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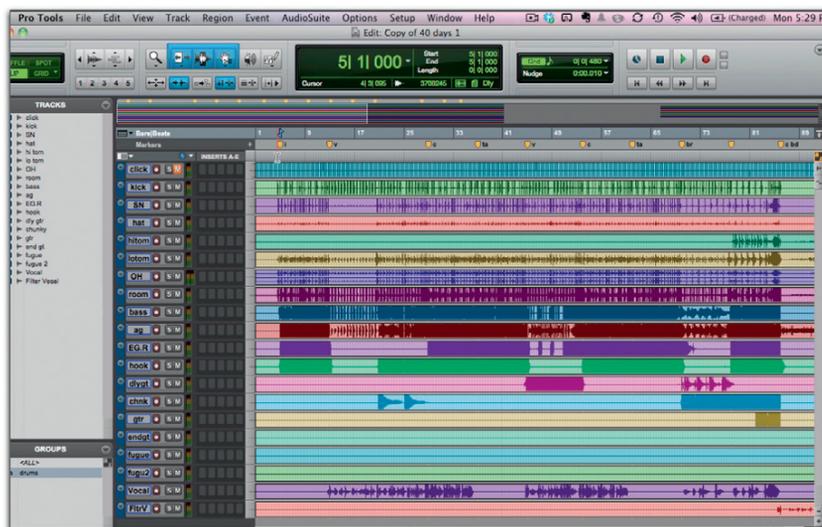


## Session Setup

### Listening Through the Original Tracks

Depending on who you are talking to, the 1970s were the greatest decade in recent history. Oh sure, we had to put up with all the crappy disco music we would ever need, but for a few blissful years, little programmable sequencers freed us from plague of human drummers. (Ba-Zing!). But seriously, as a wannabe drummer myself, I sympathize with the plight of any musician who has to have four limbs playing different rhythms simultaneously. Above all, however, I sympathize with the engineer who has to fix a challenging drum performance. Fortunately, in this song, we have a good rock drummer, who just needs to be tightened up. Of course, that's why you're here.

With that, fire up the included Pro Tools session, and you should see the tracks laid out ready for your masterful touch (Figure 2.1).



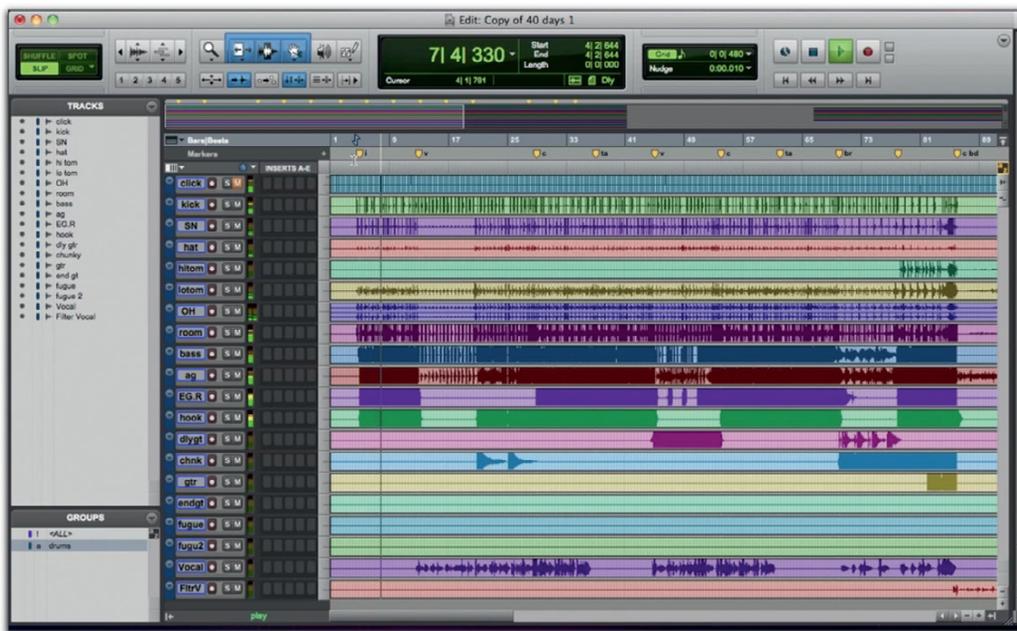
**Figure 2.1** Your Session Should Start Out Looking Like This.

## Pro Tools 9: The Mixer's Toolkit

Now as we've already stated, this is *The Mixer's Toolkit*, not "Intro to ProTools for Toddlers." So, we are not going to walk through how to arrange tracks by clicking and dragging on their name, or in the Tracks window, but it is worth noting the order that we chose to arrange the tracks in. This is a fairly standard track arrangement, with the click track on top followed by the drums, the bass, acoustic and electric guitars, and finally vocals. It is a pretty standard track layout for pocketing, as our reference track (in this case, the click) resides on top, ready for us to edit the drums against.

Everybody wants to jump right into the advanced editing and mixing techniques as soon as they sit down at their first digital audio workstation. However, as we saw last time, if you don't set your software up properly and in a way that is conducive to the work you're going to do, the technology can often frustrate your creativity. There is nothing more maddening than pressing a flurry of keyboard shortcuts expecting voodoo to happen as notes and tracks magically align, only to have your screen rearrange, audio disappear, and your computer freeze up, all because you didn't take just a few moments to optimize your set up. Lazy, lazy, lazy.

Don't feel bad though because we are about to kick things in gear. First things first, go ahead and play through the track, so you can get a feel for the instruments, vocals, and frequency ranges that everything is occupying. Your session should look something like this (see Figure 2.2).



**Figure 2.2** It All Starts with a Great Song ... In a Garage.

## The Alt and Shift Key Secret

The beauty of using a session like this to learn about mixing is that it has many great elements, as well as elements that need some sweet mixing action. Seriously, like the drums.

In order to really focus on the drums, let's select all of the nondrum tracks and mute them, of course you could simply click on the individual mute buttons, but that would be slow and painful. This brings us to our first Pro Tools mixer's shortcut that you will use hundreds of times in a given session. First let's select the range of instruments between the bass guitar and the filter vocal. Click on the name of the bass guitar track, then hold down your Shift key while clicking the filter vocal track at the bottom (Figure 2.3).



**Figure 2.3**  
(a, b) The Magic of the Shift Key.

## Pro Tools 9: The Mixer's Toolkit

Voilà! Holding the Shift key selects everything between your two selections. The beauty of this is that it works in most every Pro Tools editing and mixing situation you would desire. For example, want to select all audio between two markers? Simply select the first marker by right-clicking on it, then Shift+click the later marker; all audio between them is automatically selected.

Back to muting our nondrum tracks, we get to our second key shortcut that utilizes the Alt and Shift keys. If you've been using Pro Tools for any amount of time, you know that holding down the Alt key (on either Mac or Windows) will affect all tracks in the session. What many people don't know is that when you add the Shift key as well, your actions will affect all *selected* tracks.

We use this to our advantage now by holding the Alt and Shift keys while clicking the mute button on any of the selected tracks. In only a few short clicks, we have muted all of the nondrum tracks (Figure 2.4).

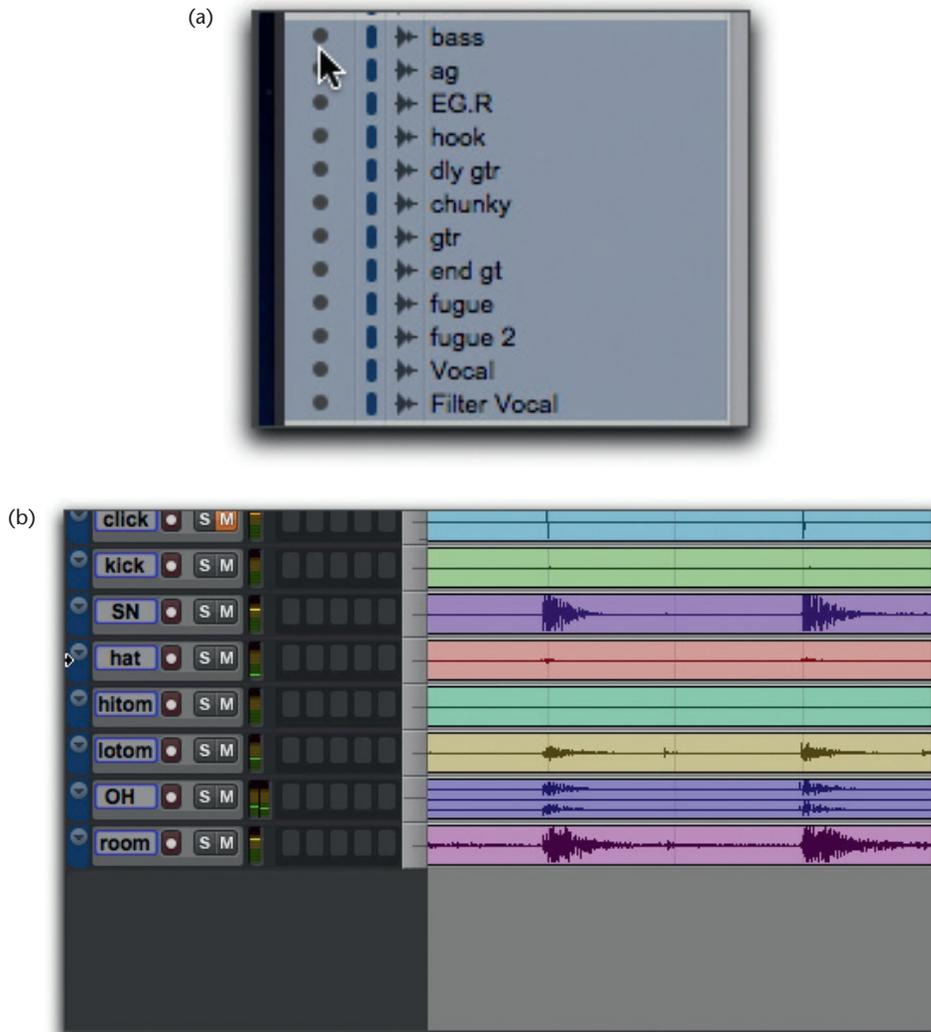


**Figure 2.4** One Click Beats a Dozen Clicks Any Day.

## Pro Tools 9: The Mixer's Toolkit

The last step in preparing to edit our drums is to hide all of these unused tracks and fill the screen with only the drum tracks. Because you are all aspiring to be professional, efficient mixers let's do this with two strokes (as opposed to the dozen or more you were about to use ...).

Still holding down the Alt and Shift keys, click on the little circle to the left of any of your unused tracks in the Tracks window. You will see them instantly disappear from your Edit window (Figure 2.5).



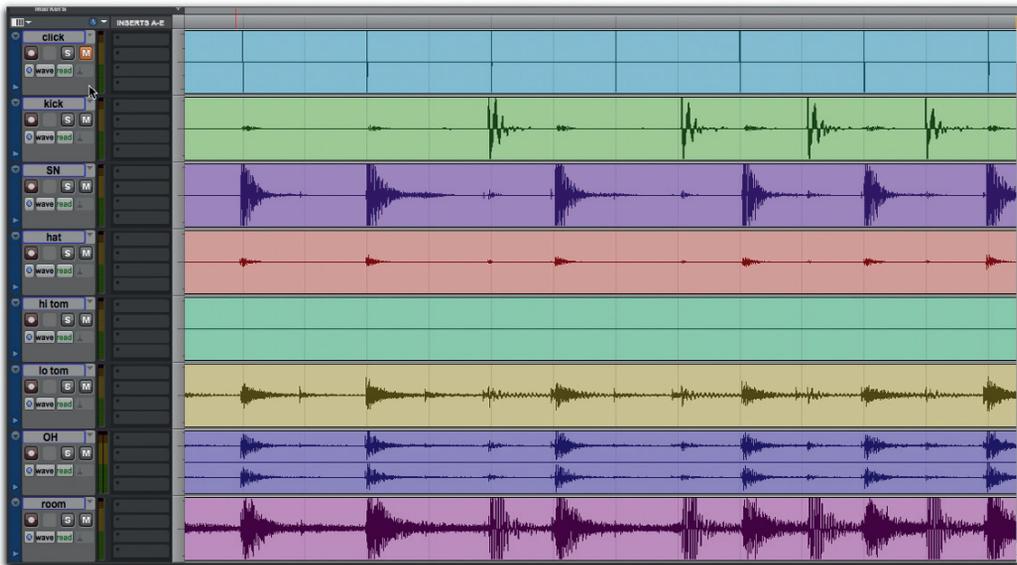
**Figure 2.5** (a, b) Quickly Hiding a Large Group of Tracks.

That's at least a minute of clicking you've shaved off with Alt+Shift already, huh?

### The Fat Finger Secret

Next, vertically resize all of the remaining tracks with our next secret ninja shortcut ... I call it the *fat finger*.

Fat finger is a short way of saying to press the Control, Alt, and Command (Win: Ctrl+Alt+Start) buttons all at once, as though your finger was too fat to press just one of them. Get it? This is one of the least-known shortcuts in the entire Pro Tools universe, but it does so much in so many different situations. For example, right now you can hold down *fat finger* (Mac: Ctrl+Alt+Cmd, Win: Ctrl+Alt+Start) and hit your down-arrow key on the keyboard to instantly resize all remaining tracks to fill the vertical space of the Edit window (Figure 2.6).



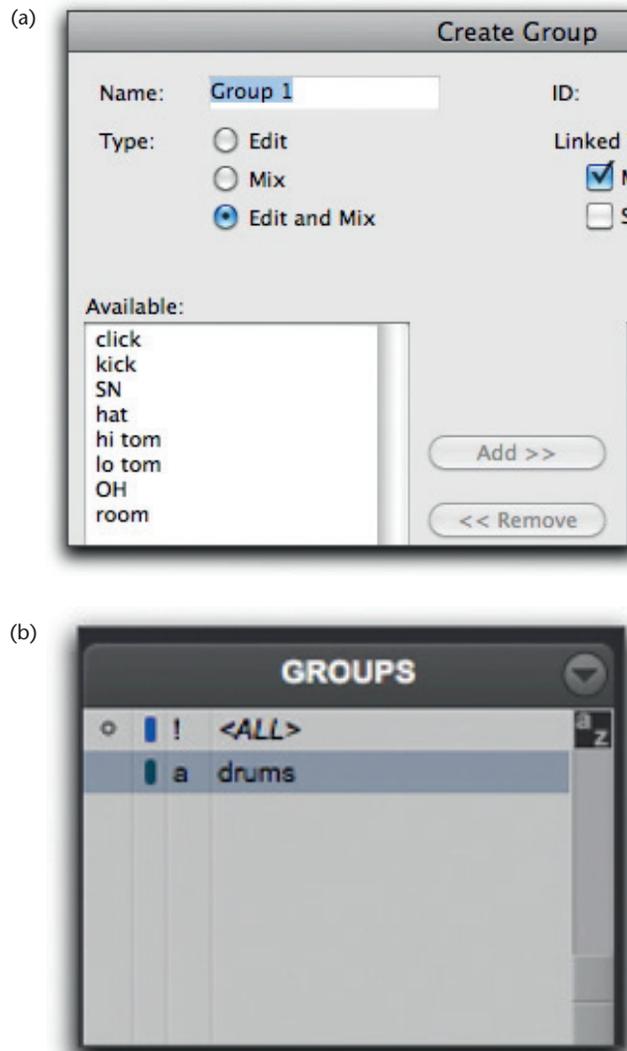
**Figure 2.6** That's Just the First of the Fat Finger Tricks.

### Drum Editing Prep

When you are an editor, you will always be hiding and showing different combinations of tracks so that you can focus your attention on just the current edits. You will also resize tracks with great regularity both vertically and horizontally. As a result, this fat finger trick is just one of the speed techniques, which separates the men from the boys.

## Pro Tools 9: The Mixer's Toolkit

Now that your drums are up and ready, let's create a drum group so that any edits we make to one drum track is made to all the drums simultaneously. If we were to try to edit the drums individually, all of the delicate phase relationships achieved with these fantastic garage miking techniques would be lost. Using the Shift+Click method we discussed earlier, select all of the drums and hit Command G (Win: Ctrl+G). Select all of the drums, name your group "Drums," link the Edit and Mix windows, and click OK. Once you've done that, you should see it in the Groups window, and any selections or edits made to one drum track will now affect all of them (Figure 2.7).



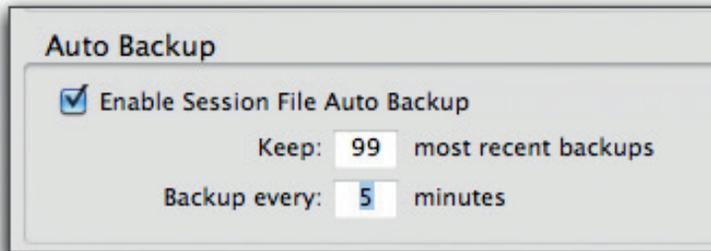
**Figure 2.7**  
(a, b) Groups Are a Mixer's Best Friend.

## Creating an Escape Route

First things first, before we go editing this track all to death, we need to make ourselves an escape route. That's to say, often times you will find yourself mixing a track that you did not have the pleasure of recording. As a result, it is very normal to polish the track to be the best that it can possibly be. However, what happens if the drummer or guitarist or vocalist comes back and says "I meant to play it like that"? Well, if you haven't created a backup of the unaffected session, or a playlist of the original tracks, then there's simply no easy route to get them back.

Obviously, the simplest solution is to turn on the Auto Backup preference found under the Setup menu > Operation tab (see Figure 2.8).

**Figure 2.8** Just Go Turn It on Right Now. Don't Wait. Check for It Every Time You Open Pro Tools, or Regret It Later.



This preference will create a Backups folder in your main session folder, and store a sweet, sweet safety copy every few minutes. There is no reason that I can think of to not turn this on.

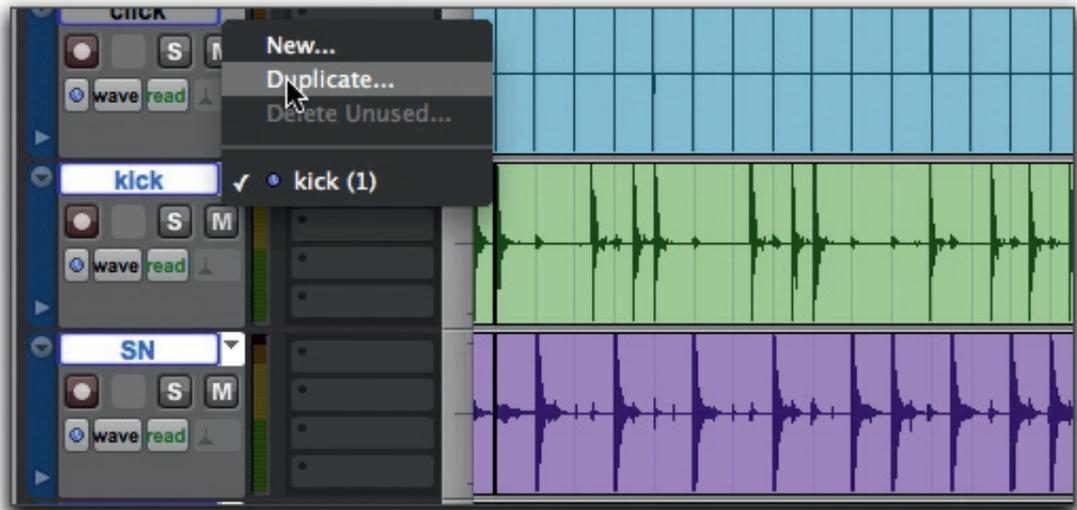
However, it's not necessarily the best way to keep alternate versions of your tracks. For example, who wants to go back through hundreds of old sessions looking for original drum tracks? Certainly, not me.

So instead, we'll use an often overlooked feature of Pro Tools called playlists.

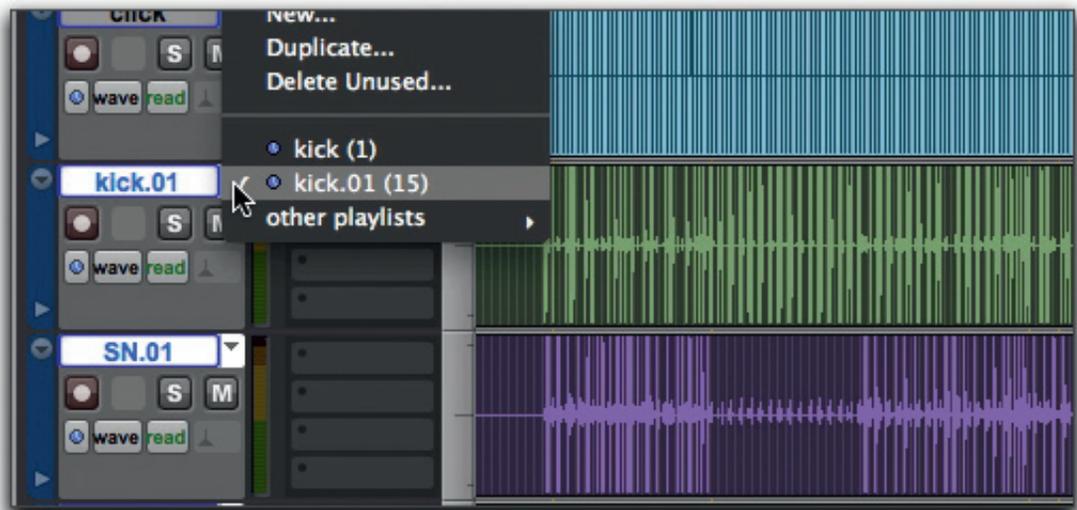
Play listing is a function that allows you to create and access alternate takes of a performance. Simply click on the down arrow to the right of the track name and you will see options for "New, Duplicate, and Delete Unused."

While there is certainly a lot to be explored when it comes to using playlists for functions such as solos and vocal comping, for now we are just going to make a duplicate of our existing drum tracks (Figures 2.9 and 2.10).

## Pro Tools 9: The Mixer's Toolkit



**Figure 2.9** Duplicating a Playlist Is a Quick Way to Move Forward with Any Dangerous Edits.



**Figure 2.10** Secure in the Knowledge That the Originals Are Hiding Behind the Scenes.

## Pro Tools 9: The Mixer's Toolkit

Once you have duplicated your playlists, you will see that your tracks now have a .01 beside them. You can rename them if you like so that these playlists are labeled with the words "Edit" or "Original," etc. Just be sure to use a naming convention that makes sense to you or follows the NARAS guidelines for naming tracks. There is nothing worse than trying to find an old take on an alternate playlist with an ambiguous name like "Audio\_07.3."

The beauty of duplicating this drum playlist is that we can access the originals at any time with just a click. So, if we get halfway through pocketing these drums and find we have accidentally pushed the entire chorus out of sync, we can simply switch back to the original playlist, copy the chorus, and switch back to our edit list to paste it in. Crisis averted.

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