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Jeff Strong
Author of *Home Recording For Musicians For Dummies*

Pro Tools

ALL-IN-ONE

4th Edition

by Jeff Strong

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Pro Tools All-in-One For Dummies®, 4th Edition

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Introduction

Chances are that after you became interested in recording some music, you started hearing about a great software program — Pro Tools. Maybe you read an article in which an artist said that she records with Pro Tools, or you heard that such-and-such major recording studio uses Pro Tools, or a friend told you that you need Pro Tools to record professional-quality music. Of the many great recording programs that are available, the most popular — and one of the most powerful — is Pro Tools.

Pro Tools is an audio and Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) recording program. Aside from recording audio and MIDI tracks, Pro Tools offers some of the most powerful editing functions available, allowing you to tweak your recordings to a high level of detail, clarity, and accuracy. You also get excellent mixing abilities that help you mix your tracks together, EQ (equalize) them, and apply effects. Pro Tools is a comprehensive, all-in-one program you can use to control your music from start to finish.

About This Book

Pro Tools All-in-One For Dummies, 4th Edition, not only introduces you to Pro Tools audio- and MIDI-recording software, but it also presents basic multitrack recording techniques. You find out about the many Pro Tools features and functions and ways to use this program to create the best possible recordings of your music.

This book also acquaints you with the basic audio-engineering skills needed to make high-quality recordings. These skills can save you countless hours of experimenting and give you more time to actually record your music. (What a concept!)

In this book, you can

- Explore the Pro Tools windows and menus.
- Get a handle on all the useful functions within Pro Tools.
- Discover the ins and outs of using the various pieces of equipment in your studio.

- Explore tried-and-true engineering techniques, such as microphone choice and placement.
- Find out about multitracking, mixing, and mastering.
- Get a chance to turn your music into complete songs and also discover how to assemble and release an album.

With this book in hand, you're on the fast track toward creating great-sounding CDs. I cut to the chase, showing you skills you can use right away. I don't bother you with tons of technical jargon or useless facts.

Note: Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

I have to admit that when I wrote this book, I made a couple of assumptions about you, the reader. (And we all know what happens when you ASSume anything.) But what the heck, I did it anyway. First, I assume that you're interested in recording your music (or someone else's) with Pro Tools software.

I also assume that you're relatively new at the recording game and not yet a seasoned professional. Of course, if you are an audio engineer — maybe making the leap from analog to digital — this book offers a great brush-up on many audio-engineering fundamentals and how they apply to the basic functions of Pro Tools. Oh, and I assume that you play a musical instrument or sing — or are at least familiar with how instruments function and how sound is produced, as well as understand some of the basics of music theory such as tempo, meter, measures, and time signature. Finally, I assume that you have some basic computer skills and know how to navigate menus, and work a mouse and qwerty keyboard.

Other than these things, I don't assume that you play a certain type of music or that you ever intend to try to make it in the music business (or even that you want to treat it as a business at all).

Icons Used in This Book

Like all *For Dummies* authors, I use a few icons to help you along your way.

This icon highlights expert advice and ideas that can help you produce better recordings.

Certain techniques are very important and deserve remembering. This icon gives you a gentle nudge to keep you on track.

This icon warns you ahead of time about instances when you can damage your equipment, your ears, or your song.

Throughout the book, this icon shows up in instances where I include technical background on certain subjects. When you see this icon, brace yourself for some dense information. Skip these if you want.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that includes loads of keyboard shortcuts to make your work with Pro Tools quick and easy. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to `www.dummies.com` and type **Pro Tools All-in-One For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

This book is set up so that you can read it cover to cover (and progressively build on your knowledge). Or be a free spirit and jump around to read only those parts that interest you at the time. For instance, if you're getting ready to record a mix of your song and need some ideas on how to use equalization (EQ), go to Book 6,

Chapter 3. If you're new to recording with Pro Tools and want to know how to set up a session, check out Book 1, Chapter 4. And if you're completely new to the whole concept of home recording, start at the beginning with Book 1, Chapter 1.

You know, that's not a bad idea. Starting at the beginning, I mean. That way, you can get yourself up to speed on my way of thinking. Book 1, Chapter 1 can also help you understand some of what I discuss in later chapters. Wherever you start and wherever you want to go, you're in for an adventure. . . .

1 Getting Started with Pro Tools

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IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding the components of a home studio
- Discovering how each component contributes to the final sound

Chapter 1
Discovering What You Need

Whether you use a PC- or Mac-based system for your Pro Tools studio, your home recording system of choice employs much of the same basic technology. In fact, your simple Pro Tools studio consists of the same basic components as a typical, million-dollar, professional studio complex.

In this chapter, you discover the purpose of each component of a home recording studio, and you also discover how each of these components relates to the quality of sound you ultimately get from your studio. This knowledge will help you to spend the right amount of money on the right stuff. (See Book 1, Chapter 2 and Book 2, Chapter 1 for more on purchasing gear.)

Eyeing the Big Picture

In spite of what you may surmise from this chapter — with its long list of equipment — you need only a few things to do multitrack recording with Pro Tools. This simple list comprises instruments and microphones (called *input devices*), a computer, a compatible audio interface, Pro Tools software, and monitors (speakers, to you home stereo enthusiasts). No matter how complicated your

system becomes and how many pieces of gear you end up accumulating, your studio will still consist of these basic parts.

REMEMBER

This chapter breaks down recording systems into the components they have to have, but you may not need to purchase every component separately to get a great-sounding system. Many of these components come bundled together. For example, your audio interface will likely include preamps — or you may find speakers that come with a power amp inside them.

Piping the Music into Pro Tools

As you begin to build your home studio, you'll notice a long list of components — okay, go ahead and call them "extras" — lurking within the Top Five basics of your studio: input devices, computer, interface, software, and monitors. In this section, I focus on these details of input devices so you can understand just what roles they play in your system.

TIP

As you get more and more involved in recording, you'll find you can add almost any of these components to your existing system to expand and enhance what you can do.

Interpreting input devices

All your expensive recording gear is useless if you have nothing to plug in to it. This is where the input device comes into play. An *input device* is, simply, any instrument, microphone, or sound module that produces or delivers a sound to the recorder.

Instruments

An electric guitar, a bass, a synthesizer, and drum machines are typical instruments that plug in to the interface and represent most of the input devices that you use in your studio. A synthesizer and drum machine can plug directly into the Line In inputs of your interface, whereas an electric guitar or a bass needs a direct box (or its equivalent) to plug in to first. (In the case of a Avid interface, you need to use one of the inputs that has a preamp.)

A *direct box* is an intermediary device that allows you to plug your guitar directly into a mixer without going through your amp first. (For more on direct boxes, see the upcoming section, "Deciphering direct boxes.") Check out Figure 1-1 for an example of an instrument-input device.