

# Music camp taps GarageBand tricks

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Layering influences from reggae, hip-hop, rock, and R&B to create her unique sound, Rihanna is one of the world's most recognized and successful pop stars. Dubbed the "Digital Download Queen," she is the best-selling digital artist of all-time and was the first artist to ever sell more than 100 million digital singles. Her mega-hit "Umbrella" contributed to that total and it launched her to stardom.

"Umbrella" was recorded in a professional studio with state of the art equipment under the expert supervision of music producers and sound engineers.



Campers learned chords on the ukulele and put them to use in an original composition.

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Despite all that, the song's beat and distinctive drum intro came from a source we all have access to, Apple's GarageBand.

Launched in 2004, this music-software program has democratized the making and recording of music. It allows users to create tracks with pre-made loops, an array of various instrumental effects, and voice recordings. Artists at all stages of their careers have embraced this new manner of working and summer campers at Music Lesson Express are getting in on the fun.

The organization offers an array of different summer opportunities and their recording camp has become a favorite. Children receive five full days of instruction on several instruments and learn how to use GarageBand software to record their own album. Though the program is new to her, 9-year-old Aubrey Recks has experimented with recording before without much success.

"I had a little toy that you could press a button and you could record yourself singing but it didn't come out very good. This is a lot better than that. There's so much different types of music and people get to mix things together and make something unique. It makes me feel like I'm free to be me." Marcelo Medina, 9, had similar sentiments and shared, "I'm inspired by jazz sometimes but mostly by hip-hop and retro. Recording this way lets me express myself."

Using a delicious analogy, 10-year-old Connor Ferguson, explained the process. "It's like a vibrant cake. Some layers are vanilla and others are chocolate. Sometimes the sound we record will be the background, sometimes it will be our voices, and we just layer them on top on one another until we get the sound that we want."

Natasha Marsalli is the general manager at Music Lessons Express and, along with instructor Lyndon Thacker, she teaches the recording camp. Combining their knowledge, they offer training in a variety of instruments and recording techniques. While some campers attend Music Lessons Express year-round, others are just starting out and GarageBand suits both.

"We use it because it's very accessible to children with no musical experience whatsoever," said Marsalli. "It's also flexible enough that if they do have a musical background, they can record themselves playing or singing but if they're not comfortable with that, it allows them to still be creative and participate. Some students prefer to click and drag and combine cool sounds, but some of them really want to showcase something that they've worked on so they record the instrument and then



PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON  
Camper Aubrey Recks enjoys her moment in the spotlight.

Lyndon and I help them clean it up and edit it down so it's a little more cohesive."

In an example of art imitating life, one of the campers' favorite recordings was an original song titled "I Fell Off My Chair." Accompanied by ukulele, the music and lyrics were collaboratively written and each camper requested the track be added to their personal album.

Marsalli explained, "they learned the chords first and gave themselves a framework. Lyndon recorded them while they were playing and then they added a couple of percussion instruments. So there was a voice track, a ukulele track, and then additional sound effects."

Some sound effects may be difficult to distinguish when listening to a song on the radio but Marsalli wants campers to have a broad sound vocabulary and guest artists are brought in to supplement the camp content.

"We had an African drumming instructor do a drum circle with them and he also showed them a lot of different percussion instruments that you might hear in a particular track and not know exactly what that sound is. They're getting a wide range of different musical experiences that they might have missed by going to iTunes or the radio and just listening to the same channels. It exposes them to the possibilities that are out there that they might not have realized beforehand."

Much like Rihanna's transformation from emerging musician to megawatt superstar, Marsalli recognizes that GarageBand can open up a whole new world to young artists and campers looking to find their own voice and style.

"Some of them come in here really confident and they leave realizing, 'oh my gosh, there's so much more I can learn.' We also get really shy kids who want to be a rock star but they're kind of timid and by the end of the week they've opened up a lot. It's neat to see different student change in different ways."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).