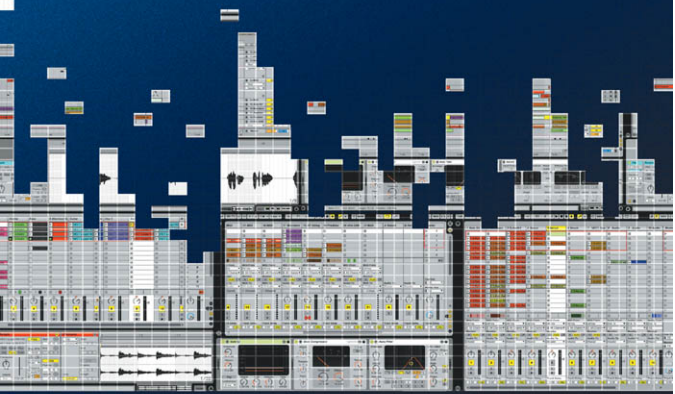


GOING PRO WITH  
**ABLETON™ LIVE**



G. W. Childs IV

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# Going Pro with Ableton™ Live

G.W. Childs IV

**Cengage Learning PTR**



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**Going Pro with Ableton™ Live  
G.W. Childs IV**

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*Thanks to Pamela Moncrief. This book took more than a year to write. You made the year so much more special.*

---

# Acknowledgments

A big thanks to God for allowing me to write another book.

Thanks also to Cengage for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to write more.

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Thanks to Livid Instruments: Your products make Ableton even more fun!

Finally, thanks to Ableton for such a wonderful product!

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# About the Author

Starting off as a small boy on a farm in a galaxy far away, **G.W. Childs** dreamed of sound and music. As he grew, he learned synthesis, sound design, songwriting, and remixing. As a soldier in psychological operations, G.W. learned ways to use sound creatively. As a touring musician performing with the likes of Soil & Eclipse, Deathline Int'l, and Razed in Black, he learned to bring music to the masses.

Still listening to his inner child, G.W. decided to work in video games as well and really stepped into a galaxy far, far away, doing sound design on *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords*, acting in *Star Wars: Battlefront*, and composing music for MTV's *I Woo You*.

But the call of synthesis never fully left his ears, so G.W. did a lot of sound design on the popular music applications Reason 3 and Reason 4, as well as the amazing plug-in from Cakewalk: Rapture.

Excited to share knowledge from these wonderful adventures, he has written books such as *Creating Music and Sound for Games*, *Using Reason Onstage: Skill Pack*, and *Making Music with Mobile Devices*, as well as many highly acclaimed articles and video tutorials with macProVideo and Ask.com.

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# Introduction

What started as a simple loop application has become something that defies explanation. Sure, Ableton is a DAW, but it still holds onto its loop roots. It also holds onto its remix roots and includes video—you can use Max/MSP with it as well.

All in all, Ableton is unlike any other application out there, period.

If you add in the fact that with regard to audio, its warping abilities are more seamless than those of any application out there, and then tally up all of these very general features, you have yourself one amazing, underrated DAW.

If you've picked up this book, you have already heard from band mates, colleagues, fellow enthusiasts, and more that Ableton Live is amazing. You don't really need me to tell you this.

What you *do* need me to tell you is that:

- ▷ This book is designed for a pro user, like you, to get up and running quickly.
- ▷ This book gives you broken down, step-by-step walkthroughs for the main procedures any pro would want to know, in terms of getting your project going with Live.
- ▷ This book was written by an old studio hand, just like you.

In writing this, I'm not naive enough to think that you necessarily intend to use Ableton as your main audio app. You may want it as a ReWire slave, you may want it simply to assist a client that uses Ableton as his main app, or you may even be checking it out for live performance, not necessarily as what you use for production. I've taken all of this into account. That's why you won't find long explanations about every plug-in or every little detail about the GUI. This book is designed to get you up and running fast.

In the Contents, you'll notice that everything is broken down by task. And in every chapter, you'll find the procedures broken down even further. With this in mind, don't feel compelled to read the book all the way through. Use what you need, put it down, and then pick it up later when you have more questions. This is meant as a very, very easy guide in "pro speak!"

Also, another thing to consider: If you're an artist who intends to work with a producer at some point in the near future, and you know that this particular producer doesn't use Ableton Live, you'll want to bring this book!

Producers, engineers, and so on will always have certain requirements when they start a project. This book will lay out in simple, quick terms what they need—things like MIDI sync, ReWire features/suggestions, export procedures, and more.

So, again, jump around as you need to. Explore the features you never knew about, and have fun. Ableton is amazing, as you will soon discover.

---

## Companion Website Downloads

You may download the companion website files from [www.cengageptr.com/downloads](http://www.cengageptr.com/downloads).

# Setup

CONGRATULATIONS ON ACQUIRING ABLETON LIVE. Most likely, you're wondering what all the hoopla is about, and you've decided to get your feet wet. And, if you're coming from a background of working with other audio applications, such as Cubase, Pro Tools, Logic Pro, SONAR, and so on, you're in the right place. This book assumes that you have a degree of knowledge about working with pro audio applications and is designed to assist you in your transition to Ableton Live.

This book, which is a part of a greater *Going Pro* series of books, is made up of several tutorials that will walk you through simple step-by-step procedures. If you feel you don't need a particular tutorial, feel free to move ahead to later tutorials that pertain to where you are currently with Ableton.

In this chapter, we'll focus on setting up Ableton so that your transition to using it is smooth and you can maintain your excitement. In my experience, Ableton has always been extremely easy to set up. But there are a few things you can do at the beginning to fine-tune the environment, so that it accommodates your workflow.

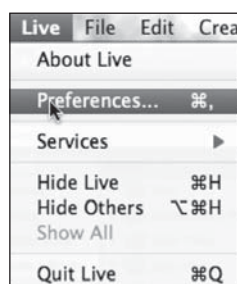
## Verify Your Authorization

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One thing I'd highly suggest at the very beginning is verifying that you have authorized Ableton from Ableton.com. If you don't do so, you're running in a 15-day trial mode, which is fully unlocked. But in 15 days, you'll have a slimmed-down, almost nonfunctional Ableton to contend with. Let's avoid this, shall we?

To check your authorization:

1. Go to Live > Preferences (see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1** Choosing the Preferences option from the Live menu.

Source: Ableton AG

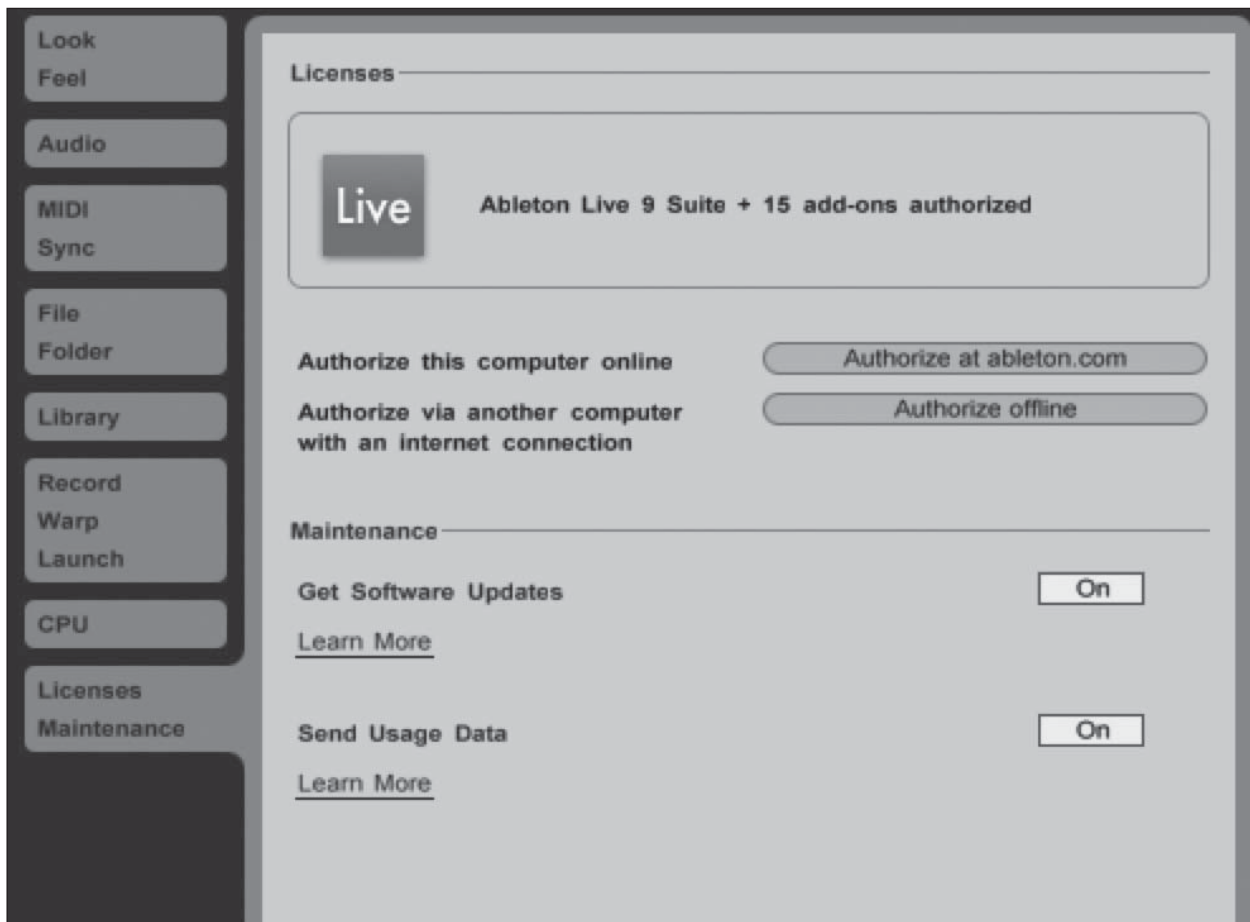
2. Choose the Licenses/Maintenance tab, as shown in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1.2** Selecting the Licenses/Maintenance tab from the sidebar in the Preferences screen.

*Source:* Ableton AG

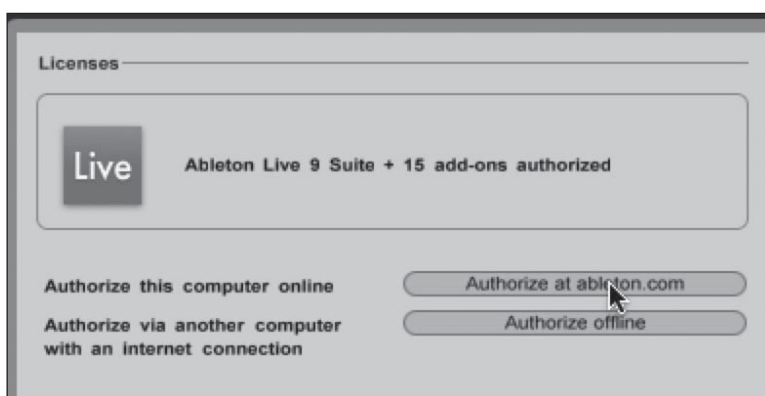
At the very top of this page, it should state “Live 9... Authorized” in some form, as shown in Figure 1.3. If it says something along the lines of demo, proceed to the next step. If you’re shown as authorized, move on to the “Setting Up Your Audio Interface” section.



**Figure 1.3** Ableton will reference whether you are authorized.

Source: Ableton AG

3. If, at the top of the Licenser/Maintenance tab, it says you are in some form of demo mode, click the Authorize at Ableton.com button, as shown in Figure 1.4. From here, you'll need to create an Ableton account (if you haven't already), log in, and then enter the serial number that came in the box. If you bought Live online, it should already be authorized. You may need to check the email that was sent to you with your receipt.



**Figure 1.4** Click the Authorize button.

Source: Ableton AG

**MULTIPLE INSTALLS:** It's important to note that you can, by default, have Ableton installed on two computers at once. If for some reason you need more than two installations, you'll need to get hold of Ableton support. Also, if you've recently gotten rid of a computer and one of your authorizations was used on that machine, you may want to get hold of Ableton support so that they can free up your authorization.

Okay, now that authorization is complete, let's get on to setting up the audio interface.

## Setting Up Your Audio Interface

It's critical that you get your audio interface set up, as you well know. Ableton is pretty straightforward when it comes to audio interface settings. But in some ways it's so simple that it's confusing. Let's walk through it together.

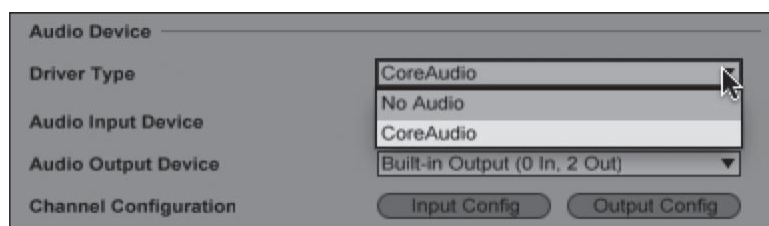
1. In the Preferences section of Ableton, click the Audio tab, as shown in Figure 1.5.



**Figure 1.5** Choose the Audio tab in the Preferences.

Source: Ableton AG

- Beginning at the very top, choose your Driver Type, as shown in Figure 1.6. This varies from PC to Mac. If you're using a PC, you'll need to go with the ASIO driver that pertains to your audio device. If you do not have an ASIO driver for your audio device, see the note on ASIO4ALL. If you're using a Mac, you'll want to go with the CoreAudio driver.

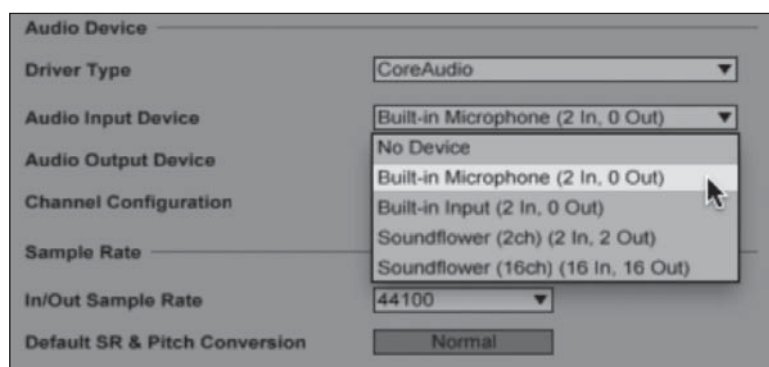


**Figure 1.6** The Driver Type drop-down menu.

Source: Ableton AG

**ASIO4ALL:** If you currently do not have an audio device that has an ASIO driver, I recommend ASIO4ALL, which can act as a blanket ASIO driver. The main function of an ASIO driver for an audio device is to preserve latency, so that you're not recording guitar, vocal parts, and any other recorded audio file that is several milliseconds behind the intended time. ASIO4ALL can help an internal audio device, such as the type found on a laptop. But, it will preserve latency at the expense of your processor.

- Once you've selected your Driver Type, you'll need to select the Audio Input and Output Devices. Keep in mind that you can select a different audio input device from the audio output device. But in most cases, you should choose the input and output of the audio interface that you're currently using. For example: MOTU Traveler Input, MOTU Traveler Output. See Figure 1.7.

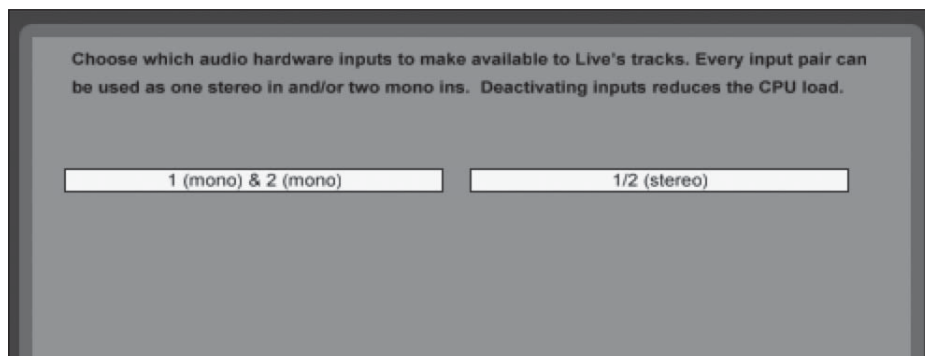


**Figure 1.7** The Audio Input Device drop-down menu.

Source: Ableton AG

## Going Pro with Ableton Live

- Next up are the Channel Configuration menus, which can be accessed by clicking the Input and Output Config buttons. These menus allow you to enable your audio device's multiple inputs and outputs with stereo, mono, or both configurations. See Figure 1.8.



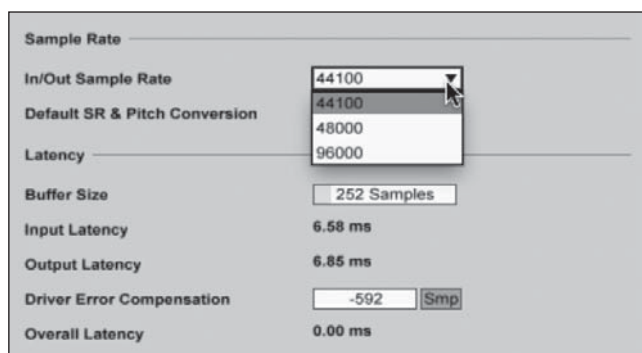
**Figure 1.8** The Input Config menu.

Source: Ableton AG

**CHANNEL CONFIG:** It's important to note that the choices you make in the Channel Config menus will later display in the input and output drop-down menus for individual audio channels in Ableton Live. So, you may want to pay attention to what you enable as mono or stereo. This can be really important if you always have an external synthesizer going into Inputs 1 and 2 on your audio interface; you may want to just keep Channels 1 and 2 as a stereo pair, as opposed to stereo and mono inputs. It just keeps things a little tidier later on, when you're in the midst of production. Don't get me wrong; you can enable mono channels individually, as well as the stereo grouped versions of your inputs. It just makes the audio drop-down menus much bigger because extra inputs are added, individually and grouped.

- Now that you have the audio device selected, select the desired sample rate for your sessions. Below the Audio Device section of the Audio pane in the Live preferences, you'll notice the Sample Rate section. Within this section is the In/Out Sample Rate drop-down menu (shown in Figure 1.9), which affects the recording sample rate of your current project. Select from:

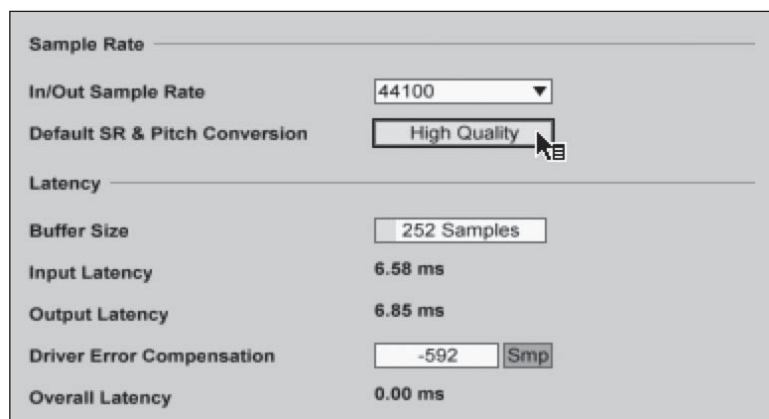
- ▷ 44100 (CD quality)
- ▷ 48000
- ▷ 96000



**Figure 1.9** The Sample Rate selections for Live in the Preferences menu.

Source: Ableton AG

6. Directly below the In/Out Sample Rate drop-down menu is the Default SR & Pitch Conversion toggle (see Figure 1.10). When set to High Quality mode, all clips will be set to Hi-Q mode. This is a high-quality sample interpolation feature that causes Live to incorporate an algorithm that reduces distortion for pitch-shifted clips at the expense of processor. If pitch-shifted audio doesn't sound right to you, you may want to investigate the Hi-Q toggle on an individual clip or set the Default SR & Pitch Conversion to High Quality for a session and see how it runs for you.

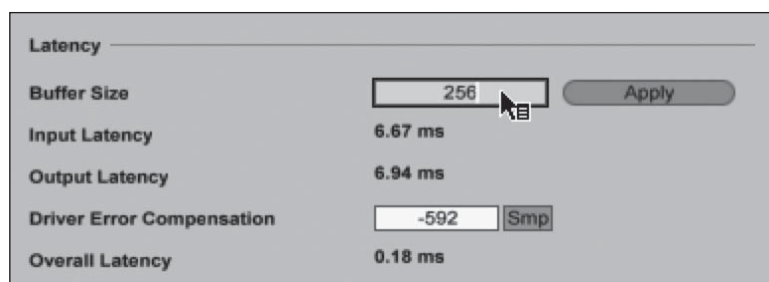


**Figure 1.10** Enabling High Quality mode for Default SR & Pitch Conversion.

Source: Ableton AG

Now we're moving into an area of Live that can easily cause a little bit of confusion. But don't worry, we'll go through this together and ensure that your session is tight before you even begin recording and arranging, as only good latency can.

7. Under the Latency subsection of the Audio page of Live Preferences, select the Buffer Size that best suits your workflow and computer processor speed. In terms of latency, this is the most important setting that you'll make up front with Live. Unlike other DAWs, Live does not have default numbers for you to choose from in a menu, such as 256, 512, 1024, and so on. Instead, you can scroll or type in any number you choose between 14 and 2048 samples. If you're unsure of what to select here, I'd recommend typing in **256**. This is a decent buffer-size setting, without getting into the science of it all, and you can always go back and change it later. See Figure 1.11.



**Figure 1.11** Typing in a buffer size of 256 for Live.

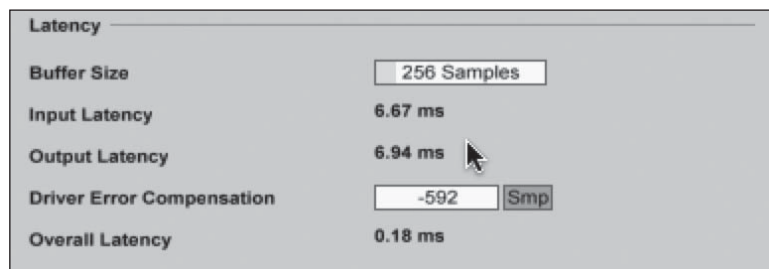
Source: Ableton AG

8. After you've entered a buffer size and you've clicked the Apply button, you'll notice that Live will tell you the actual input and output latency according to what it's reading from your audio device. You'll notice that I still



## Going Pro with Ableton Live

have an input and output latency at 6 milliseconds, as shown in Figure 1.12. Lowering the latency will, of course, reduce the output and input latency. You know that this puts some strain on the processor.



**Figure 1.12** Live reporting my current latency.

Source: Ableton AG

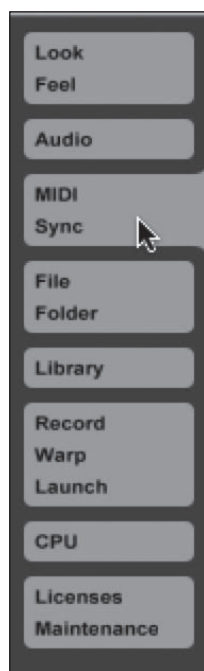
Now that you've got your audio device set up, the next step is getting your MIDI up and running!

## Setting Up Your MIDI Controller

Compared to many other DAWs, Live is alarmingly simple. Seriously, you almost start looking for more buttons to push just because it almost appears too simple.

Let's start off by setting up a conventional MIDI controller for basic MIDI input.

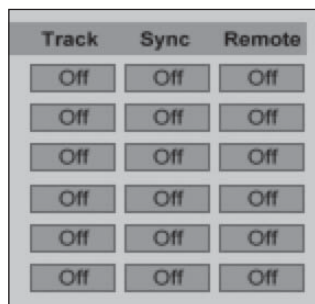
1. Go to the MIDI/Sync tab in the Ableton Live Preferences (see Figure 1.13). This is the area where you set up your MIDI controllers, in terms of keyboards, to control Live. It's also where you send MIDI sync from Ableton to external hardware—for example, syncing an MPC to Ableton's host clock.



**Figure 1.13** Selecting the MIDI/Sync tab in Ableton Live.

Source: Ableton AG

- In the middle of the MIDI/Sync page, there is a list of several MIDI inputs and outputs. In fact, you'll notice that they are labeled Input and Output before the actual MIDI input or output title. Corresponding to each input and output are Track, Sync, and Remote On and Off buttons. See Figure 1.14.



**Figure 1.14** Track, Sync, and Remote buttons.

Source: Ableton AG

- For basic MIDI input, all you need to enable is the Track On. This will cause the selected MIDI input to have immediate control over any MIDI track you create, by default. Before you create a MIDI track, though, I suggest you simply press a key on your MIDI controller and verify that there is MIDI activity with the MIDI input indicator. See Figure 1.15. As you press your MIDI controller, you should see the MIDI indicator light up green with each key pressed.

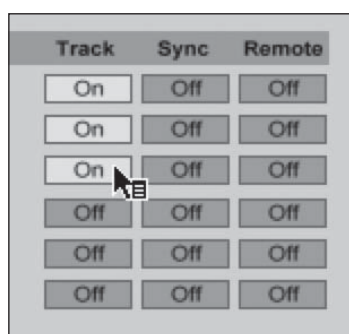


**Figure 1.15** The MIDI input indicator.

Source: Ableton AG

**MIDI INPUT SELECTION FOR MIDI TRACKS:** When you enable a MIDI input in the MIDI/Sync page of Preferences, you also make the MIDI input available in the MIDI Input drop-down menu on each and every MIDI track you make. So if you're not seeing a MIDI input that should be there, return to Preferences!

- Select Track On for every MIDI input that you intend to use within Ableton Live (see Figure 1.16).



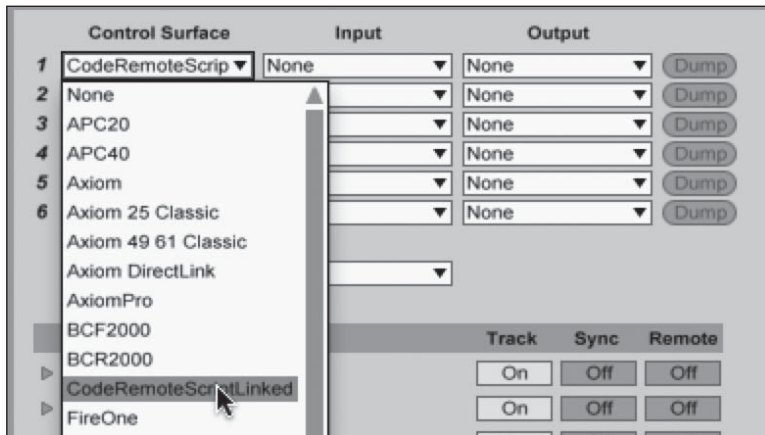
**Figure 1.16** The MIDI input indicator.

Source: Ableton AG

# Setting Up a MIDI Control Surface

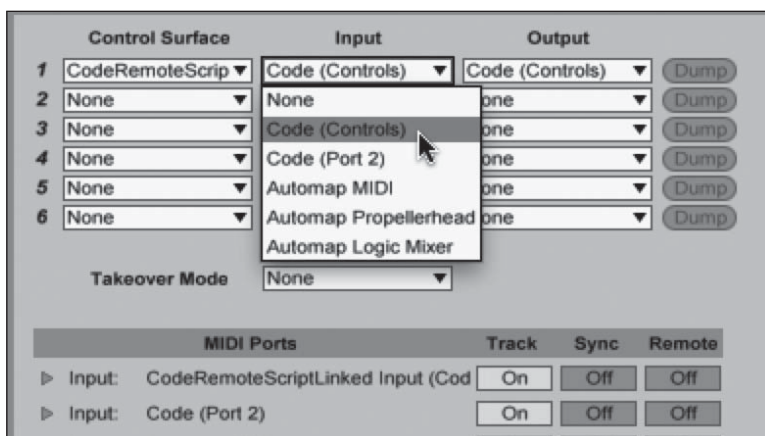
You may also wish to use one or more MIDI control surfaces, such as the Launchpad, APC40, Code, and so on. Or, you may have a MIDI controller that, aside from having keyboard keys, also has knobs, sliders, and buttons. Keep in mind that there are several variations of MIDI controllers on the market, and this section is more of a general setup guide for controllers. There will most likely be some additional instructions from each individual controller's manufacturer.

1. In the MIDI/Sync page of Preferences, at the top of the page, select your controller from the farthest left drop-down menu, labeled Control Surface (see Figure 1.17).



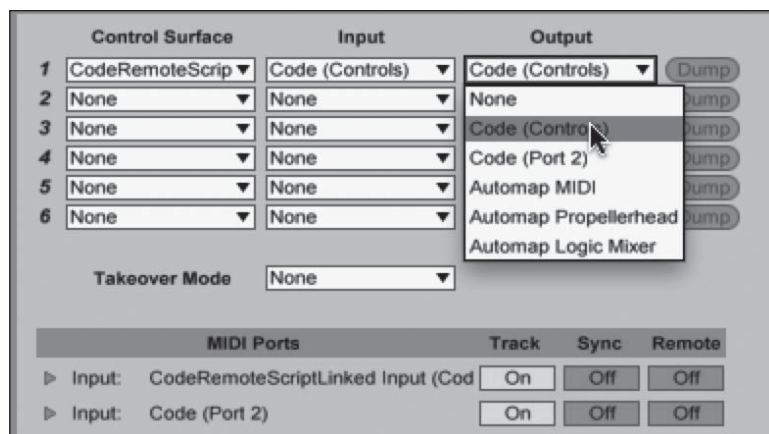
**Figure 1.17** Selecting a control surface in the Live preferences.  
Source: Ableton AG

2. Choose the MIDI Input for the control surface (see Figure 1.18). In most cases, you'll have two inputs per MIDI device. Generally speaking, it's always the first input. However, if you're not sure or your control surface is one of the more complex devices on the market, make sure you consult the device's installation instructions.



**Figure 1.18** Selecting the MIDI Input for a control surface.  
Source: Ableton AG

- Choose the MIDI Output for your control surface (see Figure 1.19). Usually, this is the same selection as the MIDI Input. See the manual for your MIDI control surface if you're not sure.



**Figure 1.19** Selecting the MIDI Output for a control surface.

Source: Ableton AG

- At this point, your controller should be set up. Close Preferences and try triggering the device. If there are any problems or something seems off, consult the manufacturer's setup guide. You can also refer to the manufacturer's website. Many manufacturers are really good about posting walkthroughs for setting up certain devices unique to specific DAWs. Because Ableton is pretty popular and so controller friendly, there's almost always a guide specific to Live.

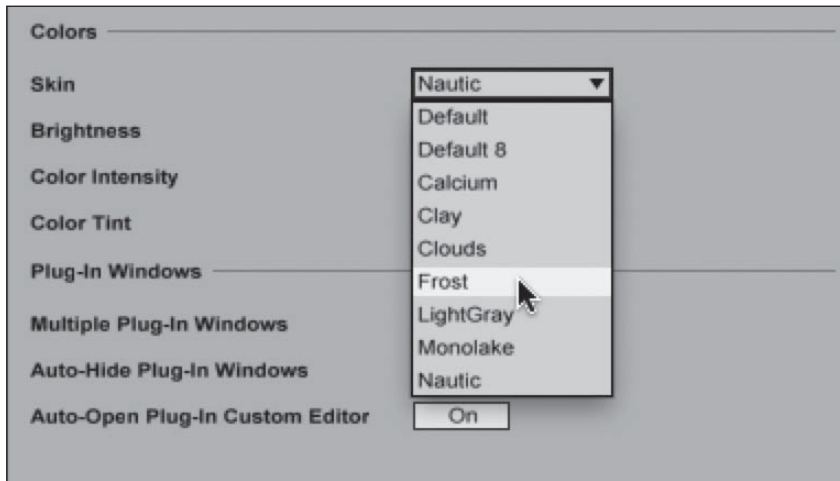
## Changing Live's Visual Appearance

Believe it or not, Live has been designed to be slightly modifiable in its visual appearance. For most producers, this may seem like a silly suggestion, but hear me out. Everybody has a different pair of eyes, and some eyes definitely work differently from others. For example, some people can't see certain colors and some people don't like particularly bright colors. Some people just like to match the look of their software to the look of the studio surrounding. Whatever the case, you can actually modify Live's color scheme. If this sounds appealing, you can give it a go by following the steps below.

- Click on the Look/Feel panel in the Ableton Preferences. This page has various adjustments, including changing the language shown in the Live menus and GUI. There are also adjustments for warnings, labels, and so on. You can even set up rules for what colors clips will appear.

## Going Pro with Ableton Live

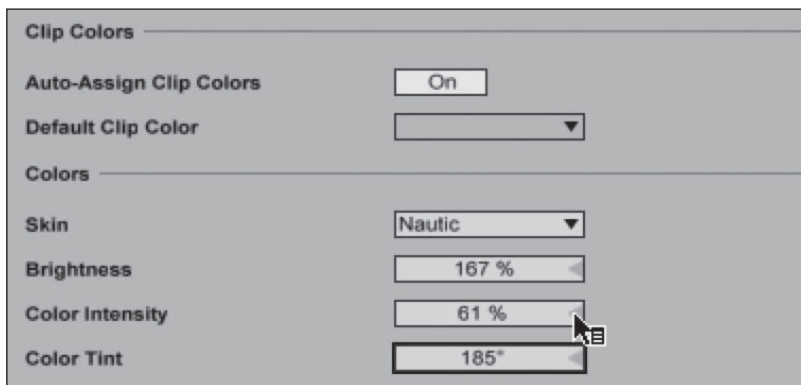
2. Under the Colors heading, locate the Skin drop-down menu (see Figure 1.20). Skins are different color schemes for the Live user interface. Try changing to a different skin—choose Frost.



**Figure 1.20** Changing Live's color scheme with the Skin setting.

Source: Ableton AG

3. The Frost skin, as you've probably already noticed, is much brighter and cleaner. Even though it changes only the color scheme, it really changes the feel of Live. Now, in the same drop-down menu, change the skin to Nautic.
4. Nautic, you'll notice, is slightly darker than Frost. It's more similar to the other Ableton skins. You'll be pleased to know that you can modify this skin further by adjusting the Brightness, Color Intensity, and Color Tint, as shown in Figure 1.21. Try adjusting these settings until you get an Ableton environment that you feel comfortable with.



**Figure 1.21** Adjusting the Color Intensity.

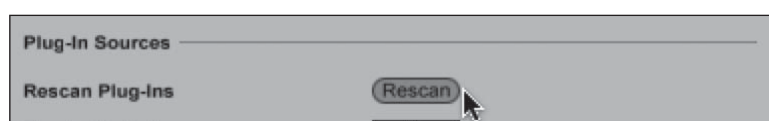
Source: Ableton AG

Color changes can have a dramatic effect on your creativity. Choosing colors that suit your workflow and aesthetic sensibilities can only help your creative workflow.

## Setting Up VST/AU Plug-Ins

Like most DAWs, Ableton supports third-party VST and AU plug-ins. However, note that AU plug-ins are available only for Mac users. If some of your plug-ins don't show up or you'd like to point Ableton to a second VST folder, you have options—take a look.

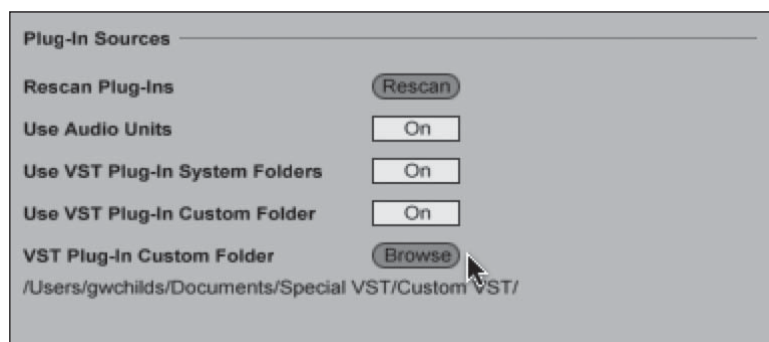
1. Click on the File/Folder panel of the Live preferences (not shown). This particular page is helpful for changing the location of your temporary folder (where Live places your audio until you save your project), where you can set up your template, and so on. We'll get to these other important setup steps later in this chapter. For the moment, let's continue on with ensuring that your instruments are up and running.
2. Locate the Plug-In Sources section of the File/Folder page, shown in Figure 1.22. This section contains a few options that you'll want to know about. Rescan, for instance, forces Ableton to go through all of your plug-ins again. This is especially handy if you've installed a plug-in while Live is running. Simply click the Rescan button, and Live will re-detect all of your plug-ins, including new ones. No need to restart.



**Figure 1.22** The Plug-In Sources section and the Rescan button.

Source: Ableton AG

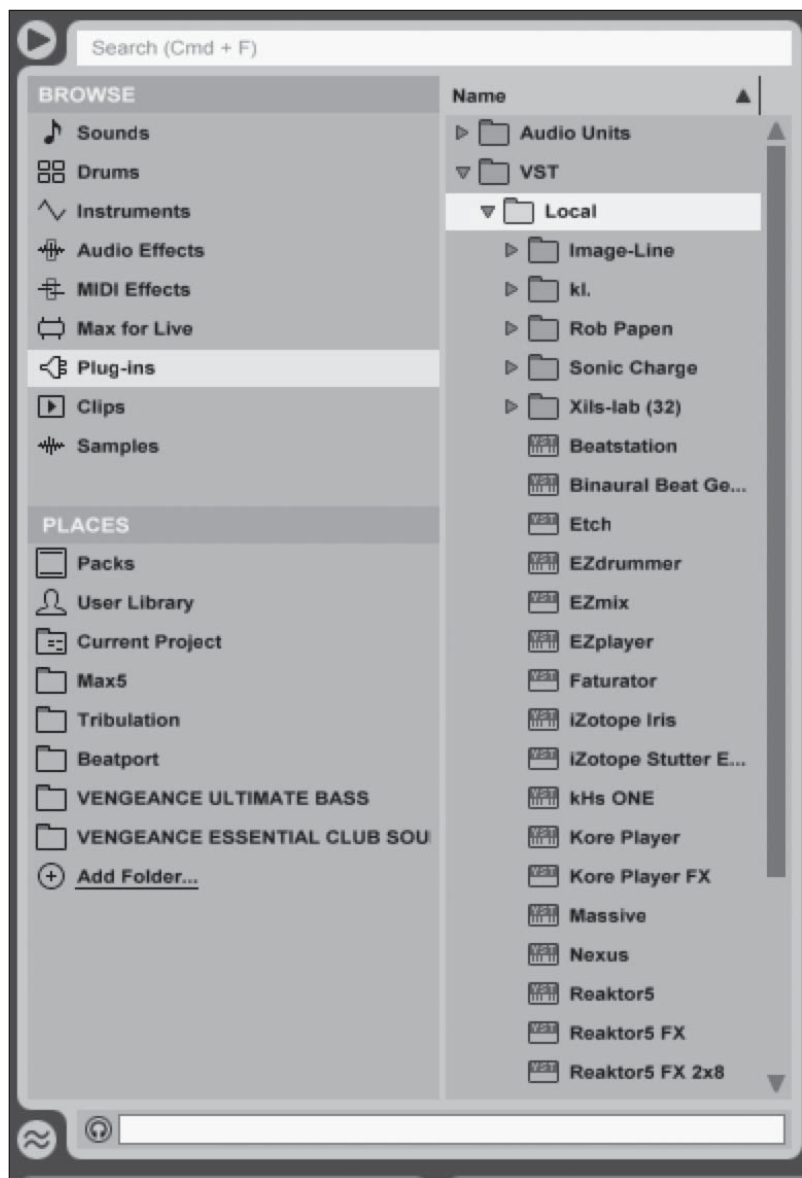
3. In the Plug-In Sources section, you can also determine whether you'd like to use AU or VST plug-ins at all. If you're running on a PC and you have multiple VSTs installed already on your computer, you may want to take a look at the VST Plug-In Custom Folder function (see Figure 1.23) if your VSTs aren't showing up. Because different companies can sometimes install in different locations, you may want to use this option to point Ableton to the correct location of your VSTs. See your VST's documentation for where it installs by default. And, reference the Ableton manual for setting up VSTs on a PC.



**Figure 1.23** Use the VST Plug-In Custom Folder function to locate missing VSTs if they aren't appearing in Live's Browser.

Source: Ableton AG

4. To ensure that all VSTs are available, close out of the Preferences and go to the Live Browser on the left. Look under Plug-Ins. You may have to drag the Browser out to see the selection area fully. See Figure 1.24. If you're on a PC, you'll see only the VST folder. Open the folder and ensure that all of your plug-ins are there.



**Figure 1.24** VSTs as they appear in the Ableton Browser.

Source: Ableton AG

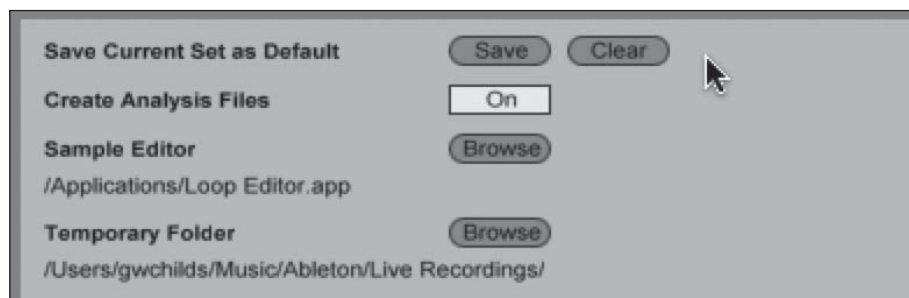
**32- AND 64-BIT PLUG-INS:** If a plug-in is missing, you may also double-check to ensure that you've downloaded the plug-in that is appropriate to the mode in which you're running. For example, if you're running in the 64-bit version of Live and you have a 32-bit plug-in installed, it won't appear. In Live's case, if you installed the 64-bit version of Live and you're running a 32-bit plug-in, it won't work. You may need to reinstall the 64-bit version of the plug-in if it's available, or install the 32-bit version of Live.

In the next chapter, we'll begin to get more familiar with the Browser, which is very, very handy. Now, let's talk about how to set up a Live template.

## Setting Up Your Template

Granted, we're still early in our exploration of Live. But once you've gotten yourself more familiar with Live's functionality, you can return to this chapter and visit this section, which refers to setting up a Live template that suits your workflow.

1. Go to the very top of the File/Folder panel of Live's Preferences. You'll notice that the very first option/section is Save Current Set as Default, as shown in Figure 1.25.



**Figure 1.25** The Save Current Set as Default section as it appears in the File/Folder panel of Live Preferences.  
Source: Ableton AG

You'll notice two buttons in this small but significant section: the Save and Clear buttons. Let's talk about Save first. When you click the Save button, Live immediately assumes that the current Set in which you are working should now be the state that appears every time you open Live. So, needless to say, it's important that you click this button at a time when you are confident that the current state of your current Set is what you want to see each and every time you open Live.

If you clicked the Save button and have decided that you aren't happy with the Live template that appears by default, it's okay. You can easily mend this either by clicking the Save button again, when you have your Set in a state that would be desirable for a starting point every time you begin a new Set, or by clicking the Clear button. The Clear button will return the original template that was loaded the first time you started Ableton Live on your computer.

Again, I recommend you spend some time getting familiar with different instruments, effects, and so on before setting up a default template for Ableton Live. But if you already have an idea of what works for you, go ahead and experiment. It's not like you can't come back later and change it, right?

## Setting Up Packs

Live has a really interesting way of adding expansions that include sounds, loops (in the form of clips) and instruments, and effects if you have Max for Live, which we'll get into in Chapter 8, "Specific Needs."

These expansions are known as *Packs*, and you can purchase them (or sometimes get them for free) from Ableton.com. If you're unsure of whether you have any available Packs for your version of Live, make sure you log in to your Ableton.com account and check out the Your Packs section of your Ableton account information. On this page, you can download and authorize existing Packs within your arsenal.



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