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So you've started a podcast, have you? And now that you've got a few episodes under your belt, you're starting to see your audience grow. Now it's time to get a little more serious about your craft. And we're here to help, with four tips to bring you closer to podcasting stardom.

Difficulty Level: Easy

What You Need:

- > GarageBand '09 (included with iLife, free with new Macs or \$79, www.apple.com)
- > A microphone (see Step 1)
- > A topic about which to ramble



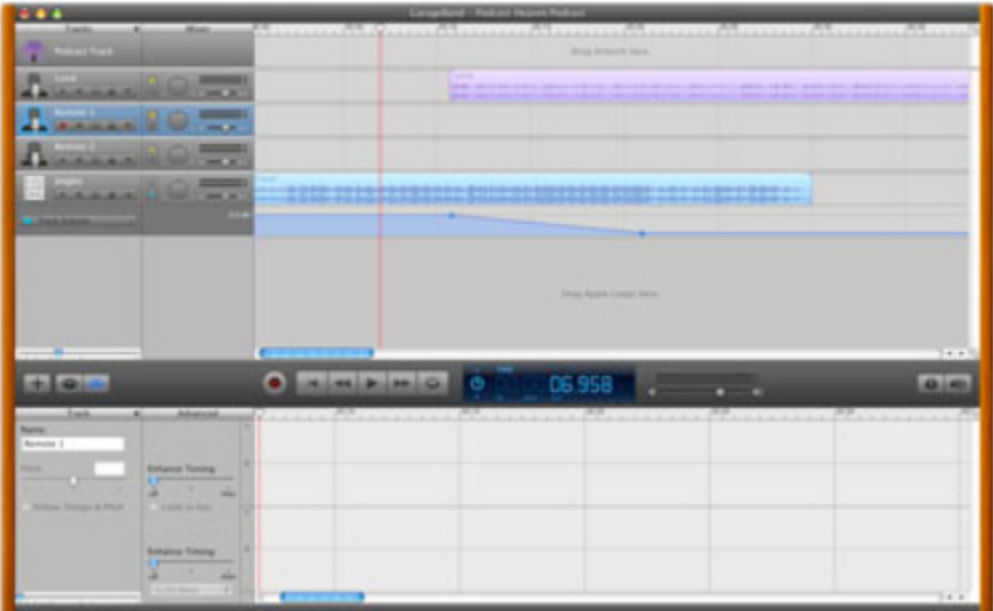
Planning to record using your MacBook's internal mic or your gaming headset? Please don't. You don't need a top-of-the-line microphone, but quality does make a difference. If a solo podcast is all the recording you ever expect to do, you can get the most consistent results from a decent headset mic. But avoid anything designed for gaming, as these tend to have mediocre recording quality even if the headphones sound great. Instead, plan to spend between \$50 and \$100 on a mic designed specifically for recording. We love the one on our U2 headset from CAD Audio (\$49, www.cadaudio.com).



The USB-based U2 headset from CAD Audio is a decent, affordable option for podcasting.

If you're not going to be the only one chattering away, or you expect to record anything besides podcasts, plan to spend at least \$25 to \$50 on a decent unidirectional mic, like the \$49 Audix F50 (www.audixusa.com). But don't forget you'll also want a stand and some sort of windscreens to prevent against vicious pops.

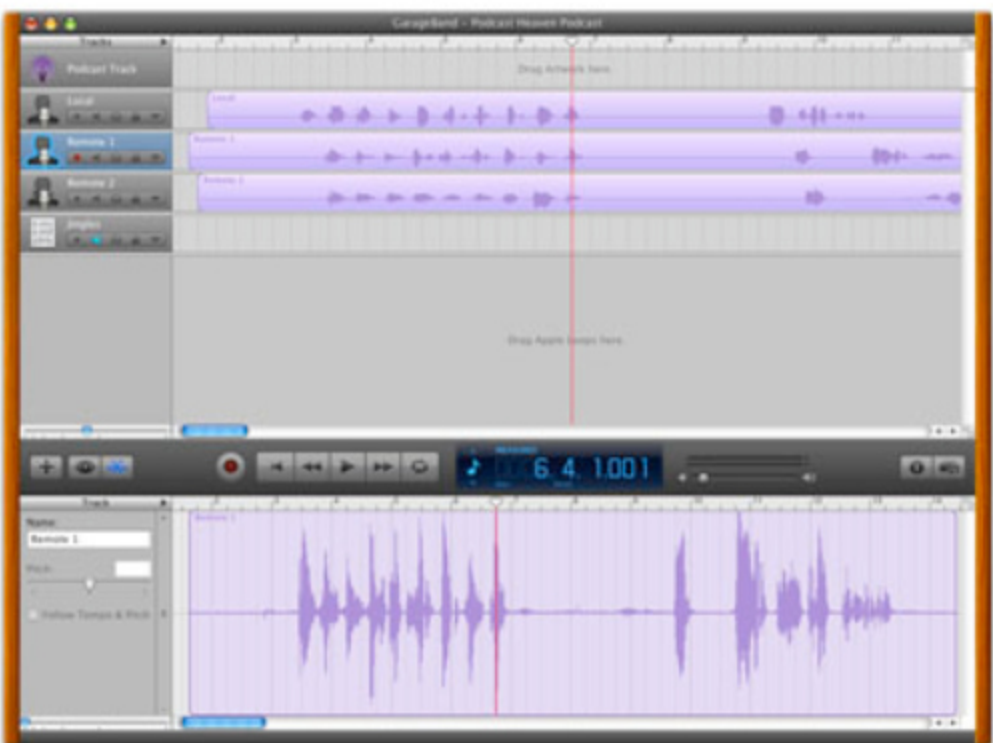
Want to wrap your podcast in a truly professional package? Then get yourself some theme music! You don't need to compose a theme song from scratch—though if you have such talents, it certainly wouldn't hurt. But for non-composers, Apple has thoughtfully included a whole suite of jingles with GarageBand.



Set your theme music to fade out and in slowly to avoid jarring silences.

Open the Loop Browser by clicking the eye in the bottom-left, then select the Podcast Sounds tab at the bottom. The Jingles menu gives you an extremely broad range of different styles to tinker with. Select one that's 30 seconds or more, and give it about 10 seconds of play before the speaking starts. Click the gray down-arrow in the Track control panel to show the Track Volume automation curve. GarageBand will handle the "ducking" (i.e., lowering the jingle when the speaking starts), but you'll still need to slowly fade the music out over the next 10 seconds or so. Then do the same thing in reverse at the end of your show. You'll be amazed what a polished feel you can get from such a simple addition.

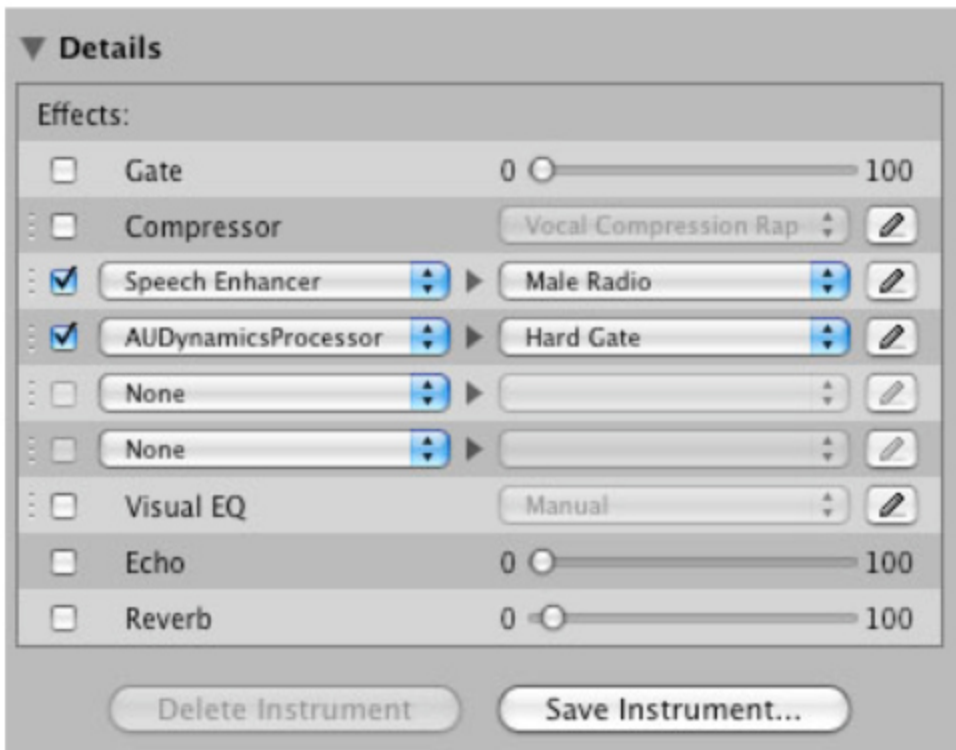
Bringing in guests can really spice up your podcast. And it's becoming more and more common for podcasters to wrangle far-flung guests via phone or Internet-voice (VoIP) services like Skype: The host adjusts the levels of each participant before the session, and then records the output of the VoIP application with Audio Hijack Pro or WireTap Studio. While that can do the job, the sound quality is often subpar, and it becomes much more difficult to edit the podcast, since all the guests are on a single track.



Sync up remote recordings by having your guests all count together.

You can take a giant leap forward in quality and post-production flexibility by using a technique known as a “two-ender.” The concept is simple: You use a VoIP app to converse with your guests naturally, but each guest records his or her own voice locally and sends you the file, which you can then simply drag into GarageBand. Even if they don’t have quality recording gear like yours, it’ll sound worlds better than recording any kind of phone call. Just don’t forget to set a sync point in your recording: Having all participants simply count to 3 simultaneously will allow you to quickly match up the timing of the separate recordings.

Finally, nothing screams “amateur hour” like wildly variable volume, forcing the listener to constantly scramble for the volume control. This is one of the most common transgressions against professionalism you’re likely to hear. But luckily, it’s also one of the easiest to fix.



For the sake of volume knobs everywhere, please compress your tracks.

Once you've recorded or imported all your vocal tracks—but before doing your final mixdown—go into each track and add a new effect by selecting one of the dropdown menus that currently says “None.” Scroll down to Audio Unit effects and choose **AUDynamicsProcessor**. This will make the loud parts a little quieter and the quiet parts a little louder. Unless you have guests moving dramatically closer or farther away from their microphones (which is why we recommend headsets), this should even out everyone's volume, making your show considerably more listenable and your audience considerably happier. And that's what it's all about, right?

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