

digital dj tips



DJ SOFTWARE GUIDE 2015

20 Essential Programs & Apps for Digital DJs



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THANKS

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

LIKE IT OR HATE IT, DIGITAL DJING NEEDS software. Not just DJ software, but software to help you organise, prepare and improve your digital music collection, and to make more from it, all in the name of getting organised, doing more and having as much fun as possible with your DJing hobby (or career).

Whether it's making that crucial first choice as to the right DJ software for you, choosing the right DJ app to use on your iPhone, iPad or Android tablet, finding a great tag editor to help you tidy up your music library, or even making your own down 'n' dirty mashups and re-edits to make your sets stand out, software is what you'll use to get there.

THIS GUIDE IS DIVIDED INTO TWO PARTS: DJ software, and supporting software. The DJ software section is where you'll find the actual programs you'll be using to play your music in front of an audience. This is where typically you'll decide to go with one program or another, although you may choose two (one for your "main" laptop, and one for your iOS or Android device, for example).

The second part of the guide is a collection of all the other "supporting" programs and apps that help DJs to get in front of their audiences with the best, most

organised, greatest sounding and most useful digital music collections they can possibly have.

This is where you'll find software and apps to help you organise and tidy up your music, improve its sound quality, audition it quicker, and even make quick edits and remixes to suit your DJ sets. Some of this software you'll use every day, some only very occasionally, and you certainly won't be interested in getting it all; but I can guarantee you'll want some of it.

THE SOFTWARE IS A MIXTURE OF FREE AND (usually) paid for programs and apps, for PC and Mac (and occasionally iOS/Android); the guide tells you clearly which platforms each piece of software works on.

Even if you're an old hand, I hope you find something useful in here that you hadn't considered using before, but if you're a beginner, I truly hope this guide will help you cut through the noise and find the software and apps that will help you break through and play the very best DJ sets possible in the coming months and years.

HAPPY DJING!

- Phil Morse
Digital DJ Tips Editor
March 2015

PART 1: DJ SOFTWARE

> TRAKTOR PRO



FROM GERMAN COMPANY NATIVE INSTRUMENTS, Traktor is a massively popular program, as complex as it is capable. If you want the very best software for playing EDM, and you fancy yourself as a DJ/producer, just as happy chopping up loops and composing on the fly with your own samples as "spinning" in the traditional way, Traktor will probably be the software for you.

While a few years back you could find Traktor bundled with all types of DJ controllers from many manufacturers, nowadays if you want to use Traktor, you're probably going to be using it on Native Instruments' own hardware. The Traktor Kontrol S2 is a good choice to use with Traktor if you want to cover the basics, the Traktor Kontrol S4 is better if you want four decks and to incorporate outside

equipment, and the Traktor Kontrol S8 unlocks the power of the company's "Remix Decks" idea, where you can layer beat and tempo matched samples over your DJ sets to create something entirely new, among other things.

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS ALSO HAS A NUMBER OF "modular" controllers that work with Traktor, either in the case of the Kontrol X1 for use as part of a digital vinyl system (where you control Traktor using vinyl on real record decks), giving you an "in" with Traktor into pro DJ booths, too, or with the Kontrol F1, to further unlock the Remix Decks.

The screenshot shows the Traktor Scratch Pro software interface. It features two main decks, each with a waveform display and various controls like pitch sliders and crossfader knobs. The left deck has tracks for "Don't You Want Some More" by Vaggio and "In Da House Tonight - Traktor Rem" by Secondcity. The right deck has tracks for "Sandlande" by Kellerkind and "Follow The Leader Acapella". Below the decks is a library view showing a list of tracks with columns for Cover Art, Artist, Title, BPM, Key, Rating, and Play Date. A red box highlights the library section with the text: "GOOD IF: YOU WANT TO BE A DJ/PRODUCER, YOU LOVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC ABOVE ALL ELSE".

TRAKTOR PRO 2

BAD IF: YOU WANT TO KEEP EVERYTHING SIMPLE, OR PLAY A WIDER VARIETY OF SOUNDS

> SERATO DJ



SERATO IS ANOTHER TRULY HUGE NAME IN digital DJing. It started off as a purist digital vinyl system (a way of playing digital music from laptop using a DJ's existing record decks and mixer, originally called "Serato Scratch Live"), but has slowly grown into a fully fledged digital DJ solution, gaining a name change to "Serato DJ" along the way, and is now capable of being used in a whole number of ways, much like Traktor.

Curiously, while Traktor is now commonly only used on Native Instruments' DJ controllers as we mentioned, Serato has gone from having a relatively small number of tightly controlled hardware partners (Serato doesn't make its own hardware) to working with pretty much everyone and anyone in the industry, so you can find versions of Serato bundled with controllers from the very cheapest right up to the top. However, the company still

licenses the software to its own specifications, meaning Serato DJ remains very easy to set up and use (it literally is "plug and play"); this is one of its noted benefits.

SERATO IS THE SOFTWARE THAT DJS WHO PLAY

a wider choice of music than just electronic styles tend to prefer, as it has fewer loop and sample based features, and instead appeals to a more varied section of the DJing community. That's not to say it doesn't have creative editing features (for example, one of its paid-for additions is "Serato Flip", an addictive way to make easy, fast re-edits of tunes), just that if you want to DJ "the way it's always been done" but with software instead of physical media, Serato will be your natural choice over the brave new world of Traktor.



GOOD IF: YOU WANT A DIGITAL SYSTEM THAT HAS STRONG CONNECTIONS TO "HOW DJING'S ALWAYS BEEN DONE"

BAD IF: YOU WANT COMPLETE FLEXIBILITY (IT IS NOT AS MAPPABLE AS OTHER SYSTEMS)



> VIRTUAL DJ



THE THIRD OF OUR TRULY MASSIVE PROGRAMS, Virtual DJ has had millions upon millions of downloads over the years, and remains a solid choice for any DJ, but especially for video, karaoke and mobile DJs, who form the nucleus of its users. With streaming music built right in, it is great for mobile DJs who may need to find that all-important request online half-way through a set, and what it maybe lacks in visual finesse it more than makes up for in flexibility and compatibility (it works with just about any hardware out there, and has a great digital vinyl engine if you want to use existing DJ gear with it).

Virtual DJ is unique among the three big DJ packages in that it works with video right out of the box (Traktor doesn't at all, Serato is a paid upgrade), and while it's always suffered from a bit of snobbery from the purists, its huge user base and the fact that some of the biggest names in the business (Pioneer included) are happy to bundle it with their hardware show that it's a perfectly good choice.

The screenshot shows the Virtual DJ software interface. At the top, there are two tracks: 'Titanium' by David Guetta feat. Sia and 'Love Is Gone' by David Guetta. The left deck (A) has a blue waveform and the right deck (B) has a red waveform. Below the decks are two turntables with red centers. To the left of the turntables is a digital vinyl representation. Between the turntables is a mixer section with various knobs and faders. On the far left, there is a sidebar with icons for 'Musikk', 'Videer', 'Sampler', 'ContentUnlimited', 'Search Audio', 'Search Video', 'Search Karaoke', 'Search NetSearch', 'Downloaded content', 'Cloud Lists', and 'LiveFeedback'. In the center, there is a library window showing a list of songs with columns for 'Album Art', 'Title', 'Artist', 'Remix', 'Rating', 'Bpm', 'Length', 'Key', and 'Comment'. Some songs listed include '2 Unlimited Vs The Partyquad & Mitchell Nemeijer - Get Ready For Pantdown (Temp P & Timtek Bootleg)', 'Shakira feat. Rihanna - Can't Remember to Forget You (Dirty Pop Deconstruction)', 'Capital Cities - Safe and Sound (DJ Denis RUBLEV & DJ ANTON Remix)', 'David Guetta, Showtek Feat Vassy - Bad (Original Mix)', 'Nina Simone - Feeling Good (Alias Remix)', 'Nina Simone - Feeling Good (Bassnectar Remix)', 'Pharrell Williams - Happy (Craig Vanity VS Benny Benassi & Technoboy)', and 'Kylie Minogue - Into The Blue (StopMotion Mix)'. To the right of the library is a 'Samples' section with a grid of colored squares representing different instruments: 1. Hihat 1 (green), 2. Hihat 2 (orange), 3. Hihat 3 (blue), 4. Kick Clap (yellow), 5. Kick Hard (orange), 6. Kick Snare (yellow), 7. Synth 1 (purple), 8. Synth 2 (purple), and 9. Synth 3 (pink). At the bottom right, there is a detailed track information panel for 'BAD' by David Guetta & Showtek feat. Vassy, including details like Year: 2014, Album: Singles, Genre: Electro House, Remixer: Original, Composer: David Guetta, Bpm: 128.0, Key: F, Length: 04:44, First Seen: 03/29 20:53, and Last Play: 03/29 00:53.

GOOD IF: YOU ARE A MOBILE DJ, A KARAOKE DJ, OR TAKE LOTS OF REQUESTS

BAD IF: YOU'RE ON A BUDGET (IT'S MORE EXPENSIVE TO BUY THAN ANY OF THE OTHERS)

VIRTUAL DJ

> REKORDBOX



THIS IS SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER programs in this section, in that 1. It is designed to be used exclusively with Pioneer equipment, and only certain Pioneer equipment at that, and 2. It is not actually designed to plug into DJ gear and perform directly from using your laptop (although you can do this, as I'll explain).

Instead, think of it as a program that lets you do all the clever preparation that you also do on other DJ software before playing a set, only with Rekordbox, you then take all that work (often on a USB stick) and plug in to Pioneer's performance equipment. The "digital" stuff

then shows on the screens of your chosen Pioneer DJ gear, and the music too is carried on that USB stick, so no need at all to take your laptop along.

Where things blur is that you can, actually, still take your laptop along and plug in if you want; this works with either Rekordbox-compatible DJ controllers (the latest one at the time of writing, the XDJ-RX, is very attractive), or a "full" Pioneer set-up (the XDJ-1000 media players, or a CDJ-900 or CDJ-2000 Nexus system, for example), making it not so different from "traditional" DJ software any more, after all. Confused? Don't be. The good/bad if summary below nails it.

Preview	Artwork	Title	Artist	BPM	Rating	Duration	Key	Date Added
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	One Desire (Alix Alvarez Remix)	Barbara Tucker & Iuccini	126.00	☆☆☆☆☆	07:42	E	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Sneak	Mountal	121.00	☆☆☆☆☆	06:24	Bm	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Draw a Line	DeMarzo	121.00	☆☆☆☆☆	08:05		8/9/2013
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	(SUPER DUCK BREAK	Radio & Isaiah Toothtake	80.00	☆☆☆☆☆	03:13	8m	1/29/2015
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Scratches 2 Super Duck	Super Duck	0.00	☆☆☆☆☆	00:27		1/29/2015
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Caution You (Alix Alvarez)	Paolo Rocco	124.00	☆☆☆☆☆	06:42	A#m	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	XXX (feat. Astrid)	Kill Frenzy	122.00	☆☆☆☆☆	05:38	A#m	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Jaywalk	Piemont	122.00	☆☆☆☆☆	06:59	Cm	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Baphome	Hade	122.00	☆☆☆☆☆	05:31	Gm	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Make 'Em Shake It	Wahoo	122.00	☆☆☆☆☆	06:57	E#m	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Do You Want Me Baby (Cloud 9	124.01	☆☆☆☆☆	08:02	Ebm	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Do It All Again (Tough Lo	Nastaly	124.00	☆☆☆☆☆	04:39	Gm	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Deeper	Ruben Mandolini	123.00	☆☆☆☆☆	07:09	F	11/18/2014
[Thumbnail]	[Thumbnail]	Messing With My Soul						

GOOD IF: YOU WANT TO DJ IN DJ BOOTHS EQUIPPED WITH MODERN PIONEER GEAR, OR PREPARE YOURSELF FOR DJING IN SUCH PLACES

BAD IF: YOU WANT TO DJ USING ANYONE OTHER BRAND'S GEAR (YOU CAN'T WITH REKORDBOX, YOU'LL NEED ANOTHER SYSTEM TOO TO DO THAT)



> DJAY PRO



BACK TO "STANDARD"-TYPE LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE now, and Algoriddim's djay Pro's particular unique selling point is that it is Mac only, so is designed to look and work beautifully on the Mac from the ground up. Recently gaining the "Pro" suffix, the software - from German company Algoriddim - is nowadays a truly polished affair, with gorgeous, Retina-ready graphics, 64-bit architecture (meaning smooth visuals), and most of the bells and whistles you'd expect from today's DJ software. At the same time it's undeniably Apple-esque, and good for beginners (in a "the power is there under the hood if you want it" kind of way, a bit like other prosumer to pro Apple products like Final Cut Pro X, for instance).

It's worth emphasising that point: this really is very simple to get started on, probably the easiest of all the programs here, especially because it has Spotify baked right in, so you don't even have to have any music collection to get going. iTunes is seamless and flawless here too, unlike any other DJ programs. Where it slips behind the others is in battle-proved hardware integrations. While it works with a variety of hardware (and very, very well with the Reloop Beatpad), you won't find the breadth or depth of hardware compatibility out there for djay Pro as you will for some of the other programs.



GOOD IF: YOU'RE A MAC LOVER WHO'S ALWAYS WISHED SOMEONE WOULD MAKE A DJ PROGRAM THAT "FEELS" LIKE APPLE

BAD IF: YOU WANT THE 10% OF FEATURES 90% OF PEOPLE NEVER TOUCH THAT SOME MORE "PRO" PROGRAMS HAVE

> TRAKTOR DJ

iOS

SO WE'RE MOVING AWAY FROM THE PC AND MAC platforms now and into the realms of smartphones and tablets, in this case, iOS, meaning iPhone, iPod touch and iPad. And Traktor DJ from Native Instruments is, I have to tell you from the outset, a thoroughly addictive, fiendishly well implemented DJ program that just might have you whiling away many a long summer night sat in your garden or poolside, little portable speaker plugged in, beer in hand, playing away (not that I'd know anything about that, oh no).

WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT TRAKTOR DJ, ESPECIALLY (it has to be said) when viewed against the frankly feature-overloaded Traktor Pro, is just how simple it is, and how much thought has gone into the workflow. You get given two big, smooth waveforms ("touch the music", went the marketing slogan), and no individual pitch controls or nudge controls, just tight beatlocked mixing,

a fantastic recommendation engine that just seems to always pick the perfect next tune to play so you don't have to, and a whole pile of FX and loops that make the most of the touchscreen.

Is it meant to be taken seriously, as a substitute for a club DJ set-up? No, not really (although you could play in a club on this). Is it just about the most addictive iOS DJing platform there is? Yes, most certainly.



GOOD IF: YOU WANT AN IOS DJ APP THAT'S MORE ADDICTIVE THAN IS GOOD FOR YOU.

BAD IF: YOU WANT TO DJ THE TRADITIONAL WAY (YOU CAN'T WITH THIS); YOU'RE A PURIST (YOU'LL HATE IT).

> MIXVIBES



MIXVIBES HAS A SMALL BUT COMMITTED FAN base. The French DJ software comes from a talented software team (the same guys who were behind early versions of Pioneer's Rekordbox) and so is perfectly capable, and while it has played catch up to the big boys features-wise, nowadays it has most of the features - key mixing, four decks, decent effects, etc - that mark the rest of the major players out from the smaller also-rans.

Maybe because of Mixvibes' historical good relationships with Pioneer, the company has made much of its tight, intuitive mappings to Pioneer in-booth DJ gear, although it's getting harder to believe there are an awful lot of DJs out there who are demanding those types of features, especially with the rise of Pioneer's own Rekordbox. Still, as I say the small but committed fanbase means this lot are certainly doing something right.

GOOD IF: YOU WANT A SOLID PERFORMER BUT AREN'T CONVINCED BY THE BIGGER NAMES

BAD IF: YOU WANT SOFTWARE A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE USE (ITS USER BASE IS NOWHERE NEAR AS BIG AS THOSE ABOVE)



> DJAY 2

iOS

WITH ALGORIDDIM'S DJAY 2, THOUGH, YOU certainly can DJ the traditional way. Indeed, its main screen is a frighteningly realistic representation of two decks and a mixer, much like with its bigger brother, djay Pro. In fact, there's not an awful lot separating the programs. Like djay Pro, there are "power" features under the hood (full vertical waveform view, like Serato Scratch Live, for instance); like djay Pro, it has Spotify built right in, and can also work with your iTunes (or iOS Music, in this instance) library. And like DJ Pro, it has at least some advanced features (key detection being a big one) that most "big" DJ software has as standard.

Couple it with one of the several hardware DJ controllers made to work specifically with it (Pioneer DDJ-WeGo3, Reloop Beatpad, Numark iDJ Pro...) and you've got a system that is pretty much as good as a laptop/controller set-up, but with your iOS device right at its heart. I've DJed a large corporate event with just such a system, and apart from the jogwheel performance on compatible hardware not being as good as, say, Serato, you could scarcely tell a difference - all from an iPad. A great second system or travel DJ set-up.



GOOD IF: YOU WANT THE FULL TRADITIONAL DJ EXPERIENCE ON YOUR IOS OR ANDROID DEVICE

BAD IF: YOU WANT IT TO PERFORM EXACTLY LIKE A LAPTOP (IT'S NOT QUITE THERE YET)

> ABLETON LIVE

**NOT TRADITIONAL DJ SOFTWARE IN ANY SHAPE**

or form, Ableton Live has attracted a lot of attention as an "alternative" way of DJing over the years, although our research indicates it remains strictly a minority thing (while some big names like Paul Van Dyk DJ with it, others - Sasha being one - tried it but went back to traditional methods).

So what's good about it? It blurs the lines between production and DJing, to start with. You can DJ with "loops", which is very appealing to producers who make

music the same way on the same software, because it allows enough spontaneity of performance in an environment where it's easy to remix your own stuff on the fly, drop in other people's music, and inhabit a place right on the very slash of DJ/producer. And really, that's what's bad about it, too: DJing and production are to most people very different disciplines, and while it is exciting to imagine a world where the two blur, very few DJs pull it off, or maintain the willingness to try.



GOOD IF: YOU'RE AN EXPERIENCED DJ AND PRODUCER WHO UNDERSTANDS WHAT YOU'RE GETTING INTO

BAD IF: YOU'RE NOT

||||| Ableton

> FLOW



FLOW FROM MIXED IN KEY IS A DIFFERENT TAKE on DJ software, organising your workflow into prepare, play and export windows, and working on segmenting your tunes into parts that make sense musically. Then it kind of semi-automates how you mix those tunes. It's easy and intuitive once you use it but quite hard to explain! The kind of DJing I think it's particularly suited to is DJing in bars and lounges where it's about programming as much as showing off your deck skills, but where simply playing "one song after another" isn't good enough. It will also be good for DJs who want to semi-automate the performance (read: recording) of their mixtapes,

because it's easy to get really solid results every time with this software.

Being from Mixed In Key, it has a solid, harmonic-based recommendation engine and a much better take on "automix" than any other software you're likely to have tried, and there's an unusually detailed and useful export section too, that lets you export your tracklisting as a CSV, and even consult your top tunes as per your history. Overall, this will never be your first DJ program unless you're a very particular type of DJ, but it would make a great "second" DJ program for an awful lot of DJs.

The screenshot shows the Flow DJ software interface running on a laptop. The main window displays two tracks side-by-side. On the left, the track is 'Sub Focus - Close [Feat. Mnek]' with a key of 1A and a duration of 02:41. On the right, the track is 'Deadmau5 - Alone With You' with a key of 2A and a duration of 04:03. Both tracks show waveform analysis and BPM controls. Below the tracks is a library view titled 'Dynamic Playlist' which includes tracks like Deadmau5, Pryda, Jochen Miller, Ananda Project, Flanders, Tim Berg, Dj Chus & Supernova, Sub Focus, and Claes Rosen. To the right of the library is a 'Song' table with columns for Song, Artist, Key, BPM, and Energy. The table lists various songs by Deadmau5, Roland Clark, Matteo DiMarr, Ananda Project, and others. At the bottom of the screen, a large 'FLOW' logo is visible.

GOOD IF: YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PROGRAMMING DJ SETS

BAD IF: YOU ARE A DJ/MIXING PURIST

> THE ONE



NEWCOMER THE ONE IS GETTING AN HONORARY mention here, just because it's a really intriguing piece of software, not because a huge number of people are using it or anything like that (they're not, not yet anyway).

Think for a second about "modular" DJ gear: You know, a mixer, maybe a drum pad controller, a couple of jogwheel decks, an FX controller. Now, think of the software equivalent: An environment where you can take certain elements (a deck here, a pile of plugin FX there, a mixer etc) and piece them all together on the screen into your perfect DJ control surface.

That's what The One attempts to achieve. It also lets you remix on the fly, constructing mixes out of lots of

parts of songs then treating them as one song, but unlike Traktor's Remix Decks (which are only spontaneous) and unlike Virtual DJ's "sandbox" (which lets you preview mixes but not much more), you can construct pretty complicated live "remixes" a bit ahead of time in The One, and get them right before playing them, all in your headphones, all mid-gig. It's a lot of fun when you get your head around it, but equally, you can DJ the "normal" way with this software too, and it's compatible with quite a lot of hardware too.

The screenshot shows the The One DJ software interface. At the top, there's a tracklist with two entries: "Para One, Tactel - Touch! - Original Mix" and "Sombionix - Ticking (Electro Mix) (128 bpm) (pitch: -8.59209 %)". Below the tracklist is a large waveform viewer. On the left, there are several panels: "Time & Gain" with volume and master controls, "Meters" showing levels for channels 1 and 2, and a "Browser 1" panel displaying a library of tracks. The browser lists tracks like "Without U - Original Mix", "UFO (Original Mix)", "Twisted Sister (Original Mix)", "Touch! - Original Mix", "Ticking (Electro Mix)" (which is highlighted in yellow), and "Right In The Dark - Henrik Sc...". The bottom right corner contains a red box with text.

GOOD IF: YOU WANT TO DO MORE THAN JUST MIX,
BUT AREN'T SOLD ON TRAKTOR'S REMIX DECKS

BAD IF: YOU WANT TO PLUG AND PLAY (IT'S GOT A
LEARNING CURVE)

PART 2: SUPPORTING SOFTWARE

SO YOU'VE GOT YOUR DJ SOFTWARE ON YOUR laptop, maybe you've even chosen a second program to use on your iPad or smartphone. But the software a working DJ needs doesn't stop there. Because there's the huge, slightly unglamorous but utterly essential question of tune organisation and preparation to consider, too.

I say unglamorous, but actually, once you get to the point of "hearing" stuff you'd like to do to tunes so they're more fun to DJ with (quick and dirty extended intros and outros, removing breaks and so on), and you realise there's software that'll let you do that as a natural part

of preparing your music, hopefully you'll start to find this stuff exciting. And as you'll see, there's even software that makes it simple to make those mashups you hear in your head a reality, or to "lock down" your acapella mixes to add them to your DJ music library as whole new tracks to make your sets unique.

Did I say supporting software was unglamorous? I undersold it. Some of this stuff can make a huge difference to your DJing. You ought to at least consider some of these programs and apps.

A DJ'S PREPARATION WORKFLOW

I just wanted to talk a little about how you may incorporate some of this "supporting software" into your workflow. Here I'm going to refer back to something you may well have heard before: "KISS" or "Keep it simple, stupid".

See, the trap some DJs fall into, especially when starting to do this stuff, is adding every little bit of software to their armoury and concocting an elaborate workflow for every new tune that arrives. If you've ever found yourself thinking (or worse, writing down) something like "First drop into a new folder. Then, edit tags manually. Then, run X to correct volume, Then run Y to get key. Then, categorise into a separate folder for year. Then, import into Z, fix artwork so it's no more than 800x800 pixels..." etc etc, you've fallen victim to this trap (confession; I have to before I learned better).

The problem is that you give up. Then you end up in a bigger mess that you started in because the

moment you add half a dozen tunes to your library the way everyone else does (you know, download, drag into your DJ software 10 minutes before a gig...) you've broken your system, and there's fixing needed just to get back to square one.

It's far better to think hard about your end result (does equal volume files really matter? Do you honestly need the filenames to reflect artist-title? Do you really need separate key mixing software? Is it totally necessary to have 20 main genres and 50 sub genres when 5 overall categories will do? Is it a good use of your time (or is it wise, from a sound quality position, to convert all incoming music to MP3? Etc etc) and then to plan a simple process you can stick to, to do what's really important to you (and some of it will be) than to over-complicate in the name of perfection.

Pick your "helper" program carefully, accept no process is perfect, and - yes - write it down as a simple checklist to help you remember, then stick to it and get back to what really matters: Learning, programming, mixing and enjoying your tunes.

> ITUNES



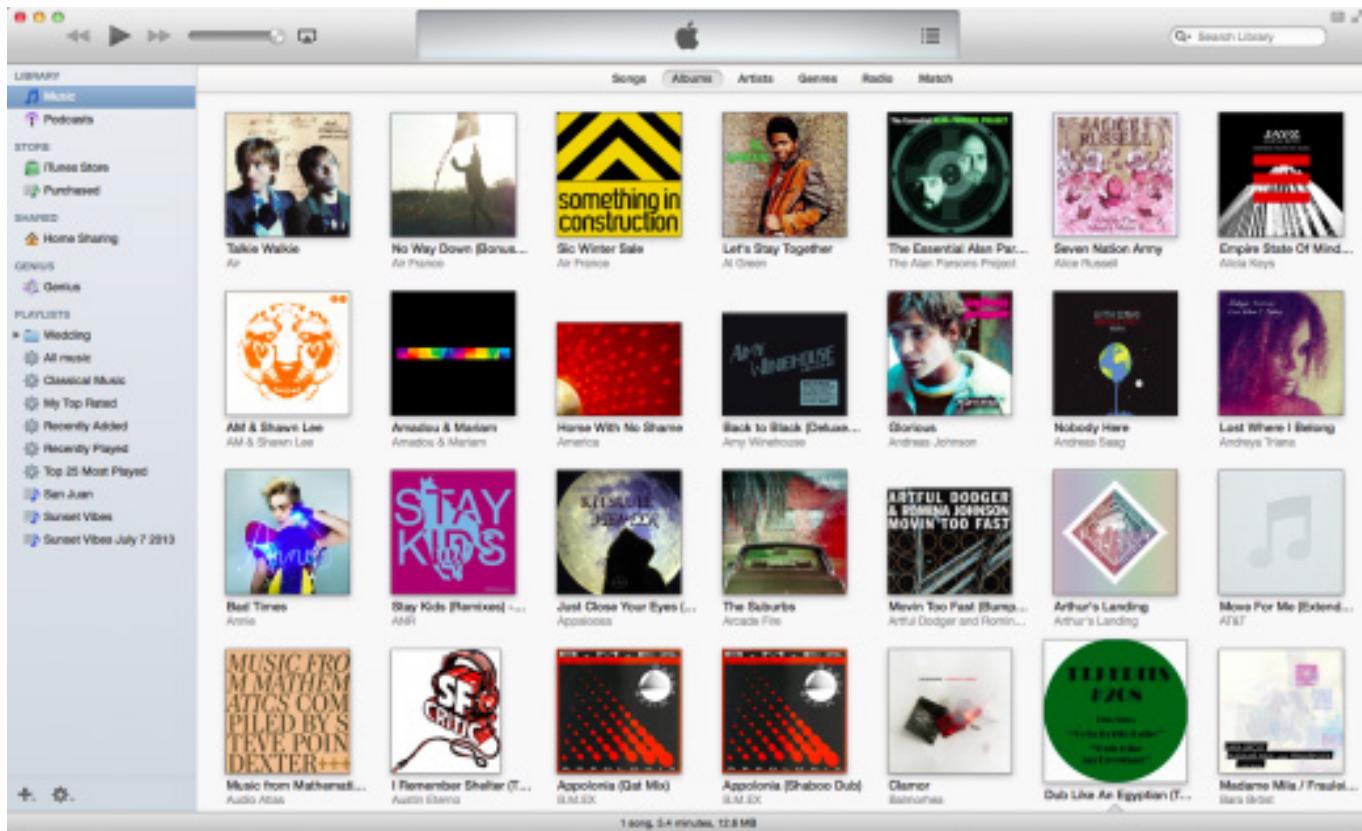
AH, ITUNES. LOVED AND LOATHED IN WHAT SEEMS like equal amounts by DJs and the general public alike. But here's the thing: There's currently no program as versatile as iTunes when it comes to organising your music.

But why organise your music away from your DJ software anyway, you may ask? Why not just drop all your tunes into a folder and do it all from within your DJ software? Or just have some manual way of organising stuff? Well, the truth is that's fine, and some DJs do do things exactly that way. But iTunes has lots of advantages. Not all apply to all DJs, but here are just some of them:

You can far more easily edit track info, add artwork, and generally keep your collection tidy in iTunes than directly from your DJ software. You can set up intuitive "smart" playlists that will automatically stay up to date when you add new tunes that fit their criteria. If you use an iPhone or iPad or iTunes Match, you can have all your collection and playlists in the cloud or on your mobile device, too, for DJing with or just to take everywhere

with you. You can back up your entire library including all playlists etc by backing up one folder. There's a cheap and well populated music store built right in. It's a very easy place to plan DJ sets from, or "pack crates", helping DJs to separate set planning from DJing. It's a great place to listen to your music from when you're busy doing other things (and we all know the more you listen to your music, the better you learn it). It has great podcasts baked in where you can hear new music. You can use it to rip CDs.

There are more, but I hope you can see some of the things iTunes adds that many DJs find indispensable. But the killer is that everything you do in iTunes is reflected in your DJ software. All your playlists are there. No other music library management program can offer that, which is why, despite its bloated feel sometimes and the way it can infuriate (you need to set it up right to use it for DJ prep), iTunes is still the tool of choice for most DJs. Mac or PC, you should at least give it a chance.



> MEDIA MONKEY



OK, OK , WE HEAR YOU, YOU HARDCORE OF PC
 owners who are "anything but Apple" in all things. Media Monkey could be for you. It's is an extremely powerful PC media library organisation tool that a small but committed number swear by. It's not free (in the version you'll want, anyway), but apart from the fact that you can't automatically have your playlists display in your DJ software as you can with iTunes, it has just about everything else that that program has.

We're talking the ability to organise your tunes, edit tags, have smart lists, add artwork, plan sets, etc. etc. While some people complain that iTunes slows down with large collections, particularly it seems on PCs, Media Monkey is zippy right up to 100,000+ tunes. And while as I say it won't be there like iTunes sat directly inside your DJ software, you can upload to your iPod, Android device from it, so the ability to organise with Media Monkey and take your music with you exists. (It will even sync via wifi with Android phones.)



The screenshot shows the MediaMonkey software interface. The left sidebar displays a file tree with various music folders. The main area shows a detailed list of tracks in a table format. The table includes columns for Title, Artist, Album, Date, Genre, Rating, Filename, Length, and a preview pane. A specific track, 'Bang Bang (White Noise Dubstep Remix)' by Deadmau5, is selected and highlighted. The bottom status bar shows '10 files, 174.0 MB, 1:15:56 (Selected: 1 file, 16.2 MB, 7:00)'. The bottom right corner features a small thumbnail of Deadmau5's iconic mask logo.

GOOD IF: YOU'RE A COMMITTED ANTI-APPLE PERSON

BAD IF: YOU WANT IT TO INTEGRATE WITH YOUR DJ SOFTWARE LIKE ITUNES DOES

> QUICKTIME / VLC OR SIMILAR



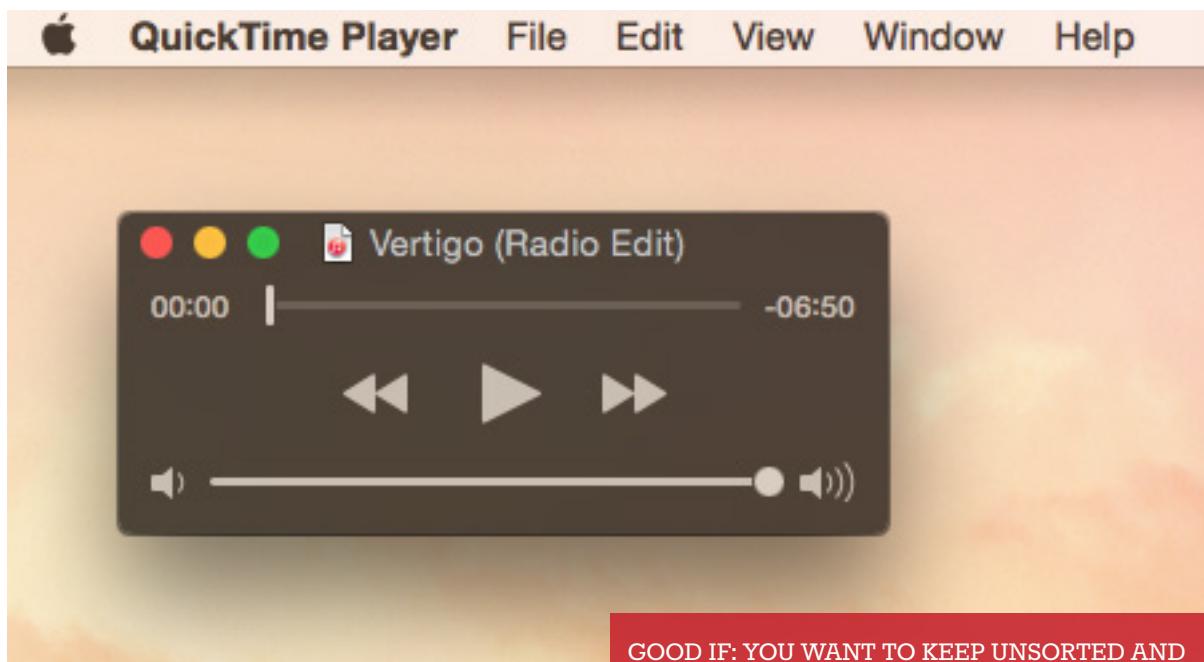
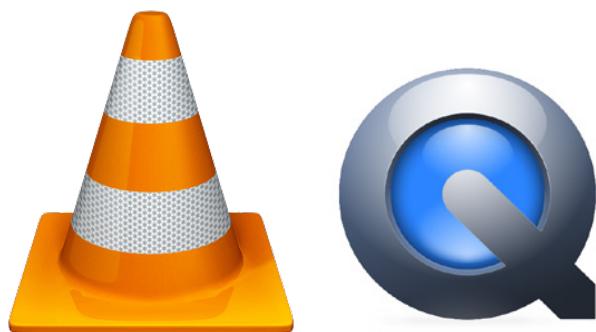
MORE MEDIA PLAYERS, I HEAR YOU SAY? WHY?

Well, here's the thing: In my view, there are two types of music you have on your computer. You have downloads / audition lists / unprepared / unsorted (or whatever you want to call that big inbox of "everything") and you have your DJ collection: That hallowed place where a lot of work has been done on every tune that you allow in.

What you don't want is the two to get mixed. So I am not a fan of having my computer set up to auto play tunes by default in iTunes when I click on them. What I like to have is a lightweight media player that is set as the default option when I click on an MP3, AAC etc (ie any music file), that'll just play it fast, let me flick through it, and when it opens, not fill the whole screen.

Quicktime can do the job fine, the free VLC player is also great (both are available for Mac and PC), and there are lots more. What you're looking for is something really lightweight that you can set to open fast and small

and just... play the tune, but give you a bar where you can quickly flick through it too, preferably with keyboard shortcuts. Then when you're ready, you add the tune to your iTunes collection, and from then on, you play it from within there.



GOOD IF: YOU WANT TO KEEP UNSORTED AND SORTED MUSIC COMPLETELY SEPARATE

BAD IF: YOU ARE HAPPY DOING ALL YOUR SORTING INSIDE ITUNES OR YOUR DJ SOFTWARE

> MIXED IN KEY / KEYFINDER



IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN MIXING IN KEY, OR mixing harmonically, you need to analyse your music to add the key information to the tags in the music files. Nowadays, DJ software is getting better at doing this for you (most except Serato now has it built in), so you definitely want to check out those options before going any further. However, further indeed you may choose to go.

Why? Because you may want to DJ on different software, or away from software altogether (for instance, using CDs or files on USB), and your DJ software key analysis won't help you there (hint: the solution is to

analyse your music and embed the key info in the tags that CD players show, even the filename itself if you have to). Or you may get utterly hooked on key mixing and want some of the bells and whistles that Mixed In Key, the leading standalone app, offers (such as detecting key changes within music). Either way, a standalone program may be on your radar.

As I say, Mixed In Key leads the field (in fact, it's the only viable dedicated paid-for key analysis program), but if you want to experiment with a free option, Keyfinder is excellent, too.

The screenshot shows two windows of the Mixed In Key software. The main window displays a circular key analysis interface with various musical keys labeled (e.g., 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 10A, 11A, 12A, 1B, 2B, 3B, 4B, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, 9B, 10B, 11B, 12B) and a waveform visualization. Below the interface are buttons for 'Add Files...' and 'Import from iTunes...'. A table lists analyzed tracks with columns for Name, Artist, Key Result, Tempo, Energy, Cue Points, and Status. The table shows tracks like 'Streets (Eno Motive Remix)' by Sonar, 'Porto (Original Mix)' by Novo Ritmo Sensibile, and 'Elle (Original)' by DJ Gregory, all completed with 5A keys, 124 tempos, and 5 energy levels. The second window, titled 'KeyFinder – Batch Analysis – 100 files', shows a list of 100 songs with their artist and title tags, grouping tags, key tags, and detected keys. The 'Detected Key' column is filled with green bars indicating successful analysis. The bottom of the screen features the Mixed In Key logo.

Artist Tag	Title Tag	Comment Tag	Grouping Tag	Key Tag	Detected Key
21 Benga	Crunked Up				11A Cbm
22 Ladytron	Destroy Everything You To...				10A Bm
23 The Chemical Brothers	Dig Your Own Hole				2A Ebm
24 Orbital	Doctor?				10A Bm
25 Mylo	Drop The Pressure				9A Em
26 Chase & Status	Eastern Jam				9A Em
27 Röyksopp	Eple				4A Fm
28 DJ Hazard	Evac Q 8				1A Abm
29 Mr Oizo	Flat Beat				10A Bm
30 Missy Elliott	Get Ur Freak On				4A Fm
31 Röyksopp	The Girl And The Robot				
32 DJ Fresh	Golddust (feat Ce'cile) (VIP I...				
33 Wu-Tang Clan	Gravel Pit				
34 Krafty Kuts	Happiness (feat A-Skillz)				
35 Daft Punk	Harder, Better, Faster, Stro...				
36 Outkast	Hey Ya!				
37 Josh Wink	Higher State Of Conscious...				



> PLATINUM NOTES



THIS IS A CONTENTIOUS PROGRAM BUT ENOUGH people use it and swear by it that I would like to make its case. Platinum Notes (from the same people as Mixed In Key, and Mashup below) attempts to auto correct imperfections in your music files to make them sound better. The idea is that it takes the file, analyses it for over-compression, clipped peaks (digital distortion), key variance, and volume deviation from the ideal volume level, and fixes all those things automatically for you, giving you a new version of the file to use from hereon in.

It's never going to better having a skilled mastering

engineer tweak all your songs, but you don't know one of those, do you? And in our tests, most of the time it makes a great job. We have heard the odd song it's made sound a little bit worse, but in our experience, those tend to be the "lost cause" tunes with big problems to start with. It's not cheap, but if you have DJ source material from a whole load of places (vinyl rips, CD rips, downloads, less-than-perfect SoundCloud productions, etc) and if you play multi-format sets, Platinum Notes can give your sets a sheen that is hard to put your finger on but that is very tangible.

Platinum Notes 4

Template: **The Official Platinum Notes Template**

Duplicate template to customize settings

Output Volume
Save new files with an average volume of **-12.5** dB
Recommended: -12.5 dB for excellent contrast between loud and quiet parts.
Limiter Character **4**

Repair Clipped Peaks
 Enable clipped peak repair if the tracks average volume is louder than **-14.0** dB
Fix clipped peaks when volume exceeds **99.7** %
Headroom to prevent any more clipping **1.5** dB

Add Warmth
 No added warmth, just regular sound
 Gentle warmth
 Hot vacuum tube

Correct Pitch
 Enable pitch correction
(Great for vinyl rips and older music)
If pitch is at least **10** cents off key:
 Fix the pitch, keep original tempo
 Change tempo to change pitch (turntable-style)

EDIT MULTIBAND DYNAMICS >

GOOD IF: YOU LIKE HOW THE RESULTS SOUND AND ARE PREPARED TO AUTOMATE THIS TYPE OF THING

BAD IF: YOU DON'T TRUST LEAVING SOMETHING AS FUNDAMENTAL AS HOW YOUR FILES SOUND TO A PROGRAM

> MP3GAIN



ONE OF THE BIG, BIG THINGS PLATINUM NOTES
 does is make all your tunes the same volume. And you know what? MP3Gain can do that too. It's free, and you can get it for Mac and PC, and it's devilishly clever. Y'see, what it does is not actually make a new version of your MP3 at the "right" volume, but instead, alters a little bit of info at the start of the file that tells your software how loud to play the track. So it's "non destructive", but it's a great way to get all your tunes the same volume.

Why would you want to? After all, DJ software has auto gain and also there's a manual gain control on most DJ

software too, to do this kind of thing, isn't there? Yes, but depending on where and how you listen to your music, this can be worth doing nonetheless. Having all your files the same volume can help when shuffle playing them on media players, for instance. In some DJ software the volume of the file affects the size of the waveform, and small waveforms, although correctable with gain, don't offer much information. And for some, this is just an anal thing!

The screenshot shows the MP3Gain application window. At the top, there's a menu bar with Archivo, Análisis, Modificar Ganancia, Opciones, Lenguaje, and Ayuda. Below the menu are several icons: Añadir Archivo(s), Añadir Carpeta, Analizar Pista, Ganancia Pista, Eliminar Archivo(s), and Eliminar todo. A text input field displays "Objetivo Volumen 'Normal': 89,0 dB (default 89,0)". The main area is a table with columns: Ruta\Archivo, Volumen, clipping, Ganancia Pista, clip(Pista), and Volumen Alt. The table lists several MP3 files from the 'Documents and Settings' folder, showing their current volume, clipping status, and other parameters. A progress bar at the bottom indicates the progress of the analysis or processing. A red callout box on the right contains the text: "GOOD IF: YOU WANT ALL YOUR MP3S THE SAME VOLUME, FOR FREE" and "BAD IF: YOU HAVE MUSIC IN OTHER FORMATS (IT ONLY WORKS WITH MP3)".

Ruta\Archivo	Volumen	clipping	Ganancia Pista	clip(Pista)	Volumen Alt
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	90,9		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	90,0		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	90,7		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	91,0		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	90,1		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	90,1		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	91,3		-3,0		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	88,3		0,0		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	91,2		-1,5		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	92,5		-3,0		
C:\Documents and Settings\yul.RE...	90,6		-1,5		

MP3GAIN

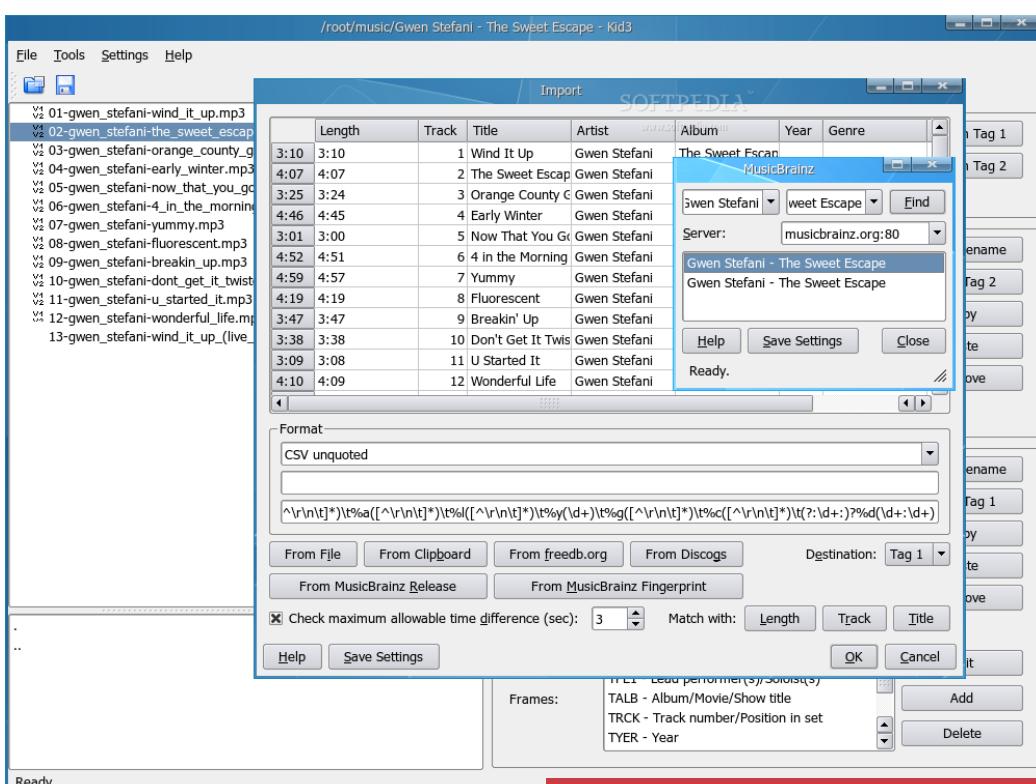
> KID3



I'VE CHOSEN KID3 BECAUSE IT'S POWERFUL AND multi-platform, but there are many programs, free and paid, of this type for both Mac and PC (more for PC, as it happens). And the type I'm talking about is tag editors. These little programs let you edit artist, title, artwork, genre etc of your music files in much the same way as iTunes does, but typically go much further. The main reasons for having one of these in your armoury as well as iTunes are these:

Firstly, they have tags in them that iTunes doesn't (for instance, the initialKey tag where Mixed in Key and similar programs store key information). Secondly, they

let you more easily do complex alterations like batch search/replacing stuff (for instance, you may want "[Artist] featuring [Artist]" to say "[Artist] feat. [Artist]" in all your file names; a good tag editor can help you make these consistency checks). And finally - crucially - tag editors let you rename the file itself from your chosen tags. So as part of your tune preparation and organisation, you may want your filenames to be "artist - title.mp3" (for instance "Robin S - Show Me Love.mp3"). Once your tag information is all correct, it's a batch process that takes a few seconds to do this stuff in a tag editor.



GOOD IF: YOU WANT TO MAKE ALL YOUR FILENAMES UNIFORM AND CORRECT EXTRANEOUS TAGS QUICKLY

BAD IF: YOU DON'T SEE ANY NEED TO



> BEATUNES



BEATUNES IS KIND OF A HARD PROGRAM TO place, mainly because it does so much that you may find useful. It's primarily billed as a playlist generator, and if you take to its workflow, it's a great way of generating exciting, dynamic playlists for listening to your music as you get to know it away from your DJ sets, or to help you build DJ sets, both automatically and manually. It does this by learning a lot about your music, both from the tags, from the cloud/online, and from you.

But as well as that, it is a semi-automated tag correction tool, able to spot inconsistencies in your music library

automatically, before you do, and then let you decide what to do about them. It can identify multiple spellings of the same artist, for instance, or genres that you only have one or two tunes in (so you may want to add those tunes to bigger, broader genres). It's also got a powerful key detection feature like Mixed in Key, and a built in media player, so you may just find you take to it as so many others have immediately and decide it's a "Swiss Army knife" you can't live without. Worth checking out in addition to or as well as any of the above.

The screenshot shows the beaTunes application window. At the top, there are menu items: ANALYSIS, LIBRARY, STORE, and PLAYLISTS. Below the menu is a sidebar with sections for AMAZON CHARTS, ANALYSIS (Task Queue), LIBRARY (Music, Movies, TV Shows, Audiobooks), and STORE (Purchased). The main area contains two tables. The top table, titled 'Search', lists songs from the 'AMAZON CHARTS' analysis. The bottom table lists songs from the 'Library'. Both tables include columns for Name, Artist, Album, BPM, Color, and Key. A status bar at the bottom indicates '9 items, 1.4 weeks, 18.9 GB'. A red callout box on the right says 'GOOD IF: YOU FIND ENOUGH FEATURES IN IT YOU'D USE TO WARRANT A PURCHASE' and 'BAD IF: YOU'VE ALREADY GOT OTHER PROGRAMS THAT CAN DO THE STUFF THAT INTERESTS YOU'.

	Name	Artist	Album	Key	Color	BPM
1	The Hardest Part	Coldplay	X&Y	Gm	Orange	82.5
2	A Whisper	Coldplay	A Rush of Blood to the Head	Gm	Green	118
3	Square One	Coldplay	X&Y	Cm	Red	124.4
4	Viva La Vida	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or Death and All His F...	Fm	Blue	78.8
5	42	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or Death and All His F...	Fm	Pink	123.9
6	Clocks	Coldplay	A Rush of Blood to the Head	Fm	Yellow	74.9
7	Cemeteries Of L...	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or Death and All His F...	A#m	Light Blue	72.7
8	Twisted Logic	Coldplay	X&Y	D#m	Dark Blue	106.7
9	White Shadows	Coldplay	X&Y	G#m	Light Green	127.4
10	Violet Hill	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or Death and All His F...	C#m	Dark Green	76.1
11	Daylight	Coldplay	A Rush of Blood to the Head	F#m	Dark Blue	133
12	X&Y	Coldplay	X&Y	Em	Orange	76.7

	Name	Artist	Album	Album Artist	BPM	Color	Key
1	Life In Technicol...	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	74.9	Green	A
2	Lovers In Japan/...	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	73.5	Yellow	G
3	Yes	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	129.9	Blue	F
4	Death And All Hi...	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	74.3	Red	D#
5	Violet Hill	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	76.1	Green	C#
6	Viva La Vida	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	78.8	Blue	Fm
7	Lost!	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	87.1	Green	G
8	Bixby Canyon Br...	Death Cab for C...	Narrow Stairs	Death Cab For C...	123.9	Red	Fm
9	42	Coldplay	Viva la Vida or D...	Coldplay	86.5	Green	G#

GOOD IF: YOU FIND ENOUGH FEATURES IN IT YOU'D USE TO WARRANT A PURCHASE

BAD IF: YOU'VE ALREADY GOT OTHER PROGRAMS THAT CAN DO THE STUFF THAT INTERESTS YOU

> AUDACITY



EVERY DJ NEEDS A DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION
 like this, and there's no excuse really, because it's absolutely free. Audacity loads your track as a waveform, a bit like DJ software does, and lets you do all kinds of things to it. It could be as simple as editing silence from the beginning or end, or as complex as adding effects to parts of the tune, or chopping and changing it. You can do full re-edits in Audacity if you want, or pull out individual samples to use in your DJ software's sample feature. If there was a digital equivalent of putting your

tune onto a workbench and shaping and reshaping it using every tool in the box, Audacity is it.

It's also a good place to take your finished DJ mixes and apply a bit of sheen to them, or add CD track markers before burning the CDs, and a whole host of other things. And while it may look a bit daunting on first opening it, there are lots of free tutorials to get simple tasks done with it out there, as it's a hugely popular program. Grab it now if you don't have it - you never know when you might need it.

The screenshot shows the Audacity interface with two stereo tracks. The top track is labeled "Audio Trac" and has a sample rate of "Stereo, 44100Hz 32-bit float". The bottom track is unlabeled. Both tracks show blue waveforms. The timeline at the top ranges from 55 to 1:35. The bottom control bar shows "Project Rate (Hz)" set to 44100, "Selection Start" at "End", "Length" at "00 h 01 m 14 s", and "Audio Position" at "00 h 00 m 00 s". A red callout box on the right contains the text:

GOOD IF: YOU NEED TO DO NIGGLY BUT IMPORTANT THINGS WITH TRACKS OR MIXES

BAD IF: YOU HAVEN'T GOT TIME TO UNDERSTAND HOW IT WORKS

> MASHUP



NO APOLOGIES FOR INCLUDING ANOTHER program from the Mixed In Key folk, because Mashup is quite possibly the most exciting program in the whole list, creatively. It's a simple idea (as is most software from that company) but well executed, namely it lets you make quick and dirty mashups of your existing tracks on a easy-to-understand timeline, with one crucial game changer: The software tells you what is in key with what else and gives you tools to get things working harmonically, without you needing any musical knowledge at all.

Basically, if you "hear" a great song in your head (typically by singing one melody over another song and

thinking "that's make a good mashup!", or find yourself wanting to add an acapella you love to something instrumental) Mashup is a really fast way of doing it. It's also a great place to work on those on-the-fly little mix/mashups/acapellas you used in your DJ set to polish them and then export them as a single, finished track - a unique little re-edit that you can just play straight in your DJ sets that nobody else has go, because you just made it!



Mashup

2:00 2:30 3:00 3:30 4:00

As You Fall (Guy J Falling Apart mix)

Collin In The Deep (by mr. acapella)

- ▶

GOOD IF: YOU HAVE MASHUP, ACAPELLA AND RE-EDIT IDEAS YOU WANT TO REALISE QUICKLY

BAD IF: YOU JUST WANT TO PLAY YOUR TUNES AS THEY WERE MADE

FINALLY...

I HOPE THIS GUIDE HAS INSPIRED YOU TO maybe try a DJing program you haven't looked at before, even if you already have a "main" program (I'm a big fan of experimenting with a second one on your phone or tablet. The more places to DJ the better, right?). I also hope it's impressed on you the importance of using the right tools to keep a spick, span and organised music collection.

One thing I didn't mention was backup software, but please do back up to a separate physical place regularly. Remember to check out the reviews linked on Digital DJ Tips if you want to know more about any of the above, and to join Digital DJ Tips for free if you aren't already a member, go to www.digitaldjtips.com/signup; there's free DJ training, news and reviews ready to fly direct to your inbox, plus discounts on our courses and other industry offers, waiting when you do.

WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR DJING FAST?

Whether it's learning to DJ from complete beginner, to getting your first aid gig, to learning to scratch, to re-editing, to make great mixtapes, to DJing weddings, to mixing in key, or one of many other skills, we've got a course for that!

Digital DJ Tips online video courses are great value and have helped tens of thousands of DJs to get to where they want to be. Find out more about them here: www.digitaldjtips.com/courses. We also have countless free training courses for our members, and you can see those here: djtips.co/free-training.

