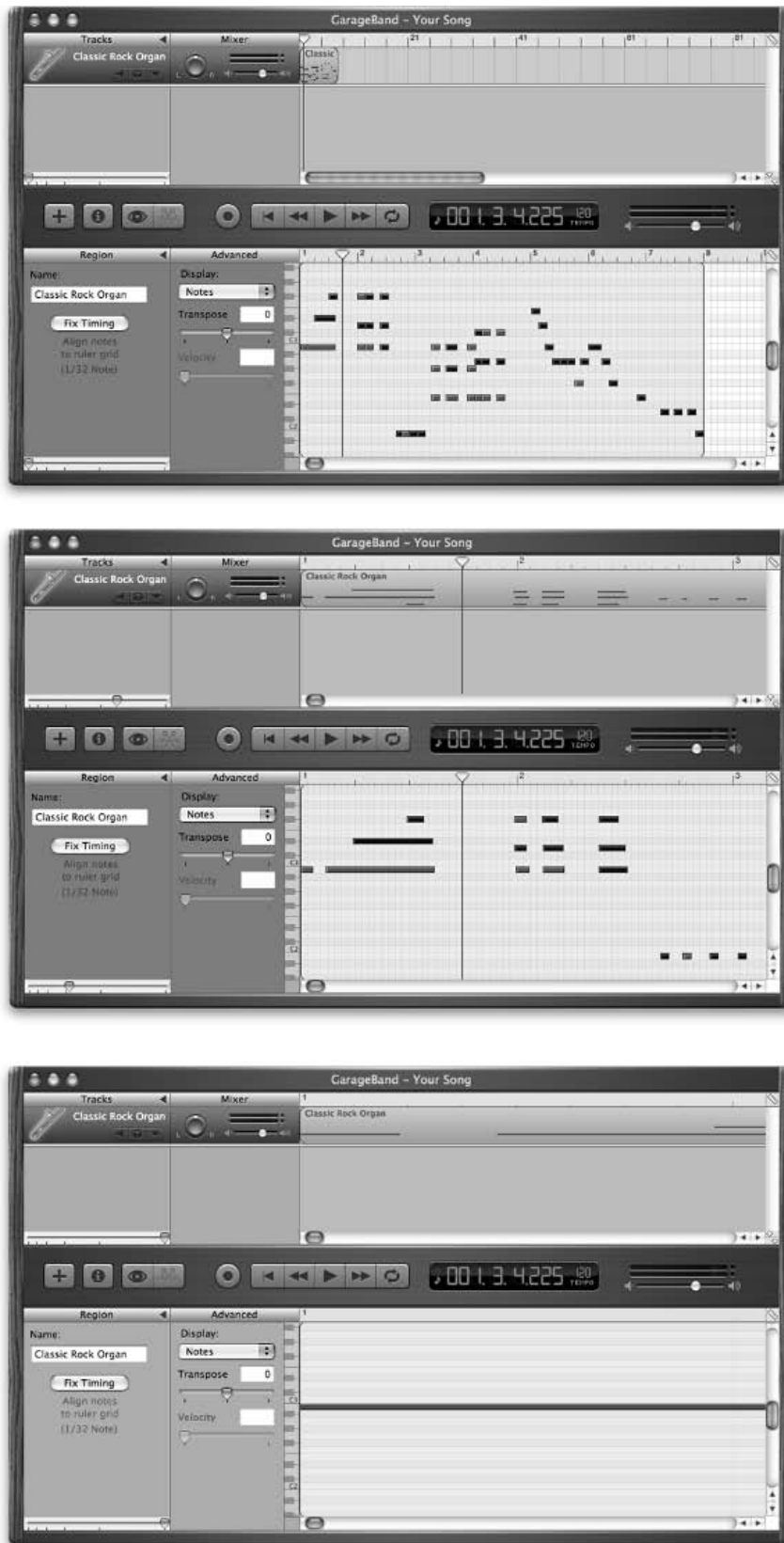


The Track Editor has its own zoom-control slider in the lower-left corner of the GarageBand window. It works just like the Timeline zoom control — slide it to the right and you zoom in on the notes in the Editor. You see fewer notes but have finer control over the individual notes that you do see. Conversely, slide it to the right and you zoom out. This lets you see more notes at once, but they're smaller and harder to drag around, as shown in Figure 9-10.

Notice that the size of each dash grows when you zoom in and that the top picture shows nine measures of MIDI information (that's what the dashes represent). The middle picture shows two measures' worth, and the bottom picture shows less than one measure.



You may have recorded many different notes, so you may need to scroll up and down in the Track Editor to see them all.



**Figure 9-10:** Editing the software instrument track at three zoom levels: least (top), more zoom (middle), and most zoom (bottom).

5. **To edit the notes in the Track Editor, click one of the dashes to select it. Do you hear that? When you click a dash, you are “playing” the note that it represents. To select multiple notes, either click them while holding down the Shift key or drag a selection marquee around them. With the note or notes selected, you can start making changes.**

Here’s a quick list of the edits that you can make to the notes:

- **To move a note or notes:** Slide the note to the right or the left on the same horizontal line, and you change *when* it is played. Slide the note up or down to a different horizontal line and you change *the pitch* of the note. It’s that simple! When you move a dash, you change when the note is played, the pitch of the note, or both.
  - **To change the length of a note:** Click the note that you want to change; then grab the right edge and drag it to the right or the left. Dragging the edge to the right lengthens the note, and dragging it to the left shortens the note.
  - **To duplicate a note:** Option-drag the note to another spot on the grid. You can do the same thing with multiple notes by Shift-clicking or dragging a selection rectangle around as many dashes as you wish.
  - **To delete a note:** Select the note (single-click it) and press Delete (or Backspace). Again, you can select multiple notes and delete them the same way.
6. **To create new notes without touching the keyboard (the music keyboard, that is), press ⌘. Your cursor turns into a little pencil. (See Figure 9-11.) When you click anywhere in the Track Editor grid, a new note appears.**

As always, listen to your changes by clicking the Play button or pressing the spacebar on your keyboard. If you’re satisfied, you can close the Track Editor by clicking the Track Editor button. If you’re sure you’re satisfied, save your changes by choosing File⇧Save.

You can also see a Fix Timing button in the region section of the Track Editor. Clicking this button moves all notes in the track to the nearest beat in the grid. This can be a great way to do a quick-and-dirty fix on your track. For example, if you have a drum track that has some beats that aren’t right in time, clicking the Fix Timing button should fix all the beats that were off. Listen to the track, and if the results weren’t what you expected, choose Edit⇧Undo or use the shortcut ⌘-Z, choose a different value from the Ruler menu, and try Fix Timing again. Repeat the process until you’re satisfied.



The grid scale affects the amount of correction applied if you click the Fix Timing button. Notice that it correlates with the choice in the ruler menu (refer to Figure 9-9). The closer the grid lines, the smaller the “fix” increments. So if you choose Fix Timing with the scale set to 1/1 Note, it will move the note a lot farther to fix it than if you Fix Timing with the scale set to 1/32 Note.



**Figure 9-11:**  
Press ⌘;  
the pencil  
cursor  
means that  
clicking will  
add notes.



Pencil cursor



Be careful when using the Fix Timing feature. If you have pickup notes or anything funky or off-beat, you may completely mess up your track by *fixing* its timing. If you don't like the results, undo the fix immediately, lest you lose your chance by saving or crashing before you do (undo).

## Sweetening: To Add New Material? Or Not?

Now that you have seen how to edit tracks and remove excess gunk, you should consider one last thing before you're ready to mix and master: Does this song need anything else? If it does, that's called *sweetening*, which is otherwise known as adding just one (or two or three) more track(s) during postproduction.

Why would you want to add something else to your song at this point? If you wanted it, you would have recorded it already, right? Well, one truism about producing music is that less is usually more. The fastest way to wreck a perfectly good song is to add one more track to it.

That is, unless you actually need that track.

Deciding when to sweeten a track is soooooo very subjective. But I know that a time will come when you need to add that track to your song, so I want to give you some food for thought.



There's an old poker maxim that says, "Look for a reason to fold." It means that you should not look for reasons to pay more money to stay in the game, but rather you should look for a reason to stop wasting money on the hand and lay down your cards. I am going to rejigger that phrase with a musical twist and tell you that when you're recording a song, you should look for a reason to leave it alone. Make it your mantra, and say it along with me now:

*Look for a reason to leave it alone.*

Okay, now that you have the right frame of mind, you're ready to look at some of the times when you may be better off *not* leaving a track alone and adding something before you mix.

Many songs that were recorded during the last several decades have been comprised of one or two guitars, drums, a bass, some keyboards, a lead vocal, and maybe background singers. But many more hit songs had all that plus one other memorable thing, such as percussion, backing vocals, special effects, horn, woodwinds, or strings.

In the sections that follow, I talk about some familiar examples (familiar to me, at least) of songs with worthwhile extras, and I give you tips for adding them to your song with GarageBand.

## ***Percussion***

Think about The Beatles' song "I Wanna Hold Your Hand." What's the best part of the song? The handclaps are it for me.

What about the cowbell part in Blue Oyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper"? An entire Saturday Night Live skit is dedicated to that! (I also have a love/hate relationship with the sound of the cowbell in "Mississippi Queen," by Leslie West's Mountain.)

From maracas to a guiro and from a tambourine to a triangle (can you say, "Comfortably Numb"), sometimes just a whack or two on a percussion instrument is just what a song needs.



Don't forget your loops. If you can't play what you want to hear or you can't find the right instrument to play it, try your loops. There's a loop or part of a loop for almost every occasion. Chapter 5 is all about loops.

## *Backing vocals*

Does your song have backing vocals? Does it need them? Are you capable?

A backing vocal can often be the backbone of a song. Heck, in some songs, I find myself singing along with the backing vocal instead of the lead part. The chorus of “What I Like About You,” by The Romantics, leaps to mind, or maybe the oooooohhhhs in “All My Loving,” by The Beatles.

Many of the songs in your music library probably have compelling backup vocals.

I wouldn’t presume to tell you how to write music, but I will tell you that the best way to find that magic is to experiment, so create a new track and sing a few ooohhs or la-la-la-las along with your song. Or hum. There’s no telling what may come out. Who knows, the killer counter-melody might come rolling off your lips.

### *Greek chorus*

Or how about the Greek chorus approach? Edwin Starr had a huge hit in the ’70s with his anthem “War.” The backing vocals are a classic Greek chorus school of backup vocals.

On paper it would look like this:

War! Huh! Good God, ya’ll!

What is it good for?

Absolutely nothing!

Say it again!

But here’s how it’s sung:

Everyone: *War! Huh!*

Edwin: *Good God ya’ll!*

Backup singers: *What is it good for?*

Edwin: *Absolutely*

Backup singers: *Nothing!*

Edwin: *Say it again!*

It all flows together, and I bet when you sing it, you sing it as if it were one person singing the whole thing. But if that were the case, it wouldn't sound like it does. Most songs wouldn't work with a back-and-forth Greek chorus background vocal like that, but you never know.

### *Harmony vocals*

Some parts of the song may beg for a harmony vocal, and the right harmony track can make a great song out of what was merely a good one.



If you don't know how to sing harmony, take some vocal classes.

Again, when it comes to harmony, less is more. Using a harmony vocal throughout your whole song is usually a bad idea (with “Bye Bye Love,” by The Everly Brothers, being one possible exception). If you think that your song needs a harmony vocal, try adding it on just the verse, or the chorus, or even just *one* verse or chorus.

## *Special effects*

Producers have been adding sound effects to popular music for as long as people have been listening to music. From the spooky Theremin floating throughout The Beach Boys' classic, “Good Vibrations,” to the toll of the bells in Pink Floyd's “Time” or the cash register in “Money” — or even the crying tires and the busting glass in J. Frank Wilson's “Last Kiss” — the right sound effect at the right place in the right song can make all the difference in the world.

On the other hand, a wrongly placed sound can make your serious attempt sound like a song parody. So once again, look for a reason to leave it alone.

If you feel you must, you can create interesting sounds using many different software instruments including most of the Synth presets. Or record the sound to a Real Instrument track using a microphone. The only limit is your imagination.

## *Horns, woodwinds, and strings*

Once upon a time, it would have cost tens of thousands of dollars to add horns or strings to a song, but today a full orchestra is at your command, just a MIDI keyboard away. You can lay down a layer of sophisticated musical goodness underneath your song — from an upright bass to a string ensemble.

This is another example of something that you just need to experiment with to know whether it's going to work in a song. So don't be afraid to try anything. You never know what will sound totally cool, and you can always delete your change if it doesn't.



Unless you know how to arrange a song for woodwinds, horns, or strings, you may want to keep it simple. In other words, it's easier to play a single horn or string part than to build an entire marching band or string ensemble arrangement.

As awesome as synthesized and sampled horns, woodwinds, and strings are with modern technology, real musicians still sound better. You just can't duplicate the nuances and subtle sounds that live musicians can coax from their instruments.

Of course, this is *GarageBand For Dummies* and not *Million Dollar Recording For Dummies*, so use those software instruments and don't worry about it.

