

Making tracks with the Jokosher audio editor

EASY MIX



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If Audacity, Ardour, or ReZound are too muddled for your taste, try the easy and powerful Jokosher audio editor. **BY JAN RÄHM**

Like many open source programs, Jokosher owes its existence to user dissatisfaction: Early in 2006, the project's founder, Jono Bacon, was looking for an open source alternative to mixers such as Cubase to produce his "LugRadio" podcast. He wanted the new program to be easy to use – and easy to learn for people without expert knowledge of audio editing. Bacon originally launched the project [1] under the name Jonoedit. He announced the launch in his podcast and asked for developers to join the fun.

Laszlo Pandy [2] heard the call and became the project's maintainer, and the name was soon changed to Jokosher. The current version of Jokosher is 0.10.1. Jokosher, which is still in a fairly early stage of development, relies on the

Gnome desktop environment and the GStreamer multimedia framework. Much of the programming is in Python.

Installation

Installing Jokosher does not pose any major problems to the user – assuming you have a Gnome environment. The 8.04 LTS and Ubuntu 8.10 repositories offer matching packages; users with other distributions will need to build the program.

If you have a distribution with a state-of-the-art Gnome environment, you are in luck. Most of the dependencies are in place in this case.

On other systems, you will need to resolve the list of dependencies (see Table 1) before launching into the manual Jokosher installation.

Setting up the program is similarly easy: Just unpack the tarball you downloaded off the Jokosher homepage [3] in a directory of your choice and change to the *Jokosher*-version directory this step

Table 1: Dependencies

Component	Version
Python components	
Python	2.4
Python-Cairo bindings	1.2.0
Python-DBus bindings	0.71
Python-XML tools	0.8.4
Python-Glade2 bindings	2.8
Python-Gtk2 bindings	2.8
Python-GStreamer bindings	0.10.6
Python-Setuptools	0.6
GStreamer components	
GStreamer	0.10.12
Gnonlin	0.10.8
Base plugins	0.10.12
Good plugins	0.10.5
Ugly plugins (optional, MP3)	0.10.5
Bad plugins (optional, LADSPA effects)	0.10.4

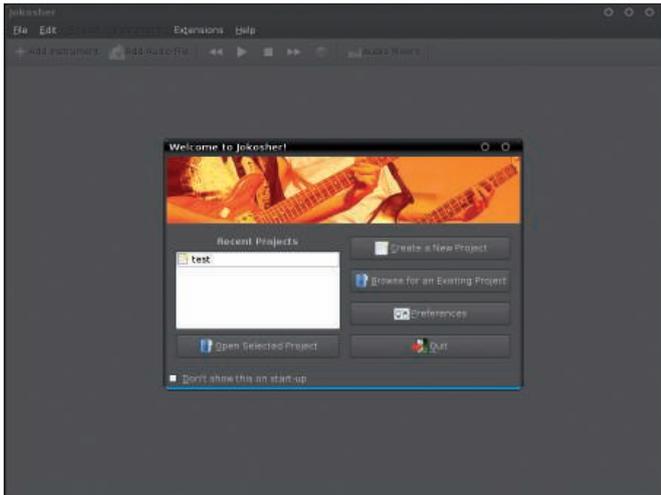


Figure 1: Getting started with Jokosher.

creates. When you get there, become root and run the *setup.py* script that drops the program components into the right folders. The audio editor itself is dropped into */usr/bin*, and that means that you can launch the program directly with the *jokosher* command.

Jokosher starts with a Welcome dialog box (Figure 1), in which you can opt to create a new project or open an existing one. The *Preferences* button here will let you configure the audio editors. One of these configuration options lets you disable the Welcome screen entirely – just click *Don't show this on start-up*.

However, selecting the recording format is more important than any of these options. Depending on the GStreamer plugins you have installed, you can choose between various lossy and non-lossy formats. After this, you need to specify the sampling rate for your recordings and select the output plugins.

After choosing these important settings, press the *Create a New Project* button. To save the project, you need to type a name and choose a directory. Later on, you will be able to use templates to load a set of tracks that you configured previously.

A click on *OK* will open a main window showing what is still an empty workspace (Figure 2). At the top edge of the workspace, below the menubar, you will see the major controls, the time display, and the pager that lets you switch between the visible window and the mixer view. Below this bar is a timeline and a metronome view. The bottom edge of the window is occupied by a horizontal scrollbar and the zoom slider.

Intuitive Rules

Now it is time to fill the empty main window. To do so, you need to create tracks or – if you have one – import a

composition. Jokosher turns out to be a real omnivore and will gladly accept MP3, WAV, OGG, and any other format for which you have a GStreamer plugin.

Clicking *Add Instrument* displays a selection dialog with a list of instruments. Both the names and the icons are provided for orientation only: From a technological point of view, you are simply creating an empty track without any additional functionality. To the left of the track is its name and the icon you selected; below it are four buttons.

The first button enables the track for recording. If you now press the Record button at the top of the main window, the sound signals are sent to the selected track (Figure 3). The second button mutes the track, which is useful if you want to listen to one or multiple tracks separately. The next button does exactly the opposite: It mutes all other tracks, allowing you to listen to the current track

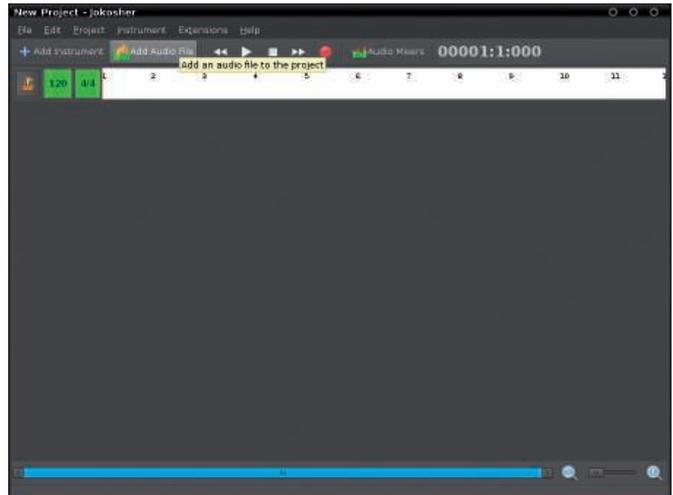


Figure 2: The uncluttered Jokosher workspace is waiting for tracks.

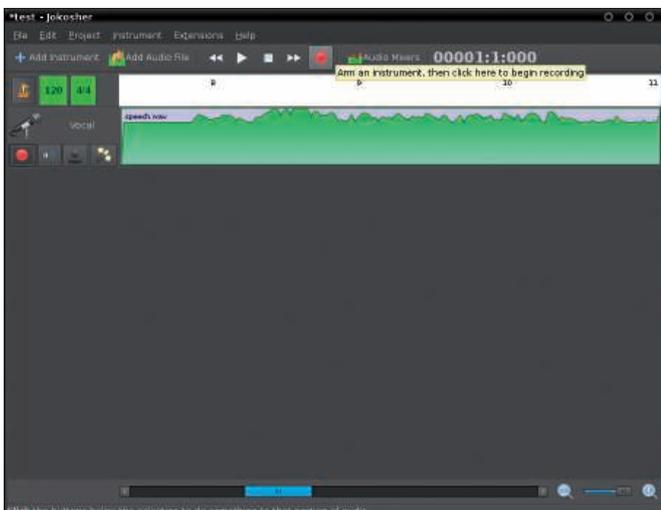


Figure 3: A click on the Record button starts recording.

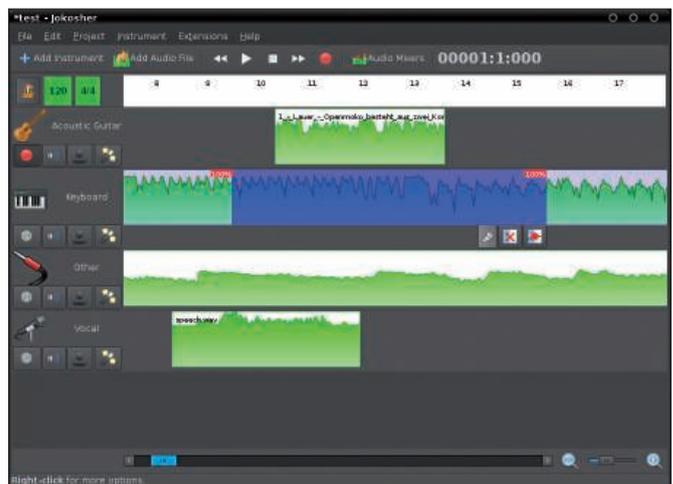


Figure 4: Right-clicking pops up a context menu with functions for cutting, copying, pasting, and splitting the track.

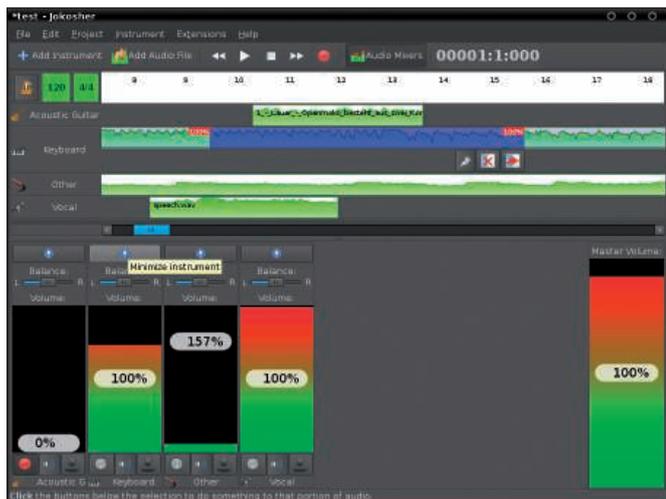


Figure 5: The volume of the individual tracks is adjusted easily in the mixer view, and you can minimize any sliders you no longer need.

only. The fourth button lets you apply effects to the track. Pressing it pops up a new dialog in which you can click to compile and configure effects.

Editing

In an existing track, just click to edit the data. Double left-clicking splits the track at the point marked by the mouse cursor. Right-clicking pops up a context menu with functions for cutting, copying, pasting, and splitting the track (Figure 4).

If you want to change the volume of a specific area, hold down the Shift key and left-click. Then you can drag the red box (“Fade point”) that marks the start and end of the blue highlighted area to change the volume.

To change the highlighted area, hold down the Shift key and left-click where you want the selection to start, then hold down the left mouse button and drag the

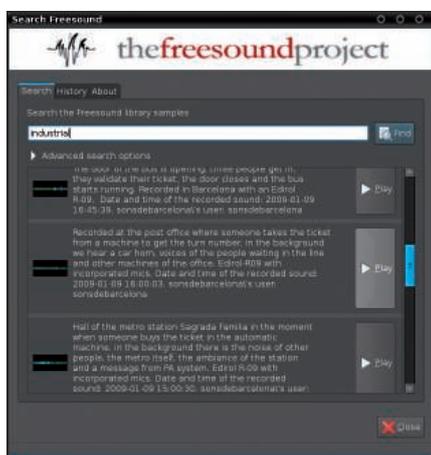


Figure 6: The Freesound plugin gives users access to thousands of free samples.

mouse through the selection.

Three more buttons are below the blue, highlighted selection. The left-hand button cuts everything except the selection. The middle button deletes any fade points you have set. The third button clicks the fade points into place: Jokosher pushes the fade points you have already applied to the

start and end of the selection.

After completing your recordings or importing all your compositions, click *Audio Mixers* to switch to the mixer view (see Figure 5). Here, you modify the volume of the individual tracks. Each track has a large vertical slider. Another slider sets the master volume for the whole composition.

A small switch above each slider lets you hide it once you are satisfied with the volume in the track. Hidden sliders can be reinstated by clicking once more. Buttons below the sliders have almost the same functions as the buttons below the icons in the main view; however, the effect button is missing.

Extending Jokosher

Beyond the basics, Jokosher is extensible [4]. It has a plugin structure that you can set up by clicking on *Extensions | Manage Extensions* to add, remove, or enable extensions for use. If the plugin is configurable, the *Settings* button is enabled.

More extensions are presented on the developer page of the project website [5] and in the Jokosher user forum [6]. Of these, I really enjoyed the “Freesound search” plugin (Figure 6), which helps users choose from an impressive selection of freely usable samples from the Freesound database (see the “Freesound” box).

Restrictions

Despite some very good approaches and solutions in Jokosher, some criticism remains. The lack of a vertical zoom function turned out to be highly impractical.

Although you can change the width of a track in the main window, the height remains unchanged. In the mixer view you can’t scale tracks in either vertical or horizontal direction, and this keeps users running back to the main view to edit work.

It is impractical and downright annoying that you cannot select multiple track takes to move them at the same time. To add a sound or an edit at the start of a composition you have created, you are forced to move each track separately.

Conclusions

For a deeper look at Jokosher, check out the program documentation [9]. Despite its current weaknesses, Jokosher seems quite advanced. The program shows huge potential for becoming a serious alternative to more established programs such as Audacity.

All told, Jokosher is a powerful audio editor for budding musicians and audio amateurs. The intuitive controls and attractive design make Jokosher a good option for smaller projects that don’t require a lot of editing. ■

Freesound

Freesound [7] is a database in which users have put a huge collection of samples, sounds, and noises that are freely usable, in contrast to commercial sound libraries. The samples are licensed under the Creative Commons Sampling Plus license, which allows their use for commercial and non-commercial purposes [8].

INFO

- [1] Jokosher: <http://www.jokosher.org>
- [2] Interview with the Jokosher maintainer, Laszlo Pandy: <http://gnomedesktop.org/node/4067>
- [3] Jokosher download: <https://edge.launchpad.net/jokosher/+download>
- [4] Writing extensions: <http://userdocs.jokosher.org/Extensions>
- [5] Jokosher extensions: <http://jokosher.python-hosting.com/extensions/>
- [6] Jokosher forum: <http://www.jokosher.org/forums>
- [7] Freesound: <http://www.freesound.org/>
- [8] Creative Commons Sampling Plus license: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/sampling+/1.0/>
- [9] Jokosher documentation: <http://doc.jokosher.org>