

# GarageBand, not GarbageBand

By Carol Broos

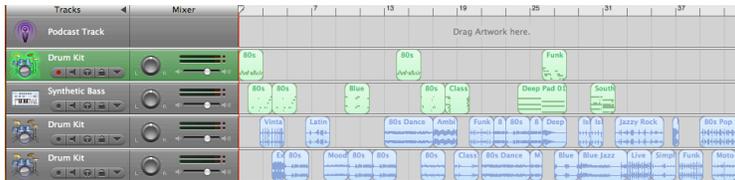
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GarageBand, a program that anyone can compose with little or no knowledge of music and/or music theory. The loops are already to drop and drag into the document, so anyone can compose a song. However, the beginning non-musician can easily over-create the composition. The musicians within the classroom understand that less is more.

There are three levels of teaching GarageBand. In showing my fourth graders the program the first time, tell them the “crayon” story. If you use a box of crayons to draw a picture, you wouldn’t use the every color and full up the entire page. In leaving a lot of “**white**” space improves your picture. The same with occurs with using GarageBand. Be selective and make sure you “love” the loop. This takes time to listen to the loops. Take your time. Decide what mood you want to convey and stick to it.

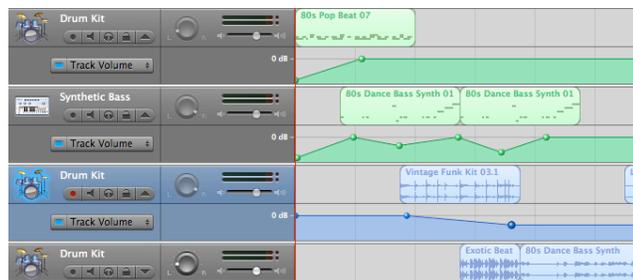


If it *looks* organized, it *sounds* organized. Do not use the word “good.” Good has a non-descript meaning.

Students should use words that accurately describe the musical idea. Students are excited to have others listen to their compositions with suggestions given to the student. Try to suggest one or two musical ideas for every composition.

The second level is **repetition**, **dynamics** and/or **left/right ear**.

This is where you really need headsets, to accurately hear the separation of the stereo within the composition. By deleting and repeating some loops, this is the first step in editing that students



hear as a major improvement. Beginning composition students usually use a loop only once, then moving on to another loop that has nothing to do with the first loop. Students need one loop that is the main loop; call it the “anchor” of the piece. It can be any loop, but more often it is drums, bass, or piano. Then, and only then, they have the additional loops come off of that original loop. By keeping a small number of “favorite” loops within the piece, creates a mood or overall feeling of the composition.

Now, let's talk about repetition, every time you do repeat, the musical rule is to change something, be it the dynamics, pitch or tempo. You cannot easily change the tempo, there is a way, but it takes many steps. It takes a lot of work. However, I find students that really want to change the tempo, don't view this as work. Dynamics and pitch are easily done and most students choose that.

Use correct arts vocabulary right at the beginning, it develops a knowledge base that encourages the students use correct musical terms and concepts. They also can correctly describe what they are trying to accomplish. They begin to sound like composers. Students are also encouraged to use the correct descriptors in analyzing their compositions and in discussing other student's works. Currently, students at Sunset Ridge School are part of the Vermont MIDI project that uses this procedure. Upon establishing the use of vocabulary, a database of arts vocabulary is needed. Laminate a sheet for students to use. Students will question the arts vocabulary words, then want to know how to use them within their compositions. This will improve their overall compositions. You can find "arts vocabulary" [www.carolbroos.com](http://www.carolbroos.com), please download it and change it to your specific needs.



Finally, the third level divides into individual preferences. They can compose their own **loops** or add a **vocal track**. Composing your own loops is done by using a MIDI keyboard or by using a composition program such as Sibelius or Finale. Additionally, students also **add pictures** to their compositions and now the file is considered a "podcast."

By adding a vocal track (track>new track>real instrument,) use "live performance." It tends to be the best quality. But, be careful to have headsets on. If you don't, the computer will double record your voice and the loops. You will have a weird echo of your voice and the GarageBand song. By, having headsets on and using the built-in microphone, only your voice will be recorded. A simple tip, but well worth the effort.

It is important that students listen to a lot of GarageBand songs to differentiate between what they like and don't like. As students listen to more and more songs, they ask, "How do you do that?"

Music is highly subjective; students are taught to have an open ear/mind and must have other students listen to their compositions to offer suggestions. This is where the composition process really is electrifying. You will see students go from station to station listening, offering suggestions. It is a very stimulating time in the MIDI classroom.

Finally, when the composition is completed, students share to iTunes and can burn a CD. The older students give you the file (either by the drop box or on a jump drive) and then post them on my website for all to download, you can too. Listen and hear some wonderful Garageband compositions under podcasts at [www.carolbroos.com](http://www.carolbroos.com)