

>>> Create

HOW TO DO ANYTHING ON YOUR MAC, iPhone & iPad

Record "Real" Guitar with a Rock Band 3 Controller

Everyone loves Harmonix's awesome videogame, and now you can connect your Rock Band 3 controller to your Mac for your own stairway to real-life shreddin'!

If you've been keeping up with the technological arms race of music videogames, you're probably aware that Rock Band 3, released last October, features a Pro mode that teaches players to actually play guitar or keyboards. A real, stringed electric guitar is forthcoming, but at the moment, Pro guitar mode can only be played with the Mustang—a plastic controller with strings only for strumming and a neck littered with buttons.

Sure, it's not a "real" instrument, but thanks to a MIDI output, you can use the Mustang to make very real music...and do some things simply not possible with a regular guitar. Don't believe it? Head over to maclife.com/rockbandhowto to hear the awesome results of our MIDI shreddin'. And here's how to use GarageBand and that polycarbonate axe to melt some faces. **BY JOE RYBICKI**



\$150 gets you a controller for Rock Band 3 that also doubles as a MIDI controller.

>>>WHAT YOU NEED

L V L:
medium

- >> Rock Band 3 Wireless Fender Mustang PRO-Guitar Controller (\$149.99, madcatz.com)
- >> MIDI-to-USB adapter
- >> GarageBand (\$49 with iLife '11, apple.com)

1 Tune Up

Open GarageBand and create a new project. Select Piano as the template, name your project something saucy, and click Create. Before you do anything else, plug in your MIDI-to-USB adapter. We used the \$30 E-MU Xmidi, but similar adapters can be found on Amazon for about \$6. You should get a notification saying, "The number of MIDI inputs has changed. Now one input is available." This is good. Plug the adapter into the Mustang using the plug labeled "MIDI In" if your MIDI-to-USB has one. Turn on the guitar, either with the power switch or by holding down the Xbox button if it's the 360 controller. Run your fingers across the strings. Hey, check it out: you're strumming a piano!



Don't get ahead of yourself; choosing Guitar here won't do you any good.

2 Sound Check

Now that you've got it working, it's time to make it sound more like a guitar. Click the Info button in the lower right of GarageBand to bring up the track info. You'll see the Grand Piano is selected. Click Guitars in the left column, and choose Clean Electric in the right column. Give those strings another swipe. Better, right? Still, no one's going to mistake that sound for a real electric guitar, but we'll get to that.



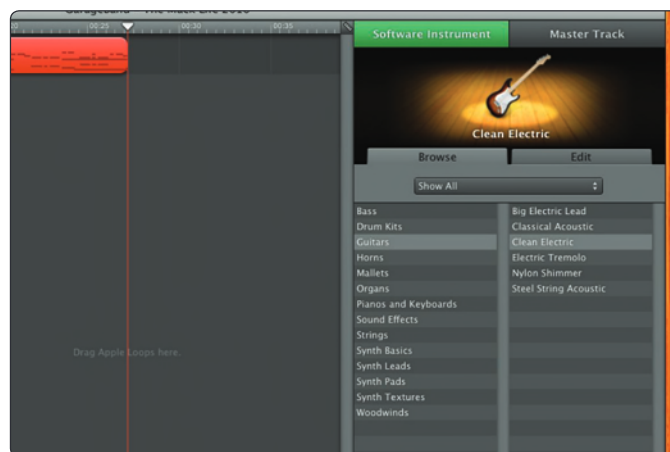
You can try other guitar styles, but they'll probably sound pretty funky in the next step.

3 In the Studio

It may seem counterintuitive because it's not going to sound spectacular, but this is the point where you want to record your masterpiece. Hit the Record button and go to town. Play the Mustang just as you would a normal guitar. Now, you will notice a couple of idiosyncrasies while playing. For one thing, if you strum an open note, it'll just keep ringing out until you hit a button higher on that string; that is, laying a hand over the strings themselves won't stop the sound as it would on a real guitar.

Since the MIDI information is transmitted only when you strum a string, you can't perform hammer-ons or pull-offs. If you were born to shred, you can tap the Start button on the guitar to switch from Strum to Synth mode, which will detect any button press even when you're not strumming. This mode has some weirdness too, but it makes things like hammer-ons, pull-offs, and two-finger tapping possible, so go ahead and get the Eddie Van Halen out of your system.

If you find yourself playing too high or too low, tap the left and right "face" buttons on the guitar (X and B on the 360 version or Square and Circle on the PS3 one) to adjust the octave up and down.

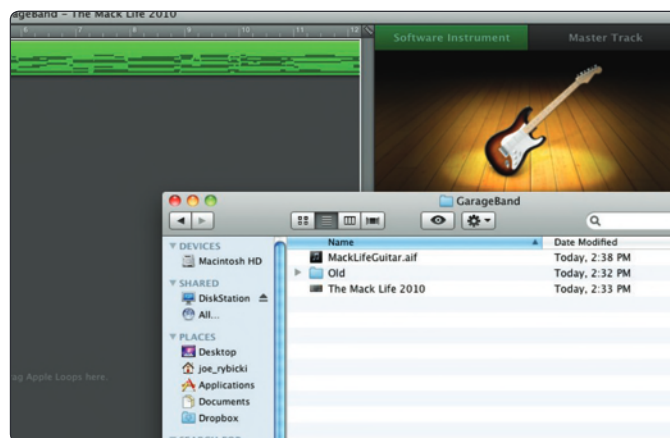


Five dollars to the first person who can identify this song. No, not really.

4 A Second Take

Once you're satisfied with the fundamentals of your guitar track, locate the Share menu and choose Export Song To Disc. If you've created any other tracks at this point, you'll want to mute them before doing this by clicking the speaker icon under the track name; we want just the guitar track exported. In the dialog that pops up, make sure Compress is unchecked, and click Export.

By default, the guitar track will be saved as an AIFF file in the folder where your GarageBand project is stored. We recommend naming it something you'll remember. Once it's finished saving, switch to the Finder, locate the file you just created, and drag it back into GarageBand. This will create a new Real Instrument track—even though you recorded it as a Software Instrument. Make sure you drag the recording in the new track all the way to the beginning of the song so that it syncs properly with the MIDI track.



Drag the new track into the Tracks pane.

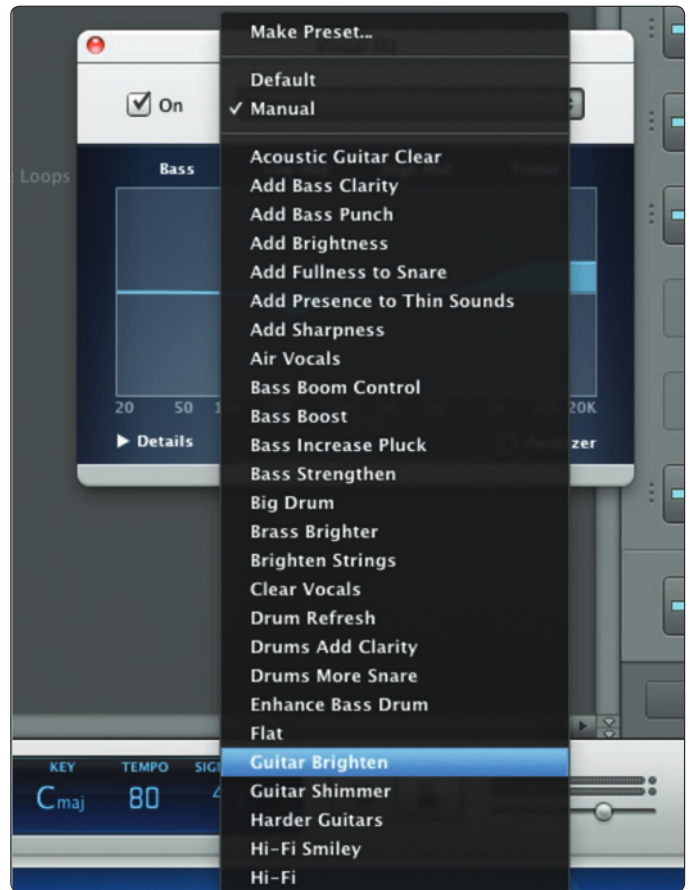
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Record “Real” Guitar with a Rock Band 3 Controller (continued)

5 Post Production

Now it's (finally) time to give your guitar some depth. First, mute your original track. Then select the newly imported track. In the Instrument Info pane, click the Edit tab. Hover over one of the open slots and you'll see a message saying, “Click here to add an effect.” Do that, select Amp Simulation, and click the drop-down menu to choose a new effect (it will say Default by, er, default). Select anything except the Clean sounds. The American and British Overdrive amps seem to provide particularly crisp results.

No matter what combo you choose, your end result might lack a bit of presence. If it does, click Visual EQ at the bottom of the Info pane, select Guitar Brighten, and make sure On is checked. Now hit Play. Holy cats, it's a real guitar! Don't worry, we won't tell anyone you're faking.



You can experiment with other EQ settings, but focus on brightening or boosting the top end.

6 The Experimental Years

This setup will give you a surprisingly good simulation of a real guitar. But it also gives you a lot more. Since you still have the original Software Instrument track, you can play with the instrument settings to accompany (or harmonize with) your guitar track with a variety of software instruments. Try switching the track instrument from Clean Electric to Organs > Cathedral Organ for an eerie tone, or go for Strings > Hollywood Strings to make it more dramatic. The possibilities are practically endless, especially since you can duplicate either of the track types and apply different effects. And you thought videogame controllers were just for playing videogames!



Try some of the Sound Effects for some real hilarity.