

GarageBand: Interface explained

Find your way around the latest addition to Apple's iLife brood with this guide to the GarageBand interface



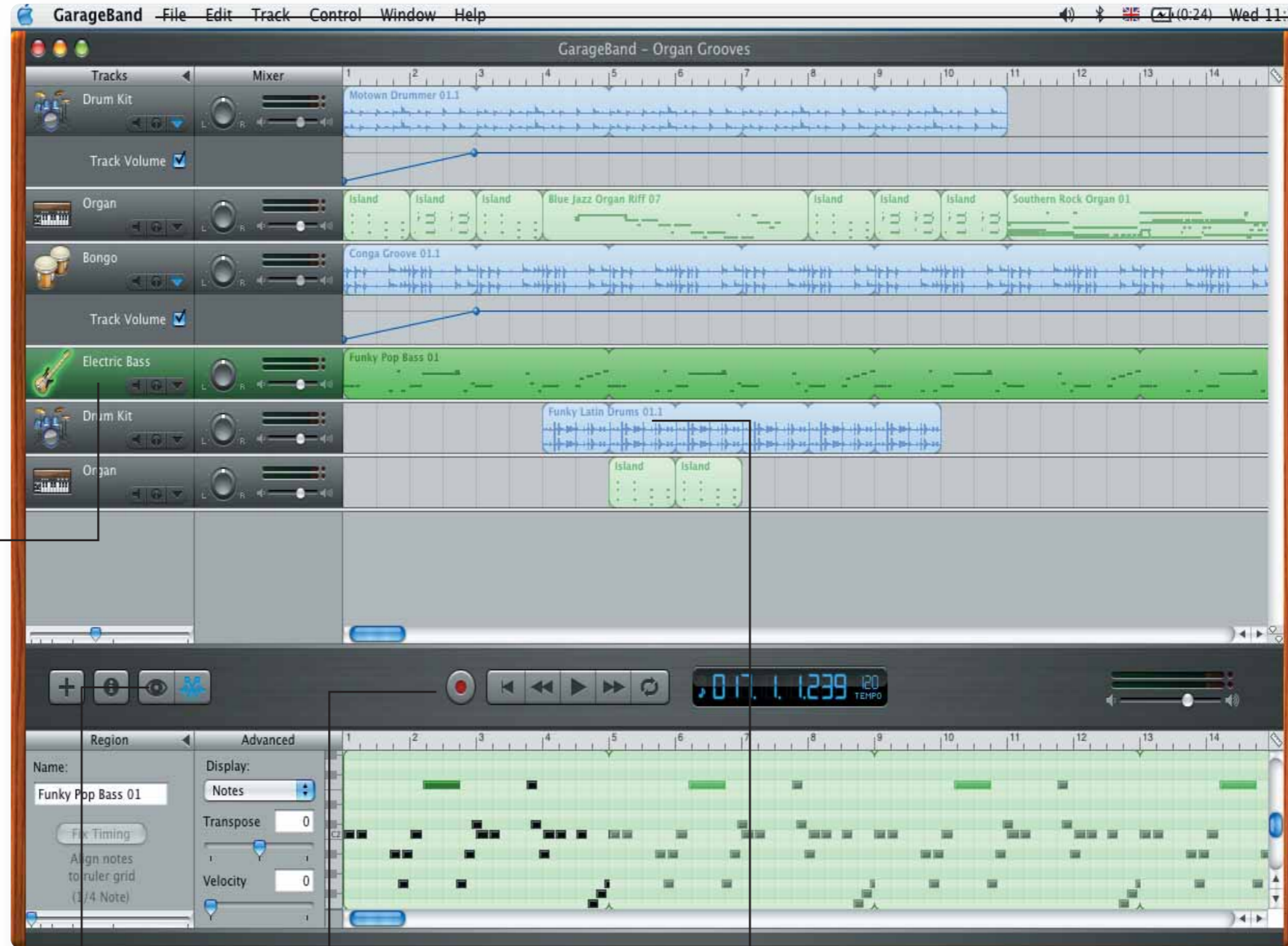
Aims of this section
Task: Get started with GarageBand
Difficulty: Beginner
Time needed: Up to 30 minutes

When Apple launched iLife '04, the major talking point was the inclusion of the brand new GarageBand software. Building on the creative outlets provided by iPhoto, iMovie and iDVD, GarageBand brings music creation to Mac users at an affordable price. Less daunting than larger music packages such as Reason, you literally drag and drop the sounds you like to build up a track. But there's more. Using the line-in connection of a Mac, microphones or live instruments can be plugged directly into GarageBand and the sound produced edited as part of a song. And if you play guitar, the virtual effects that can be applied will make you very happy indeed. To accompany recordings, GarageBand contains a vast library of drumbeats and music loops that can be dragged and dropped at will to provide the backing for your musical masterpiece. Before you begin your noodlings, though, you need to get familiar with the interface, so read on...



Tracks

The bars down the left of the GarageBand interface are the instrument tracks. Each track has separate Pan (balance), volume, mute and solo controls as well as a 'Track Volume Automation Channel'. This alters the volume of a track at specific times in a song, using a graph display.



Knowledge Base: Going loopy

Looking at loops
 The loops in GarageBand are of the utmost quality and have all been professionally recorded to give your track a polished, studio sound. Each loop will fit snugly into any project you may be working on and will always be in perfect time – as long as they're placed correctly on the 'Timeline' grid. Apple has also announced an upgrade pack for GarageBand called Jam Pack, which contains even more loops and instruments for your tunes. Another top place to look for loops is www.powerfx.com who, among other things, produces excellent loop CDs for both Soundtrack and GarageBand and is bound to have a product to suit your style.

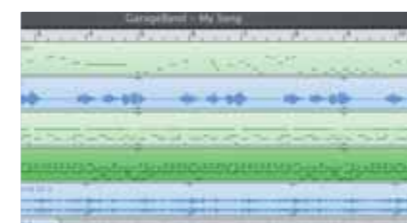
Loop Browser

Clicking on the 'eye' icon in GarageBand opens the 'Loop Browser'. This displays all the available loops such as drums, bass and strings. The loops are divided into genres, styles and instruments so you can quickly find what you're looking for and drag them into your song.

Name	Tempo	Key	Beats	Eye
70s Ballad Strings 02	80	C	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contemplative Synth 03	130	C	32	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exotic Sarod 01	109	C	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exotic Sarod 02	110	C	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle Eastern Oud 01	139	D	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle Eastern Oud 02	141	C	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle Eastern Oud 05	89	C	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordic Keyed Fiddle 01	120	D	16	<input type="checkbox"/>

Playback controls

The 'Stop', 'Play', 'Record' and 'Skip' buttons are self-explanatory, however the playback controls also feature a rather nifty loop facility. Highlighting the 'Loop' button, indicated by two curved arrows, means an area of the track can be highlighted on the 'Timeline' for continuous play.



Timeline

The 'Timeline' is where all your musical inspiration comes together. Recorded instrument parts, vocals, drum and music loops are gathered here alongside their 'Track' bars, and automation lanes and can be manipulated in any way desired. Soundtrack veterans will find the drag and drop style very familiar.

Pay iTunes a visit

As soon as you have finished your song in GarageBand, you will probably want to export it so others can hear your musical wranglings. This is a simple process, thanks to one of GarageBand's iLife '04 siblings...



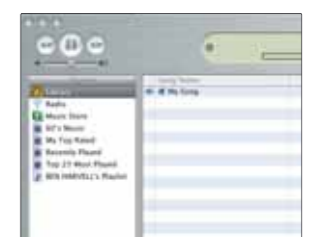
1 When you have a song finished and are happy enough to make an audio file out of it, run through one last time, checking that the volume levels don't clip (distort) by going into the red part of the volume level control.

2 Now open the 'Preferences' window, which can be found by clicking the 'GarageBand' menu. Select the 'Export' tab. Alter any of the text boxes as you wish, which will become the default settings for exported songs.



3 From the 'File' menu, click on 'Export to iTunes'. A mixdown will now be created, which is where all of the separate loops and effects are merged into one unit. Once that's done, iTunes will open.

4 With iTunes now open, you will see your track in the 'Source' panel, complete with the title and artist you specified in the 'Export' menu of GarageBand. Either burn to CD or use the track in another iLife '04 project.



Knowledge Base: Track Automation

Understanding the Track Volume Lane
 The downward arrow on the 'Track' bar of any instrument opens the 'Track Volume Lane'. This begins as a grey area of the 'Timeline' and has a line running through the middle. Checking the box that appears on the 'Track' bar makes the lane active. The line now represents the volume of a track throughout the song. Let us imagine you need the string section to play more quietly at a certain point in the song. All you have to do is locate the area in the song, click on the line in the 'Control Lane' to make a 'Control Point' and gently drag it downward to reduce the volume at this point in the tune. Using a group of 'Control Points', you can create gradual build-ups, or add periods of silence within your tracks.

