Booting Up

Welcome to the wonderful world of mashups, where you create your own collaborations with unwitting participants. Have you ever wondered what the Beastie Boys would've sounded like if they had rapped with the Beatles? What would a Green Day/Oasis supergroup sound like? Would you enjoy Kelly Clarkson more if she were backed up by the Breeders? These are the sorts of questions mashup artists not only dare to ask, but attempt to answer, by lifting and dropping, cutting and pasting, unmixing and remixing, blatantly stealing and then kindly giving back, and raiding the annals of pop culture to create a disorienting recombinant nostalgia trip. Arguably one of the first new popular music genres of the twenty-first century, mashups are a global phenomenon enjoyed by people of all ages, cultures, and musical preferences.

At its most basic, a mashup is simply the vocals of one song singing or rapping over the instrumental of another song, assembled on a computer. Each component is edited to make sure the parts flow together seamlessly.

This chapter will give you a whirlwind tour of mashup production, just enough to get your feet wet. Afterward, throughout the rest of the book, the history of mashups will be explored, followed by some technical and musical background necessary for mashup production. After the fundamentals are covered, you'll read about mashup production in detail, including the issues of song selection, timing, pitch, unmixing, arrangement, and mastering. Distribution and legal issues will also be considered.

Quick Start

Rather than learning all the ins and outs before experiencing the satisfaction of mashup production, you can get a quick taste by following a few simple steps. All of this will be covered in much greater detail and at a much slower pace in later chapters.

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☑ Quick start

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Install the Software

On this book's CD-ROM are installations of two versions of Sony ACID, one of the more popular software packages for mashup production. See the Introduction for details on the different versions available. Choose the version that's right for you, run the installer, and follow the instructions. ACID and its installation are covered in depth in Chapter 5.

You will also need iTunes installed, available at www.apple.com/itunes, or some other means to acquire the component songs.

Download an Acappella

If you purchase your song from the iTunes store, you will need to convert it to either a wav or an mp3, two types of audio files that can be used in ACID. Wav files are higher-quality but large, while mp3s are much smaller, but not quite as high-quality. The simplest way to convert your purchased file is to burn a CD with your song and then reimport the song from the CD. This removes the copy protection, which would prevent the songs from being directly loaded up in ACID. This conversion technique (as well as several others) is covered in detail in Chapter 3 in the "Unprotecting Audio" sidebar.

An acappella is simply the vocal for a song or rap without any of the background instrumentation. For simplicity's sake, it's good to start with a rap acappella (a selection is available for purchase at the iTunes Store). Try "Whoomp! (There It Is) [Acappella Mix]" by Tag Team.

Download an Instrumental

The great thing about rap acappellas (without any singing) is that they easily combine with a number of instrumental backgrounds as long as they have similar tempos. Eventually, you might decide to cut up a full song's instrumental sections and rearrange them into your own customized instrumental, but for now it's quicker to simply download an audio file that's already an instrumental.

A good match for the Tag Team acappella is "Stand Up Tall (Instrumental Version)" by Dizzee Rascal, available at the iTunes Store.

The ACID Drop

After you get your audio files, drag them from iTunes and simply drop them into the upper-left half of the ACID window (see Figure 1-1): first the "Stand Up Tall" instrumental, and then the "Whoomp!" acappella. If a Beatmapper Wizard window (ACID Pro) or an upgrade window (ACID XPress) appears, click Cancel or Close to close that window.

Click here to select second track   Paint tool

Drop your files here

Project tempo

General and Stretch tabs

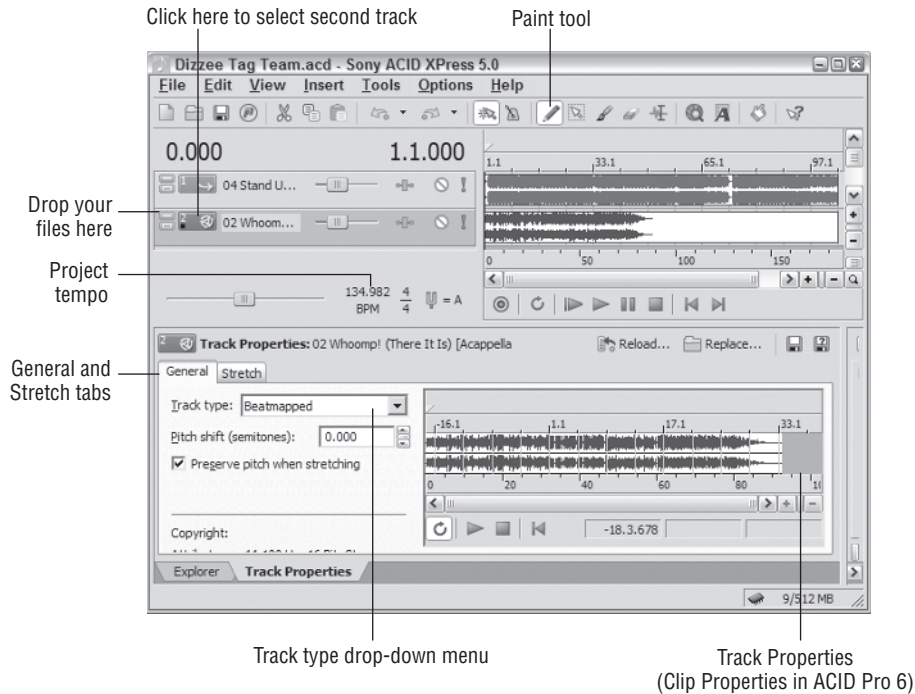Track type drop-down menu   Track Properties (Clip Properties in ACID Pro 6)

FIGURE 1-1: ACID XPress

Now select the second track by clicking 02 Whoomp! (There It Is) [Acappella Mix] in the upper-left portion of the ACID window (see Figure 1-1). The entire track names may not be visible, but they should start with 01 and 02.

In the General tab of Track Properties (ACID XPress) or Clip Properties (ACID Pro 6), switch from One-Shot to Beatmapped in the Track Type drop-down menu, as shown in Figure 1-1. Check the box that says "Preserve pitch when stretching," and then click the Stretch tab, which shows three parameters (not shown in Figure 1-1). Leave the Root Note as it is, and change the Original tempo to **129.000** and the Downbeat offset to **12,640**. You do not need to change the track/clip properties of Track 1. Also, make sure you are editing the downbeat offset in the Stretch tab of your Track or Clip properties, not in the Event Properties pop-up window.

Select the Paint tool by clicking its button in the toolbar (see Figure 1-1). At the beginning of Track 1, paint the entire track by clicking near the beginning of Track 1 while holding down the Ctrl key for track 2. Your ACID window should look something like Figure 1-1. Double-click the project tempo (see Figure 1-1) and enter a value of **134.982**.

Press Play. Congratulations. You just made your first mashup.

Breaking It Down

If this all seemed too easy, don't worry. It gets a lot more interesting. For example, what happens if your tracks aren't of similar tempo? If the vocals are sung, how do you find a good match? What happens when you can't find the instrumental or acappella of the songs you want (which is most of the time)? What do you do if the tempo is uneven? All these questions and more will be answered in the following chapters. Have fun!