



How do you make your kick . . . kick? Let us know on the forums or by commenting on this article at [keyboardmag.com](http://keyboardmag.com).

# THE KICK INSIDE


by Francis Preve

## I'm constantly asked about kick drums.

After all, in dance music, it's quite possibly the single most important element in a track. With zillions of kicks available via factory presets and third-party soundware, finding the perfect kick for your tracks can take hours. This month, I'll show you my

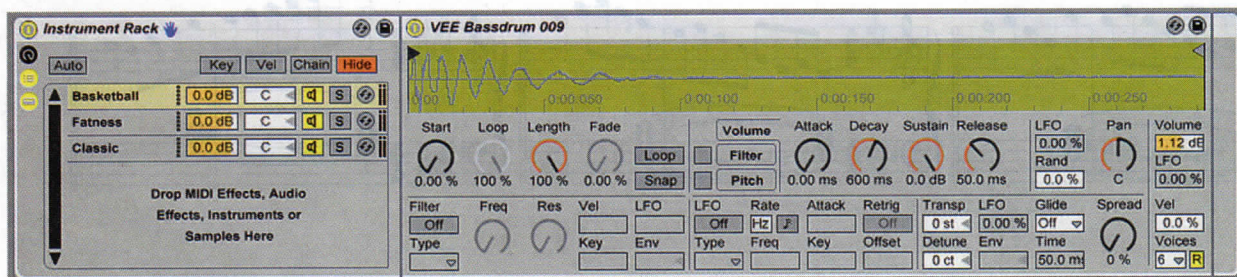
own personal technique for quickly nailing it – and defining your own unique sound in the process.

The approach is blissfully simple: Spend an afternoon sifting through your collection and set aside three (or more kicks), each with different qualities, then make those

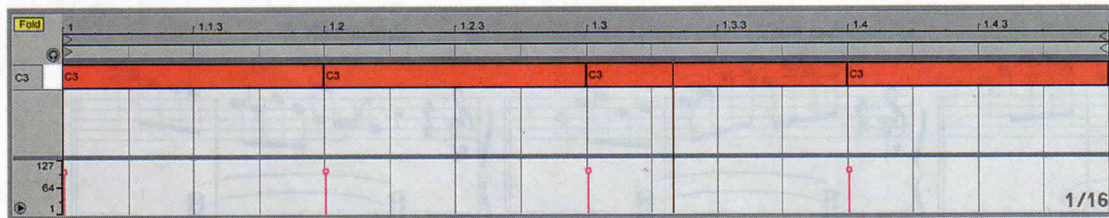
kicks part of your DAW's starting template. You can then use envelopes, volume, and/or filters to sculpt them into the perfect kick for a given track. This technique works with any DAW that includes soft samplers, or you can use a third-party sampler such as Native Instruments Kontakt. 



**Step 1. Find three kicks you really dig. I chose three from Vengeance ([vengeance-sound.de](http://vengeance-sound.de)) Electro Essentials: "Bassdrum 009" for its basketball-like quality, "Bassdrum 028" for its overall thickness, and "Bassdrum 050" for its all-purpose, classic sound.**

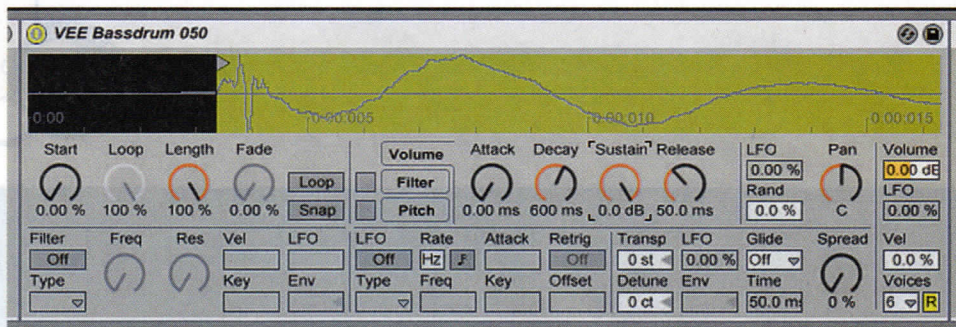


**Step 2. Create three separate samplers, each containing one of your selected kicks, and give each its own track. In Ableton Live, create a single Instrument Rack that contains a Sampler for each layer. To keep organized, name each sampler based on the kick inside – I used "Basketball," "Fatness," and "Classic."**

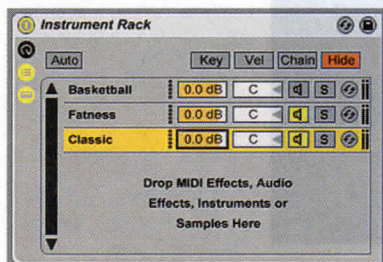


**Step 3. Create a one-measure, four-on-the-floor loop for each track. Be sure to make the note length a full quarter-note for each event, so the kick isn't truncated by a short event duration. If using Live, create a single one-measure clip for the channel containing the Instrument Rack.**

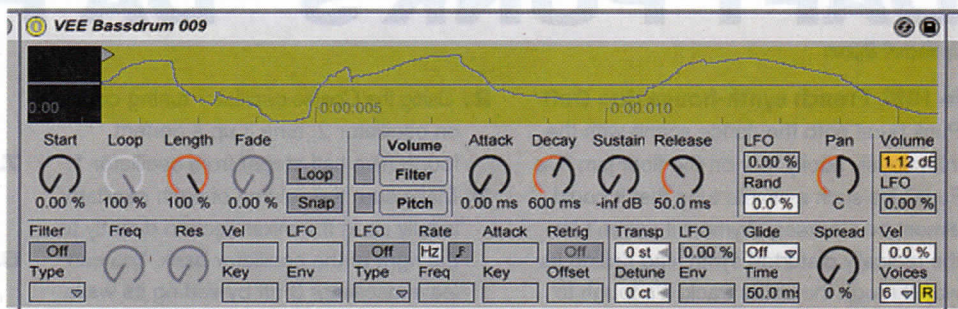




Step 4. Loop and play all three tracks. Listen closely for any flaming. With three kicks going at once, there's a good chance that their attacks may not line up. Some libraries crop their samples right on the attack, whereas others leave a little room for the producer to touch up manually. In the latter case, go into your samplers and adjust the start time for each kick by hand. Here's an edit in one of our Instrument Racks' Simplers.



Step 5. Now we're ready to start blending. Begin by muting one of the three kicks in your layered collection. Then try another, and so on. From there, try adjusting the levels of each kick to create different mixes. As you do this, pay close attention to the low end. A little intermodulation between low frequencies is inevitable; just make sure you don't introduce an unpleasant wobble (due to phase cancellation) by combining two closely related kicks. Here, good monitors or headphones are your friends.



Step 6. For more sophisticated blending, tinker with the envelopes of each sampler. If you like the attack of one kick and the body of another, start by soloing the "attack" kick, then reduce the sustain level to zero, so that it decays. Next, adjust your decay so that you're only briefly hearing the attack. Now, add your "body" kick and adjust its level in relationship to the other. Spend a bit of time tweaking the volume and envelope for each kick until you get it right.



Step 7. To really punch up your mixed kicks, apply some dynamics processing to the entire chain. If you're working with separate tracks in your sequencer, route all tracks to a single bus, then apply your processor. If you're in Live, add the processor after the instrument rack. One of my favorite tools for getting a really punchy kick is PSP Vintage Warmer. Slapping this at the end of a chain and increasing the drive can really glue everything together.