

Live 4: Getting MIDI-fied

Live 4 offers many exciting new features to enhance and inspire your music productions. One of the most notable new features is the addition of full MIDI recording, sequencing and editing. This means that your MIDI hardware and software instruments can now become an integral part of Live's unique real-time approach to making music. So, now that MIDI is in the game, this month's Tips & Tricks will explore some of the MIDI-related features in Live 4.

Lessons in Live

Before we get started, I would like to point out the new, integrated step-by-step program tutorials, which are aptly named *lessons*. Whether you are a beginner or are already well acquainted with Live, the lessons provide many useful tips and make it extremely easy to become quickly fluent in the program.



The screenshot displays the Ableton Live 4 interface during a MIDI lesson. At the top, the software version is 4.0.0, and the MIDI mode is active. The lesson window, titled "Drawing Notes", provides instructions on how to use the Draw Mode for MIDI. It states: "Not only can you record patterns, but you can also *draw* them- or do both." and "Make sure *Draw Mode* is engaged." Below this text is a control bar showing the current time signature (75. 1. 2) and a yellow pencil icon indicating Draw Mode is active. The lesson further explains: "In Draw Mode, clicking into an *empty* grid tile creates a note there; clicking into an occupied tile clears the tile. Dragging across tiles fills them or deletes them all." A MIDI piano roll is shown with various drum tracks (hh 05, perc 05, tom 23, snar041, kick051) and a grid of notes. A red box highlights a specific note on the hh 05 track. At the bottom of the lesson window, it says "You can change the grid density at any time by holding" followed by a key icon. The interface also shows a "Master" track list on the left, a "Solo" button, and navigation controls for the lesson (Previous, 7 / 10, Next).

The lessons are accessed via Live's Help menu. Here is a brief overview of what is covered in each lesson:

Making Music With Live: The Live Session View and many other fundamental aspects of what makes Live unique.

Editing Arrangements: Editing and navigation in Live's Arrangement View, including some nice editing tips.

MIDI, Instruments and Effects: Many of the exciting new MIDI features, including Simplr, MIDI clips, MIDI tracks, MIDI effects and the powerful new routing scheme. (I highly recommend this lesson, as it lays much of the groundwork for this month's Tips & Tricks.)

Creating Drum Patterns With Live: Impulse, drawing and editing MIDI, using the computer keyboard to play MIDI, and a plethora of other tips along the way. (Again, highly recommended and very much related to this month's Tips & Tricks.)

Recording and Automation: Arrangement View audio and MIDI recording, automation, routing, and many other features, as well as some handy tips.

If you are not yet a proud owner of Live 4, you can follow the lessons and try this month's Tips & Tricks with the Live 4 demo version, which is available at www.ableton.com/downloads. Also, you might want to check out the new movies to see Live 4 in action at www.ableton.com/movies.

MIDI 101

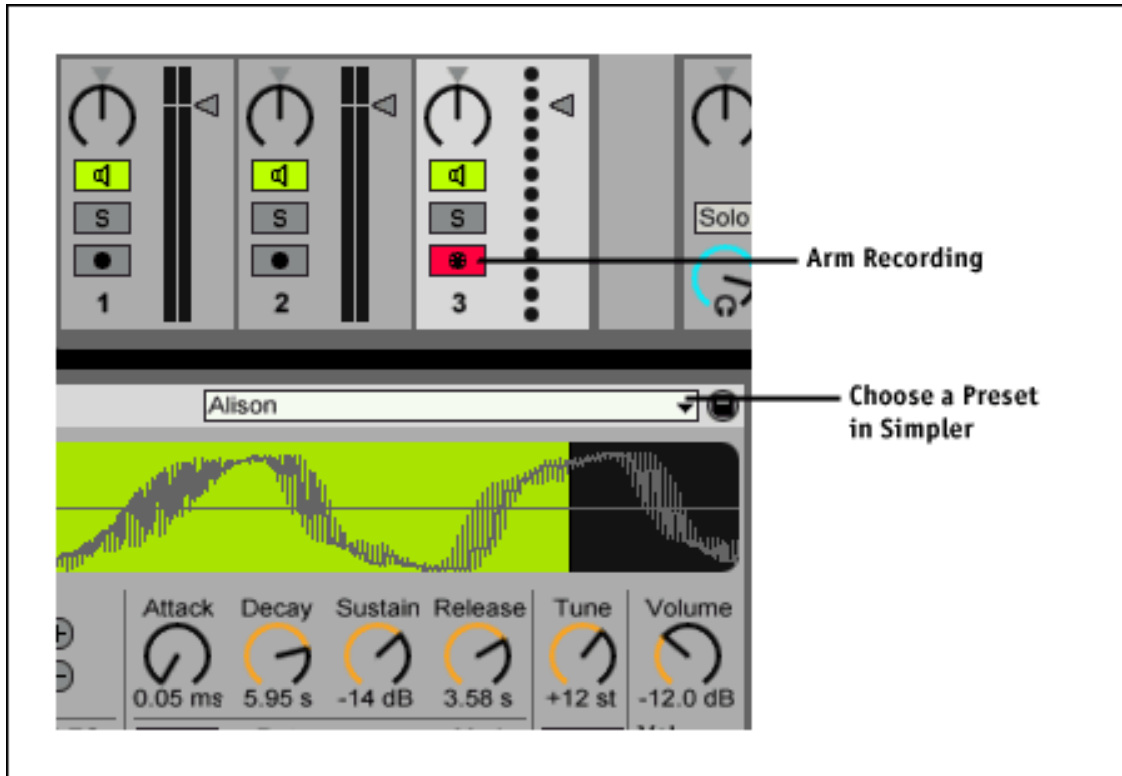
MIDI in Live 4 is easy to use yet extremely powerful and flexible. Let's start with some basics to get you going.

In Live 4, MIDI is stored and recorded in MIDI clips, which "live" in MIDI tracks. Creating a MIDI track can be achieved by selecting "Insert MIDI Track" from the Insert Menu. However, if you work with virtual instruments, you can create a new MIDI track simply by dragging an instrument from the Browser and dropping it into the empty space following the tracks in the Session or Arrangement View. Try dragging a copy of Simplr from the Browser into this empty space to create a new MIDI track.



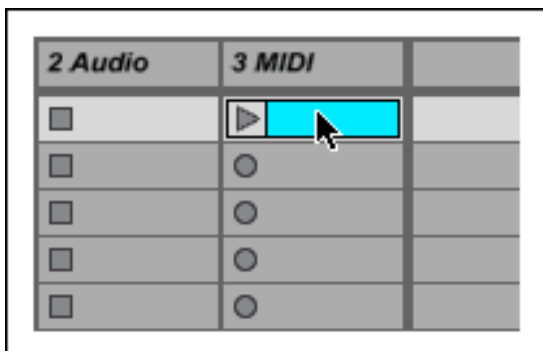
Tip: This drag-and-drop trick also works for audio and MIDI clips and effects.

Arm recording for the track and choose a preset in Simplr. Now you can play notes on your MIDI keyboard or any other controller to audition the instrument.

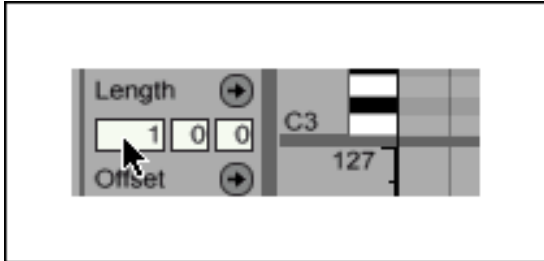


What, no MIDI controller? No problem, the computer keyboard can play MIDI notes too. The A,S,D... row plays the white keyboard notes, and the Q,W,E,... row plays the black keyboard notes. The Z and X keys transpose down and up in increments of one octave, respectively.

Now, in the Session View, create a MIDI clip in the MIDI track containing Simplr by double-clicking in an empty clip slot. The new MIDI clip is automatically set to be an empty one-bar loop, which we can record into so as to build up a pattern or phrase.

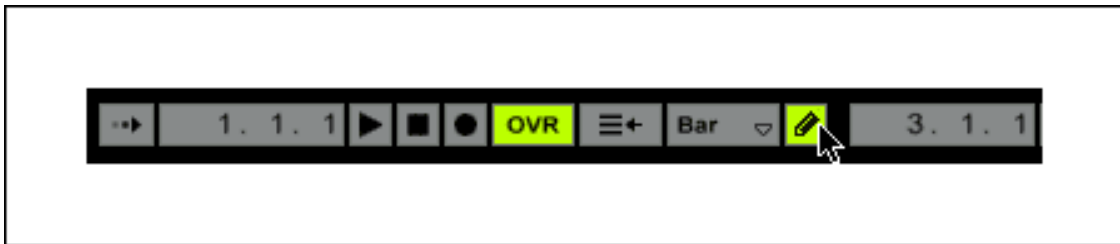


You can change the length of the clip by dragging the Clip Loop/Region end marker or by typing a new length in the Loop Length field, shown below.

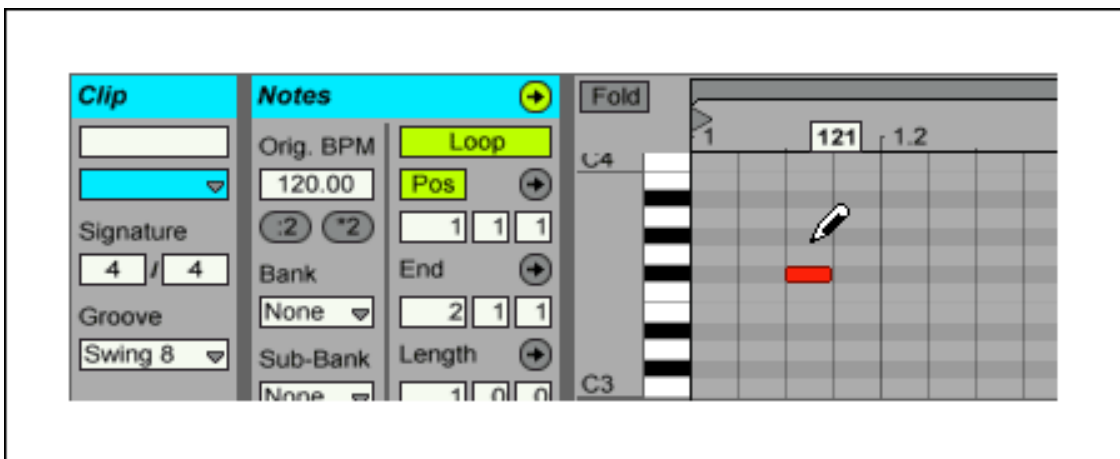


MIDI for Artists

Sometimes it can be more fun to draw MIDI data instead of playing it from a MIDI controller. You can draw notes in the MIDI Editor by enabling Draw Mode, as shown below.



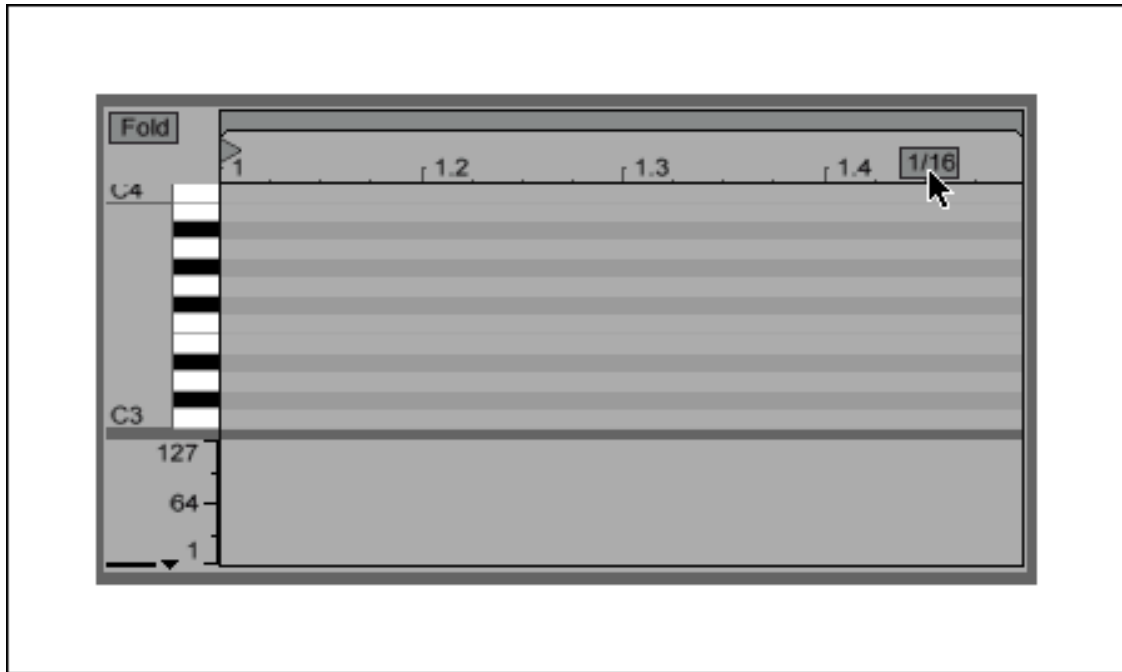
Double-click on the MIDI clip you just created to bring up the MIDI Editor, and simply click in the grid to draw notes.



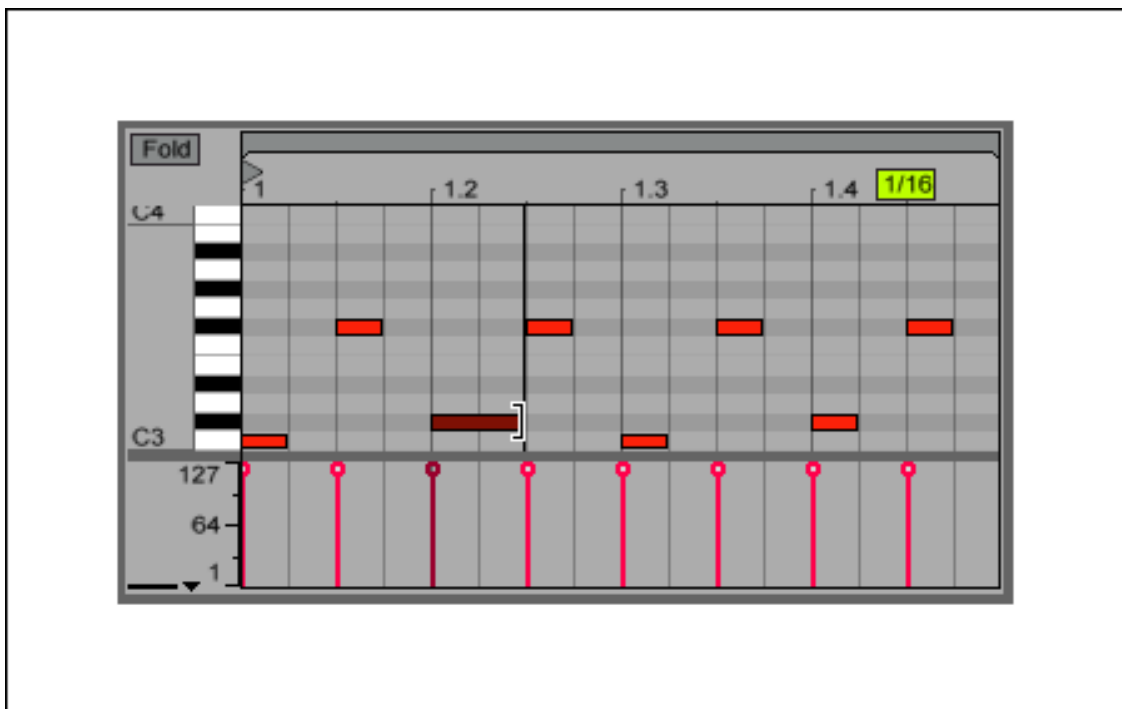
Here are a few quick tips to get you acquainted with the MIDI Editor:

- When drawing notes, you can simultaneously draw velocity values by dragging up and down with the mouse. Click to create a note, and drag up and down without releasing the mouse button to adjust velocity.

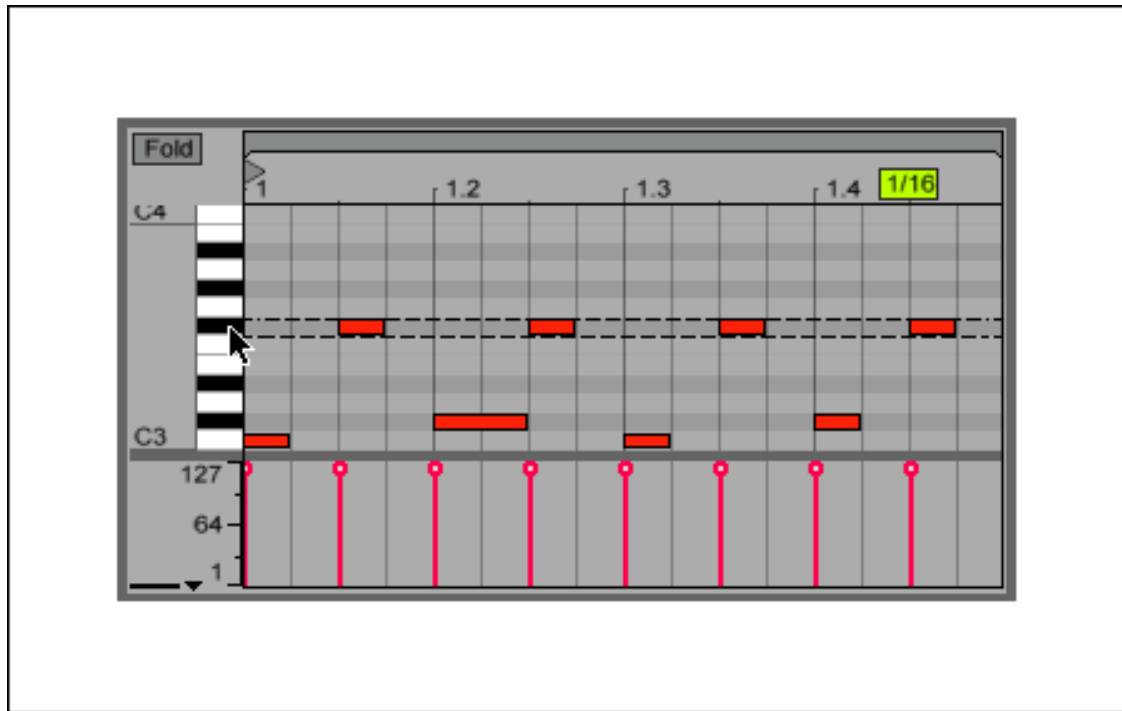
- Drawn notes snap to the grid, which is based on zoom resolution. You can narrow, widen or switch the grid to triplets via the Options menu. You can activate and deactivate the grid by clicking on the grid display in the upper right-hand corner of the MIDI Editor, shown below.



- Deactivate Draw Mode to move and resize notes by clicking and dragging. You can hold down the Command (Mac) / Alt (PC) modifier as you drag to temporarily bypass grid snapping.



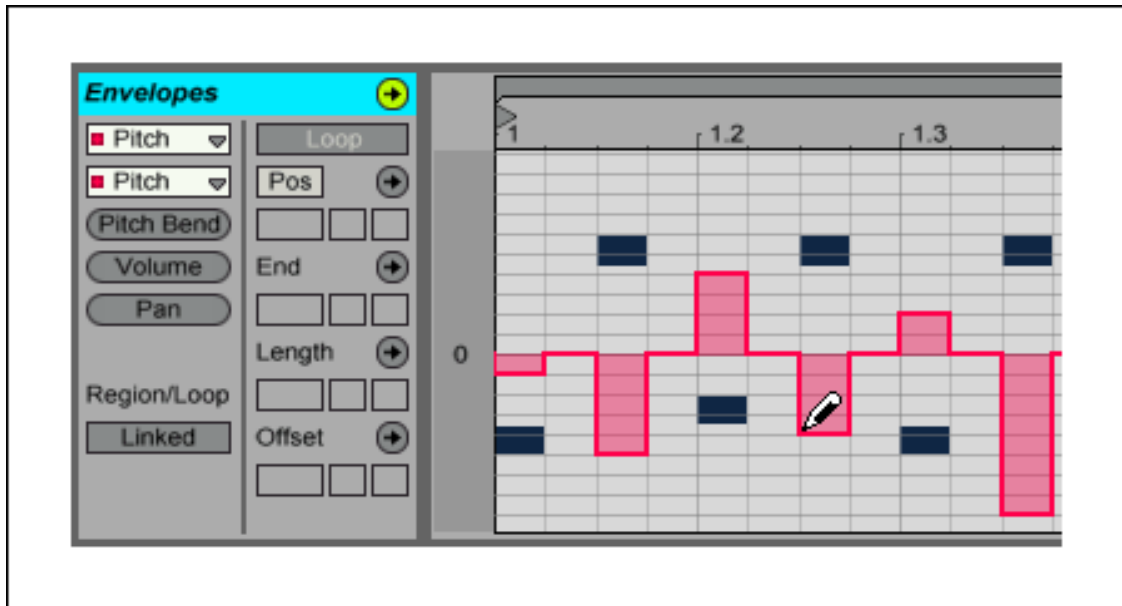
- You can move notes left, right, up and down within the display using the arrow keys on the computer keyboard.
- To select all instances of a particular note throughout an entire clip (to uniformly adjust velocity, for example), click on its associated piano roll key, as shown below.



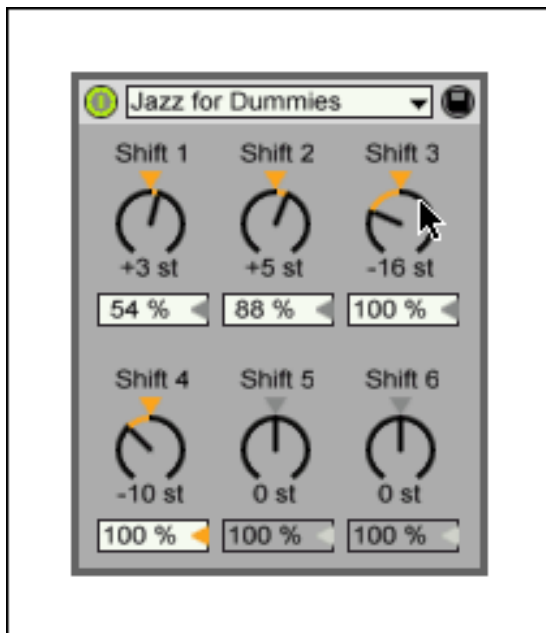
Simply Effective

Live 4 also introduces some exciting real-time MIDI effects. With these effects, you can do anything from saving editing time to getting completely crazy with your creations. Try some of these tricks:

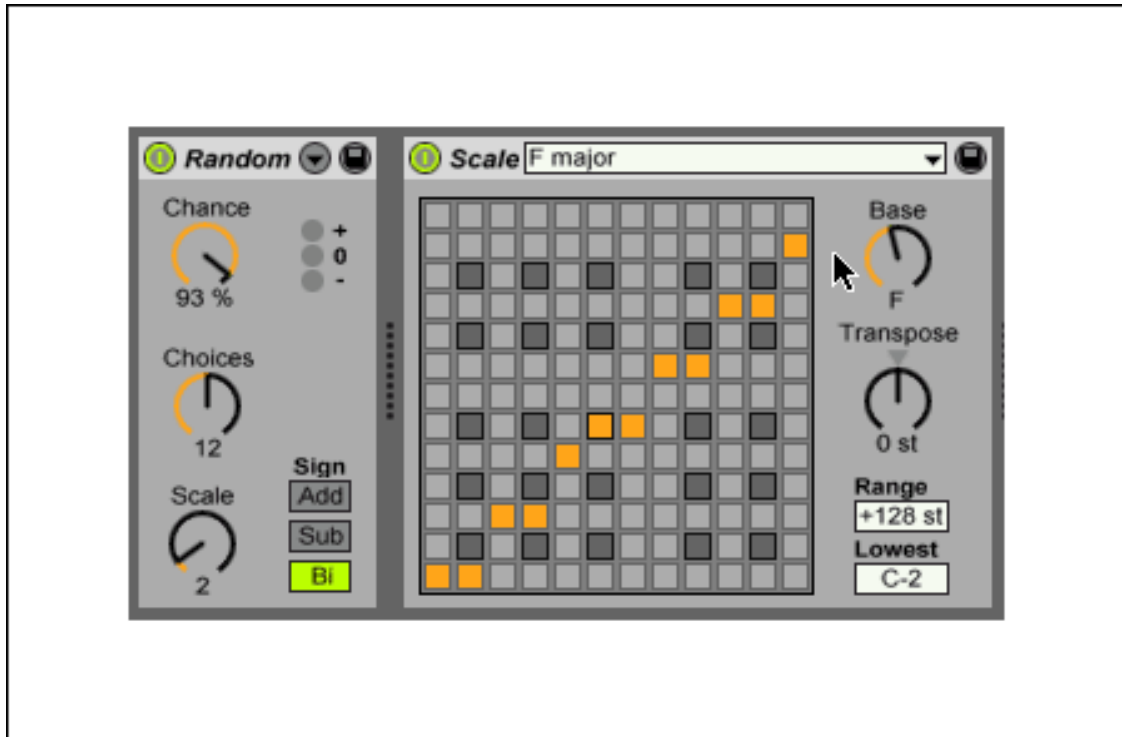
- The Pitch effect is really fun when paired with clip envelopes. Just drag it into a MIDI track, and select Pitch in the clip's Envelopes box. Now, you can draw transpositions without having to move notes. Try clip envelopes with the other effects as well.



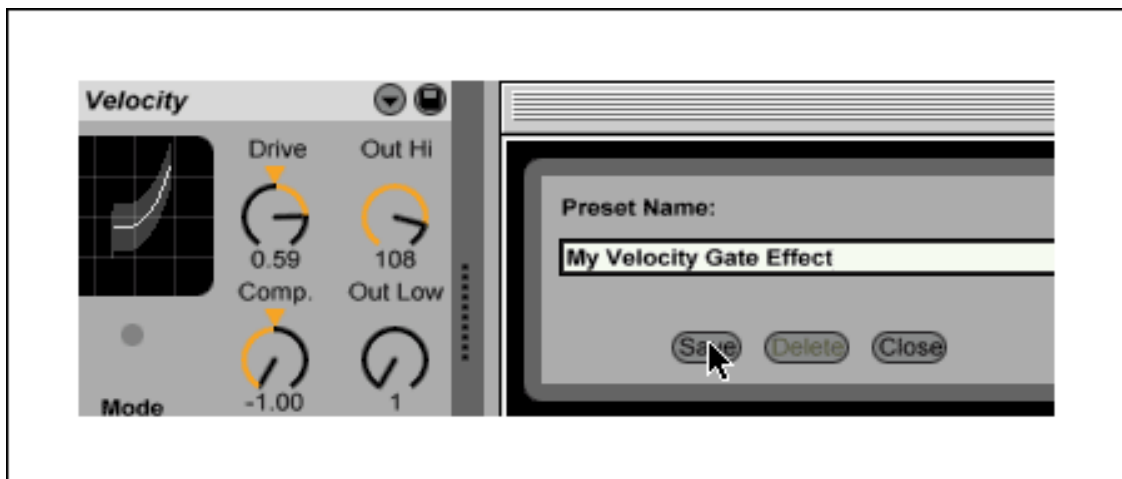
- The Chord effect is great for one-finger keyboard playing. Just try some of the presets and press a key. Ah, beautiful chords...



- The Random effect modifies pitch, well, randomly. If you're running short on inspiration, this effect may give you some nice ideas. Random used in conjunction with Scale, which remaps incoming notes onto a user-definable scale, can keep things interesting yet under control.



- You can save your own presets for the MIDI effects, so if you find settings you like, be sure to save them.



Pick a Sample, any Sample

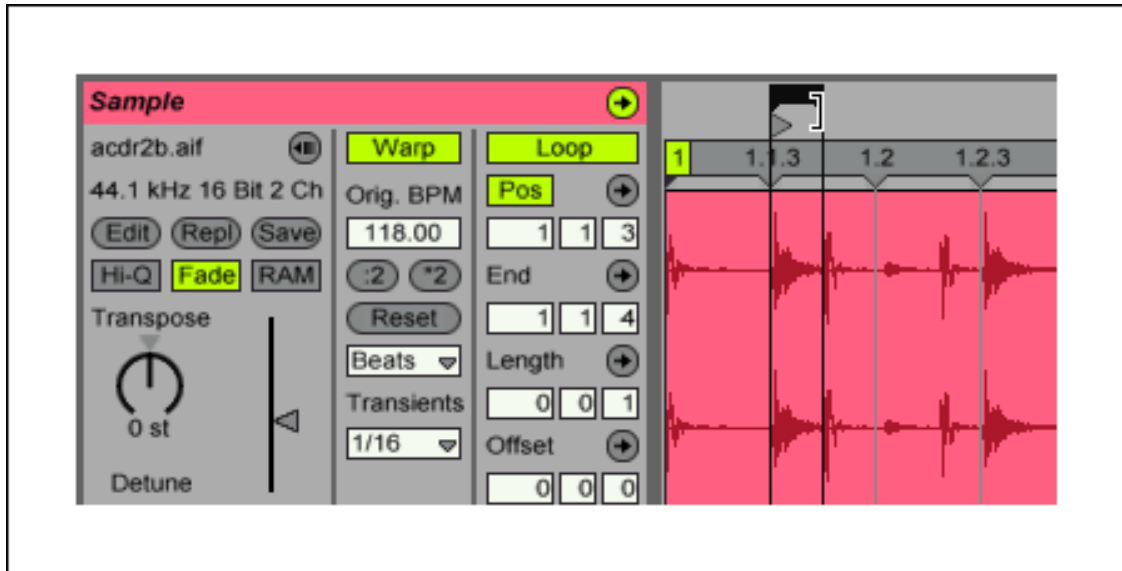
Whoa, what about the new instruments, you ask? Simpler's drag-and-drop sampling and Impulse's percussion manipulation are nothing short of amazing.

Simpler makes sampling extremely fun and easy, but don't let the name fool you. Earlier we used a Simpler preset, but presets are just the beginning. Simpler allows you to drag clips from the Browser or your Set into its display and manipulate them in exciting ways.

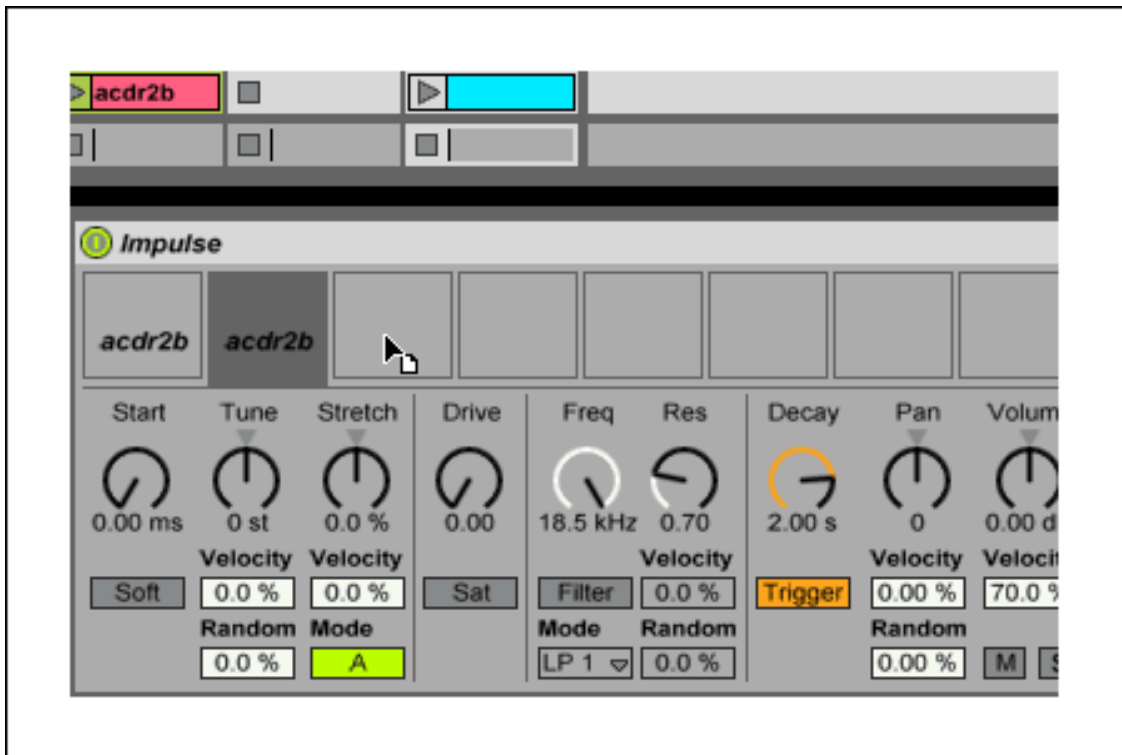
Using Simpler, you can loop just about any sound imaginable and play it polyphonically. Try this trick: Set a short loop on a long sound and modulate the sample start point to sweep through the sample. Or, try modulating the loop length. You can have even more fun by making MIDI assignments to control and tweak Simpler in real time with MIDI knobs.



With Impulse, creating drums and percussion has never been easier. Impulse works with the same drag-and-drop philosophy as Simplr. Here is one of my favorite tricks in Live 4: Take a drum loop and zero in on a particular sound with the Clip Loop/Region markers, as shown below.



Now, drag the clip into an Impulse slot. Isolate another sound in the same clip, and drag the result to another slot in Impulse. Repeat the process as much as needed to deconstruct the loop into an Impulse kit. Be sure and save your new kit as a preset if you want to use it in other Live Sets.



By the way, Impulse automatically maps to the A, S, D... computer keyboard keys, so you can even create grooves on the go.

Outside of the Lines

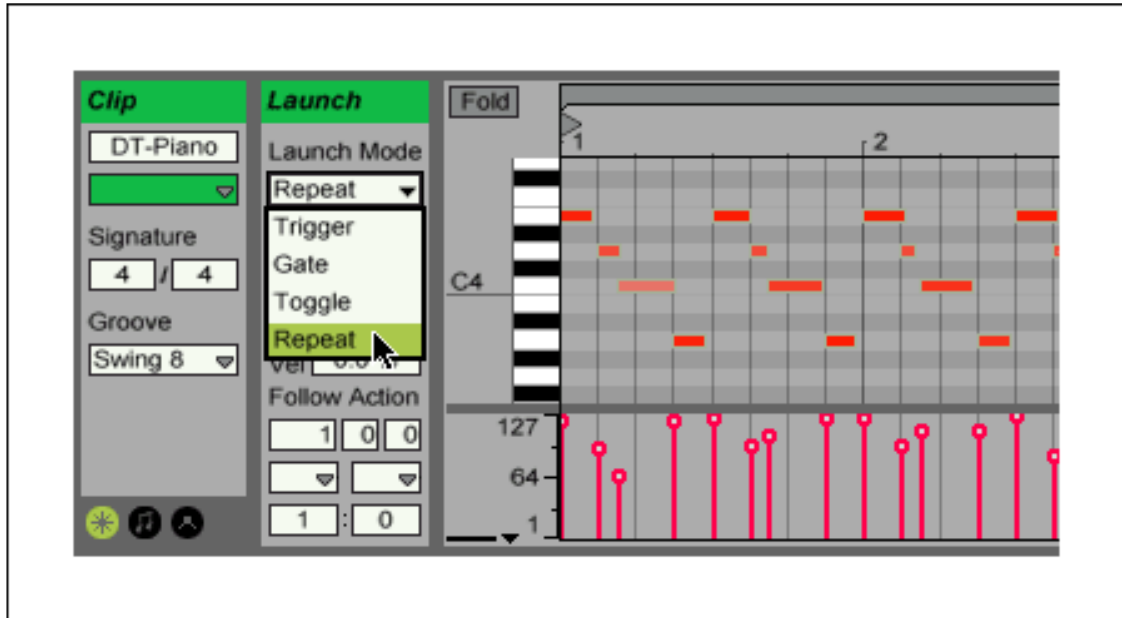
Working with MIDI clips opens up many possibilities. Taking MIDI out of its conventional linear context can quickly change the way you make music. Create and combine patterns in the Session View to build sequences and jam with your ideas. Live's Session View is now a launching pad for MIDI, just as it has always been for audio.

Here are a few things to try with MIDI clips in the Session View:

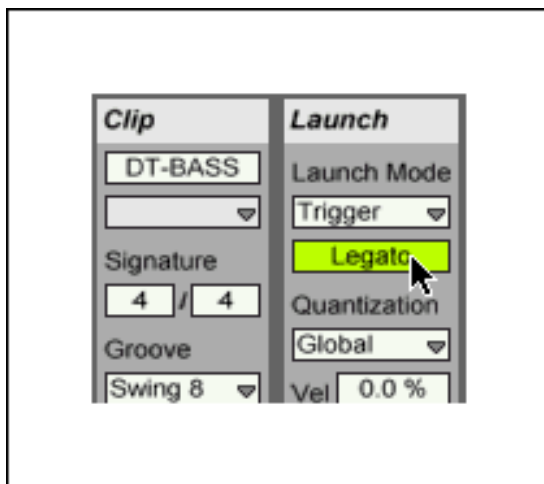
- Assign a MIDI clip to a range of notes on your MIDI keyboard. This allows you to instantly transpose its contents and come up with nice progressions. Use an otherwise unused note range, such as the upper or lower octave of your keyboard, so that you can still play notes freely when recording new MIDI clips.



- Set a clip's Launch Mode to Repeat, and assign it to a computer key or MIDI note for triggering.



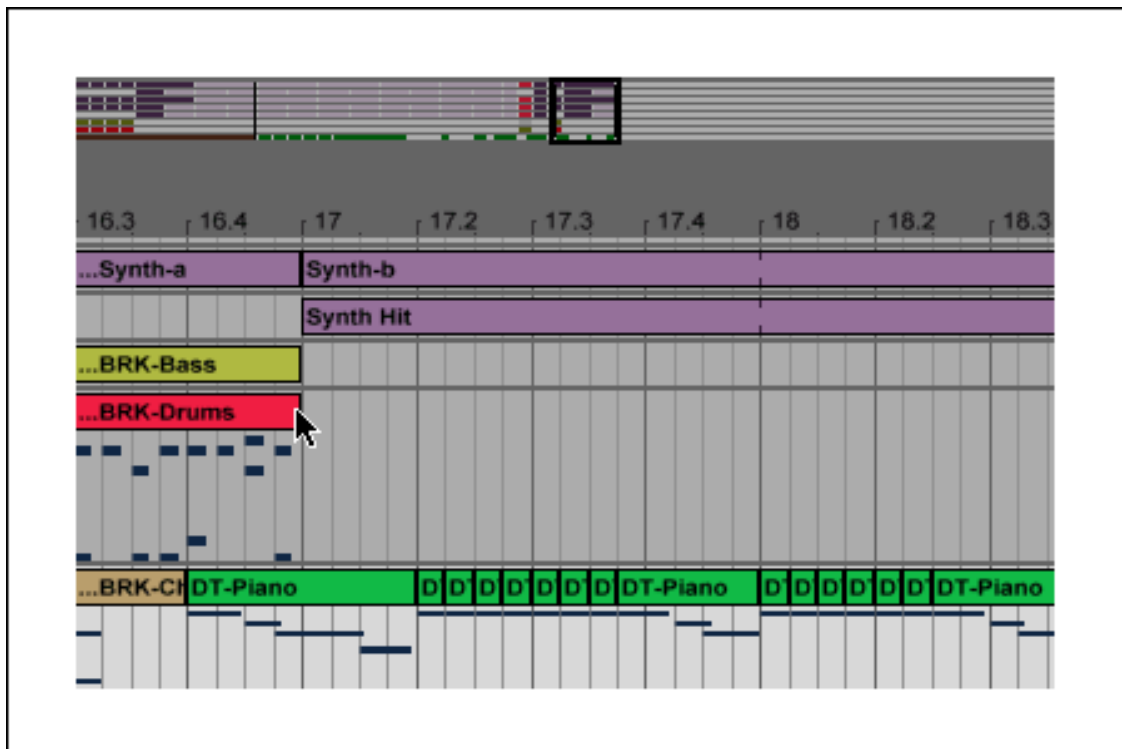
- Try Legato Mode with a couple of MIDI clip variations in the same track to seamlessly switch between them. This works nicely with both drum loops and melodies.



- Build your own MIDI clip library. Export your favorite MIDI clips as Standard MIDI files so that you can drag them into any Live Set.



- And don't forget that all of your actions can be recorded into the Arrangement View for further editing...



I've been working with MIDI for quite a while, and my old ways of thinking about creating music with MIDI are dying fast, thanks to Live 4. MIDI always offered me flexibility in music creation, but MIDI in Live is a completely new experience. This is only the tip of the iceberg concerning what Live 4 has to offer, so stay tuned for more tips and tricks.