TUNE IN

teen tech week 2008 @ *your library*

Making Music With Teens:

A Getting Started Guide

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As the early '00s move along, digital music is getting even more pervasive for teens. MP3 players let them keep almost two straight months' of music in their pockets. Their phones double as portable stereos. Even their shoes are becoming music devices. But this explosion in music consumption comes with another, equally exciting dimension: the teen as music creator. Teens have more low-cost or free options than ever before to record, remix, and produce music—and they're taking advantage of them. Here, we'll look at one cheap and easy way to get your teens making and recording music in your library.

What you need

- Computer (preferably a laptop for portability)
- Computer microphone (if you don't have one handy, Radio Shack has microphones available for under $10.00 at http://tinyurl.com/2zdy5u)
- Computer speakers or headphones
- High-speed internet connection
- Account with Splice Music, www.splicemusic.com
- Audacity audio software, http://audacity.sourceforge.net.

Music, sweet music, in a few easy steps

1. Splice Music is an online music-making program that allows people to mix and create songs without any download required. Open the program through the "Make Music" link, www.splicemusic.com/makemusic/intro (which also gives you a quick tutorial). Teens can then drag and drop audio tracks, which are used to loop & layer beats, instruments, and other sounds from the integrated Freesound Project database (http://freesound.iua.upf.edu). Since all samples in the Freesound Project are licensed via Creative Commons, teens can freely use others' creations (see http://wiki.creativecommons.org/FAQ for more information). Teens can also add melodies that *they* create from Splice Music's virtual piano and synthesizers, as well as record simple sound loops of their own with the Splice online recording tool. Splice will automatically play all sounds at the rate necessary to fit right in with the others. If Splice's guess is imperfect, sounds can be adjusted for seamless music production.

2. Export the teen's creation to MP3 format using Splice's "mixdown" feature. Open Audacity and import the file.

3. Now the teen can record vocals, additional instrumentation, and other sounds over top of the instrumental track. Just plug the microphone into the sound card jack, make sure the microphone input is listed in Audacity's drop-down menu, and hit record! Since you might be skeptical that it's as easy as it sounds, here are some additional tips to guide the teens:

   - Audacity's "play other tracks while recording new one" option allows teens to hear what's going on while singing/playing/making noise. This helps them keep in tune and stay with the rhythm of the song, which will make a big difference in the quality of their music.

   - Audacity also allows users to generate a "click track," which is a metronome that plays at a specific rate. If the song has no--or no easily discernible--rhythm, the click track will help keep the teen moving with the tempo and time signature of the song.

   - Try experimenting with effects to warp sound in different ways. It's fun to just play with discovering what each effect does, and how changing the different options can make a surprising difference.

   - Pop filters, those black circles you often see in front of the microphone during a recording session, are very helpful for vocals--even when using computer microphones. They keep the microphone from picking up a distinct "PUH" or "HSSSS" sound when people say their P or S sounds. Pop filters, which normally cost around $30, can be made on the cheap by securing pantyhose tightly over thick wire or pulling them taut inside an embroidery hoop.

   - Acoustics count! The size of the room and what the walls are made of are definitely

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going to impact the sound of your recording. Get a fairly clean recording by putting up a sheet or blanket against the wall and moving the microphone a foot or so away from it. The idea is that the blanket will dampen the sound enough so that it doesn□t go bouncing all around the room. If you are recording more in the center of the room, try putting some sort of absorbent barrier between the sound and the walls.

- Using headphones when recording keeps the sound from going back into the microphone and making a lot of noise in the process (otherwise known as feedback). Ideally, you'll be using closed-ear headphones (the kind which cup over the ears) to keep the sound from spilling back out.

4. Export your song to MP3 format, and enjoy

There you have it! Your teens may already be on their way to making a demo, working on some rough sketches, or just goofing around. Regardless, they probably had some fun doing it. And even if your library has absolutely no opportunities to record music, your teens can still use Splice to put together an instrumental. Teens who aren't interested in using samples or digital instruments can skip that step and work solely with Audacity. It's a pretty flexible system that should meet the needs of many teens.

Navigating Copyright

Copyrighting music is as simple as creating it, though proving when it was created and who created it becomes the issue. In the case of online music services, registering the date of creation is often included in the process of creating music. A library can also be counted on as a neutral third party in cases of registering copyright, so consider keeping all lyrics, written music, and music files together with a register of what was created, who created it, the date it was created, and your name and signature.

As a copyright holder, your teens have privilege to all the following activities, as per the U.S. Copyright Office's "Copyright Registration for Musical Compositions" (www.copyright.gov/circs/circ50.html):

"The owner of copyright in a work has the exclusive right to make copies, to prepare derivative works, to sell or distribute copies, and to perform the work publicly. Anyone else wishing to use the work in these ways must have the permission of the author or someone who has derived rights through the author."

If teens used Splice Music to create their music, teens choose from a series of Creative Commons licenses when saving to the site. That means the terms of copyright are different from the description above. Splice Music helpfully offers a guide (www.splicemusic.com/licenses) to the various licenses teens will choose when saving music through the Splice service.

Teens who combine their Splice-based compositions with their original recordings retain copyright over the final product, though in a limited fashion. Teens must credit all sources of their samples from the Freesound database, in accordance with the credit/attribution guidelines (http://tinyurl.com/2g4nrt).

Hosting the Creations

Teens have lots of options for hosting their music. Creating a band site on MySpace (http://signup.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=bandjoin) lets teens not only host their music but also build and communicate with a huge potential fanbase. Teens can do the same thing on Last.FM (http://musicmanager.last.fm/register?accountType=artist), Purevolume (www.purevolume.com/signup), and Garageband (www.garageband.com). Keep in mind that each includes its own licensing terms, dictating whether people can download or stream music and what people can do with it when they get it. Make sure your teens read them so that they know what they're getting into.

Libraries could benefit from creating a podcast that showcases their teen's work. Upload your teen's files to Ourmedia (www.ourmedia.org) or Podbean (www.podbean.com), and let library users from all over download your teens' creations.

For More Information

Coryat, Carl. *Guerrilla Home Recording: How to Get Great Sound from Any Studio (No Matter How Weird or Cheap Your Gear Is)*. Backbeat, 2005. $22.95. (978-087-930834-6).

Create Digital Music Website, www.createdigitalmusic.com

Hagerman, Andrew. *Digital Music Making for Teens.* Thomson Course Technology, 2005. $24.99. (978-159-200508-6).

Home Recording Connection, www.homerecordingconnection.com

Making Music with OSX Podcast, http://macmusic.libsyn.com.

Making Music Podcast, www.beathive.com/podcast.jsp.

Oland, Pamela Phillips. *The Art of Writing Great Lyrics*. Allworth, 2001. $18.95. (978-158-115093-3).

O'Reilly Digital Media Center, http://digitalmedia.oreilly.com.