

Ableton Live 9 Power!

The Comprehensive Guide

Jon Margulies

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Ableton Live 9 Power!:
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Jon Margulies

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Jon Margulies is a producer and performing artist who has been called the “Mr. Miyagi” of Ableton Live. A lifelong professional musician and computer wizard, Margulies has performed as “Hobotech” at festivals such as Coachella, SXSW, Winter Music Conference, and Burning Man. He is the author of *Ableton Live 7 Power!* and *Ableton Live 8 Power!*, and the co-author of *Your Ableton Live Studio*. Visit hobo-tech.com for Jon’s latest Ableton Live tips and music downloads.

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Introduction

Ableton Live 9 Power!: The Comprehensive Guide is an all-inclusive guide to making music with Ableton's revolutionary live performance and studio software. Written for all Live users, from beginners to seasoned pros, this book explores each fundamental feature in Live, although it does presume a basic familiarity with music making and digital audio. This book is intended to supplement and expand on the information included in the Live manual and built-in lessons, so don't forget to take advantage of these great resources. Finally, this book also includes downloadable materials, which can be found at www.hobo-tech.com/livepower.

What You'll Find in This Book

You'll find the following areas covered in this book:

- ▷ Composing, arranging, and mixing music with Live.
- ▷ Using Live's built-in instruments and effects, and working with plug-ins.
- ▷ Performing with Live on stage.
- ▷ Essential information on Live's add-ons including Max For Live and the Push hardware controller

And much more!

Who This Book Is For

This book is for anyone who wants a solid foundation in using Ableton Live. While it contains all of the basic information needed by beginners, it also delves into deeper topics, providing real-world tips and examples for power users.

How This Book Is Organized

This book starts out with an overview of the most important concepts of Live, explaining essential aspects of the interface and outlining Live's unique workflow. The following chapters provide a detailed and highly practical reference guide to topics such as clips, tracks, devices, and hardware control. The final chapters of the book are devoted to important concepts for performance and useful advanced techniques.

Companion Website Downloads

You may download the companion website files from www.hobo-tech.com/livepower or www.cengageptr.com/downloads.

Live 9

EVERY SO OFTEN, a new piece of technology or software application makes an indelible mark on the way things are done. Ableton's Live has instigated a revolution in the audio software world by transforming computers into playable musical instruments, without sacrificing the power that digital audio workstations are known for. You'll find all the features you'd expect, such as multitrack audio and MIDI recording, nonlinear editing, quantization, pitch shifting, freezing, delay compensation, and more. This comes as the culmination of years of software development infused with DJ and electronic music-making instincts.

Live is also widely used for DJing, live performance, sound installations, and just about any on-stage or non-studio use you can imagine. Unlike other software programs that are based on a traditional DJ paradigm, Live allows artists to create a highly customized performance environment, limited only by imagination. And with the introduction of Max For Live in version 8, Live has an ever expanding community of programmers creating add-on devices to extend the program's functionality.

What Is Live?

Live is a program written for musicians by musicians. Initially, Robert Henke and Gerhard Behles (paired in the Berlin-based electronica group Monolake) were looking for a better way to create their own music through the use of a computer. Both were experienced sound designers and had spent time working for Native Instruments, one of the industry's chief authorities on software synthesizers and sound design software. At the time, the industry lacked a user-friendly software application conducive to creating music as a musician would—both intuitively and spontaneously.

In 2000, they formed Ableton and released Live 1.0, an audio-only program oriented around live performance (hence the name!). What made Live so unique from day one was the Session View, a customizable grid, which is used to organize and play musical elements (such as drum loops, guitar riffs, and synthesizer parts).

While most other music sequencers are organized around a timeline, which is used to lay out musical elements in a left-to-right fashion, Live's Session view allows musical elements to be composed on the fly and mixed-and-matched at will—a highly fluid and interactive process that was traditionally the domain of hardware synths, loopers, and drum machines (see Figure 1.1). Live combines this workflow with the power of modern software, giving you the best of both worlds.

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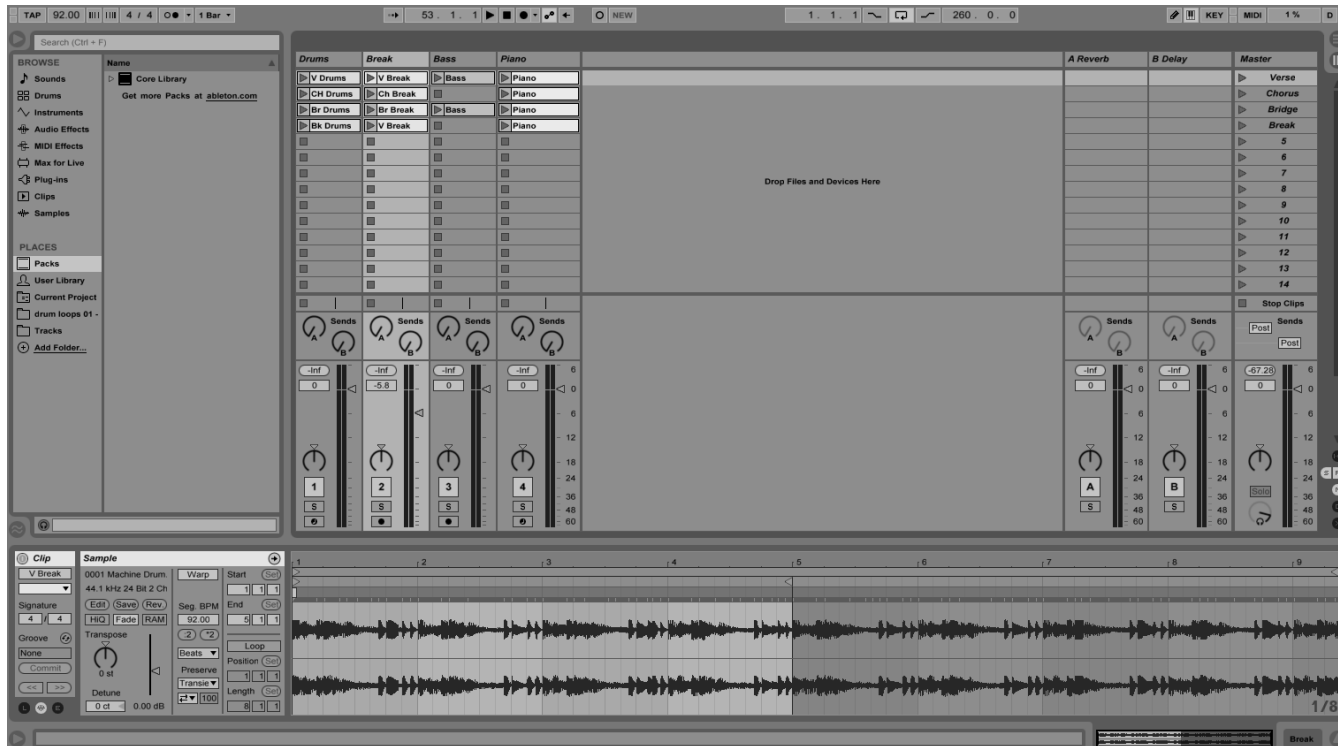


Figure 1.1 Here is a quick peek at the Session View grid in Live 9. The rows make up musical sections called scenes, and the columns function as virtual mixer channels.

Source: Ableton

Another area Live specializes in is stretching audio to any desired tempo or pitch. Want to use that 90BPM drum loop in the 105BPM song that you're working on? Not a problem. Want to transpose the key and change the tempo of some Ozark mountain fiddle music to sync it up with a dance floor banger (as this author has been known to do)? It takes a little skill with Live's Warp feature, but once you get the hang of it, you'll be amazed at how easy it is to combine a wide variety of musical elements with varying keys and tempos.

Not strictly an improvisation and performance tool, Live sports a traditional timeline like that found in other digital audio workstations (or DAWs) such as Digidesign's Pro Tools, Apple's Logic, MOTU's Digital Performer, Cakewalk's SONAR, and Steinberg's Cubase (and Nuendo). Live's timeline (called the *Arrangement*) can be used to capture your improvisations for final polishing, editing, and mixing. To get an idea of what we're talking about, look at Figure 1.2, which features a screenshot of Live's Arrangement View.

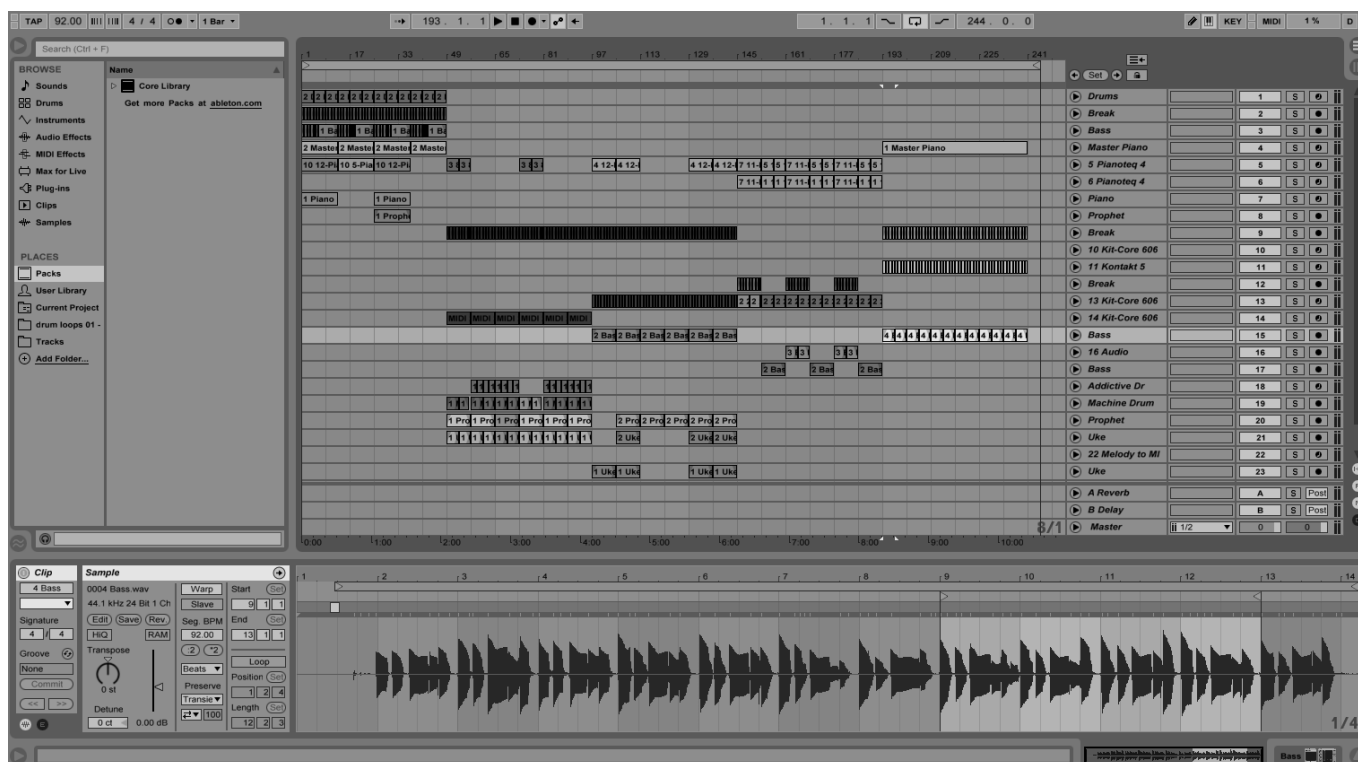


Figure 1.2 If you've used other digital audio workstations, Live's Arrangement View should look familiar.

Source: Ableton

Over the years since its inception, Live has evolved into a fully featured music production suite with powerful MIDI editing, VST/Audio Units and ReWire support, and (with the advent of Live 9) futuristic features such as Audio-to-MIDI and Push, a hardware controller for Live that promises the ability to create most of a song without ever having to grab your mouse or computer keyboard.

What Sets Live Apart?

The digital audio world has exploded since Live's first days. Even the average computer is extremely powerful, and all the major software companies have studied their competitors' features and expanded their products in ways that make formerly incomprehensible innovations commonplace. There has never been a better time to get into the game; for a beginner, it's almost impossible to go wrong.

That said, there are still many things that make Live a unique program. Although this list is far from complete, these few items from Live 9's feature set show a few ways in which Live stands apart from the rest.

- ▷ Ableton is one of the original innovators in the area of real-time time stretching and pitch shifting. While most DAWs now have time and pitch manipulation features, Live's flexibility and ease of use remains unparalleled. With a few mouse clicks, you can adjust pitch and time for synchronization tasks or insane sound mangling.
- ▷ To achieve even more flexibility and elasticity, the Slice to New MIDI Track command can cut a loop into multiple samples and generate a MIDI file to play them back in order, much in the way Propellerhead's ReCycle and Dr. Rex would. (Speaking of which, Live natively supports REX files as well!)

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- ▷ Live is very easy to use with MIDI controller hardware. Whether you're using a device designed for Live (such as Push, APC 40, or Launchpad), or a generic MIDI controller of some sort, it's simple to get your hands off the mouse and onto pads, knobs, and the like. Even if you don't have a controller, Live's flexible mapping feature allows you to control just about anything with a single keystroke on your computer keyboard.
- ▷ Live lets you build customized groupings of effects and virtual instruments called *Racks*. With powerful routing options, you can create layers, splits, and complex effects like never before. Drum Racks take this concept to another level, allowing you to build drum banks with combinations of audio samples, synthesized sounds, and effects.
- ▷ Max For Live (included in Live Suite and available as an add-on for Live Standard) allows Live to be infinitely extended. These extensions range from effects (such as convolution reverb) to step sequencers, parameter randomizers, video tools, and interface tools such as Already Played, which will change the color of a clip once it's played to make it easier for DJs to keep track of their sets. Max For Live devices are fully programmable, so if you've got the skills, you can modify any device to taste or create your own from scratch.
- ▷ Live 9 introduces a new set of Audio to MIDI features that can analyze audio of drums, melody, or harmony and produce a new MIDI track ready for you to tweak and process to your heart's content. Want to sing a melody and then have a synth play the melody? Now you can.

Goals of This Book

Like Live, *Ableton Live 9 Power!* was written by a performing musician. I've spent plenty of time performing with Live and have been recording and remixing in Live for years. Live is built to be musical, and this book will aspire to be the same. It is my hope that you will have many long hours of enjoyment using Live while creating some interesting new music. Although this book is designed to be a "power user" book, don't be deterred if you are new to Live, new to music, or new to computer-based production. This book will serve as a basic guide for interfacing with Live and an advanced tips and tricks collection for taking advantage of Ableton's industry-rocking technology.

If you are already familiar with Live, this book should feel like a souped-up reference manual with some powerful tips and musical ideas for you to incorporate into your Live vocabulary. This book should help you optimize Live's settings for speed and sound, which should translate into maximum musical output. *Ableton Live 9 Power!* covers some sticky but rewarding topics, such as Live's MIDI implementation, editing Live's mix automation, and using virtual EQs and compressors for professional audio results.

The Online Files

To get you going as quickly as possible, you can find online files containing custom-built Live Sets to illustrate the topics in this book as you read about them. After all, what fun is it to read about music? It's much more fun to *hear* music.

Download and install the Live Pack hosted at www.hobo-tech.com/livepower onto your computer. Once you've done this, you'll be able to get to the files by clicking on Packs in the Browser and unfolding the Live 9 Power! pack.