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"You can do whatever you want in Logic. You're not limited by any machine or sound. If you want your own sound, you can use Logic to make it."

Photo by Anthony Cutajar
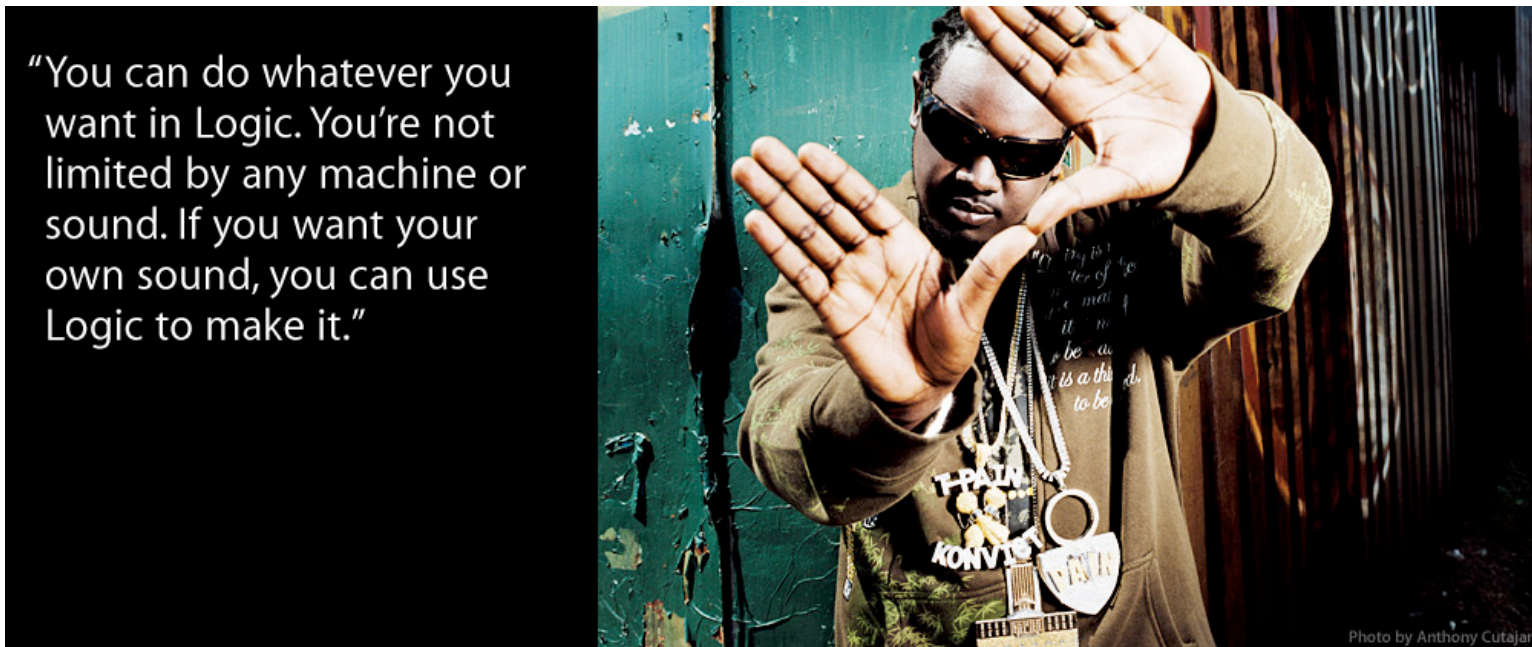
T-Pain: Sprung

By Dustin Driver

Whether he's throwing out a staccato stream of rhymes or sounding out some smooth vocals, T-Pain's style is unmistakable. The title of his debut album "Rappa Ternt Sanga" sums it up. T-Pain strives to bring hip-hop and R&B together without compromise. And it works — Five Grammy nominations and a run of solid-gold albums testify to the fact.

Photo by Anthony Cutajar

T-Pain has been known to produce on the plane, in the tour bus or just hanging around back stage before a show. He recorded some vocals for "I'm N Luv (Wit A Stripper)" directly into GarageBand using an external microphone. Now he uses pro mics with Logic Studio to nab vocals and live instrumentation. He can also jam on his guitar through a USB or FireWire interface, recording directly into Logic Studio or GarageBand.

Leaping Levels

It didn't take long for T-Pain to make the leap from GarageBand to Logic Studio. Of course, it helps that the producer spends nearly every waking moment in the studio laying down tracks, beats and remixes. "I loaded it [Logic Studio] up one day and saw that it was pretty much the same as GarageBand, with just more knobs, buttons and instruments," he says. "I had no problem getting into it and laying down tracks. And that led me to keep using it and keep using it. I haven't found anything that I can't do in the program. I just get more and excited about it and now I tell everybody to use Logic."

T-Pain can throw out a track in about an hour using Logic Studio. "In an hour, I can get one done," he says. "Sometimes I challenge myself though. I had promised a guy that I would make him a beat and he came into the studio asking about it. I said, 'I'm about to make you a beat in ten minutes.' I actually made the beat in seven minutes. It had different changes, a bridge, everything."

Origins

When Akon heard T-Pain's unofficial remix of his song "Locked Up," he was so impressed that he signed the young Tallahassee rapper/singer to his Konvict label. Akon didn't know that T-Pain would change the way he did music. "Seems like he got into Logic because I told him about it," says T-Pain. "He saw me with my Mac and asked where the MPC and keyboards were. I told him it's all in Logic. The next time I see Akon, he's got a MacBook Pro and a MIDI keyboard and he's running Logic."

Favorites

When you work in Logic Studio as much as T-Pain, you're bound to find a few favorite features. "I love the new Quick Swipe Comping that's in Logic 8," he says. Quick Swipe Comping streamlines the producer's recording sessions, allowing him to swipe over the best portions of every take to automatically create comps. "And the new instruments and Ultrabeat are just fantastic. I can do anything with Logic," he says.

Playlist

Listen to T-Pain on iTunes

Equipment List

MacBook Pro
Logic Studio

To meld the two musical styles, he uses GarageBand and Logic Studio. In fact, T–Pain wrote one of his first hits, "I'm N Luv (Wit A Stripper)," with GarageBand, in about two hours. "It was an all of the sudden thing," he says. "I was in the studio and I had all of my equipment — I had MPCs and all kinds of outboard sound modules — I was getting ready to make a song and the power went out. They wouldn't let me turn anything back on in the studio because they were afraid that everything could get fried. My laptop was the only thing still on. I had never tried GarageBand before and I wanted to see what it could do. I started messing with it and in 40 minutes I had a good beat. Forty minutes from that I had a whole song."

T–Pain was hooked. GarageBand became his hit factory, his mobile studio capable of handling every aspect of production, from recording to composing. After a few years, the musician took a step up to Logic Studio. Today he uses the application almost exclusively. "It's all I use now," he says. "All I need is my laptop, a hard drive and a controller and I have a full studio in my bag. And it sounds good — most of my stuff that's on the radio now was straight out of Logic."

Seizing Style

T–Pain gained fame with the Tallahassee, Fla. hip–hop group The Nappy Headz. But he didn't gain superstardom until he remixed Akon's "Locked Up." The unofficial remix was so good that Akon signed T–Pain to the Konvict Music label. It was only a matter of time before T–Pain released his own album, which smashed charts across the country. His infectious songs spread from station to station and hit the iTunes store, where they consistently hold the number–one position. His Vocoder–laced vocals are reminiscent of the soulful–cyber sound of the Zapp Band. His fast–and–furious rhymes overflow with Caribbean dance hall flavor. Smash the two together and you get T–Pain's distinctive style.

It's a style that hinges on an ability to fuse a lot of sounds — live instrumentation, MIDI beats, vocals and effects. When he first started, T–Pain employed an army of outboard gear, including the famed 808. The switch to GarageBand, and then Logic Studio, significantly reduced his dependency on gear. "I can do it anywhere," he says. "It's a producer's worst nightmare when you don't have the right gear to produce the sound you want when you want. Logic is just the most convenient thing. You can just take your laptop and a hard drive and a MIDI controller and get down with it right there. I can plug it up anywhere and make it happen."

But T–pain isn't just a producer; he's a performer. When he's on stage he turns to MainStage, the live component of Logic Studio, to simulate guitar amps and add effects. "There's part of the show when I play guitar," he says. "There are some points when I need a quick delay or reverb and I can use MainStage. If I want to switch up and do something different real quick, my engineer can just switch the MainStage plug–in. It helps out tremendously."

Soaring High

T–Pain is busy. He's currently working on a new album and some other projects with R. Kelly, Kanye West, Usher, Chris Brown and Britney Spears. That's in addition to his regular studio work with the Konvict crew. It's a lot of music to make, but luckily T–Pain doesn't seem to have much trouble coming up with new beats, hooks and rhymes. "I just gotta let it flow," he says. "Whatever comes out of my head is what comes out. I never try to think about where it's headed."

Photo by Anthony Cutajar

No matter where he's headed, T–Pain strives to create something different. "I know I'm already doing something different, but in another couple of months everybody's going to be doing that, so it's not going to be different anymore," he says. "Unless I switch it up all the time I don't really feel like I'm standing out anymore. That's the only way I'll be able to make it different. If I concentrate too hard, I'll start making everything sound exactly the same."

Logic Studio will help the producer find his unique sound and propel him even further. "You can do whatever you want in Logic," he says. "You're not limited by any machine or sound. If you want your own sound, you can use Logic to make it."

GarageBand

Resources

Soundtrack Pro

MacBook Pro

Mac OS X Music and Audio Documentation

Logic Pro

Mac Pro

Third–Party Music Products

Seminars

Guitarists and Mac: Pat Metheny

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