

An up-to-date look at free software and its makers

# PROJECTS ON THE MOVE

We take a closer look at photo stitching, a photo gallery application, an audio player, and video-recording software. for a more complete summary of the article. **BY MARTIN LOSCHWITZ**

In the age of digital cameras, most people are capable of taking reasonable photos. To make an impression with photos, you have to do something really special. Stitching is one option, but this has nothing to do with traditional handicrafts. These days, stitching means piecing individual photos together to create a large-scale panoramic image.

Now that high-quality digital cameras are affordable and pocket-sized, photo stitching is becoming increasingly popular. A good camera is no guarantee of a usable photographic panorama – you need some software to help piece individual images together in, for example, GIMP. The community has a solution for this problem, and its popularity is growing to keep pace with the popularity of stitching.

## Hugin

Hugin is a program for photo stitching on Linux and other Unix-style operating systems [1]. The authors call their software a “simple collection of tools for creating panorama photos.” Hugin comprises three smaller tools that live behind a clear-cut and functional interface.

Assuming you have the right kind of original image material, Hugin supports simple drag-and-drop-based stitching. Photos for stitching must be part of a larger panoramic image, and they must overlap at the edges.

To improve the fit of the individual sections, the use of a tripod is a good idea. After loading the photos you want to stitch, you need to define reference points that Hugin will use to join the photos (Figure 1). In next to no time, you have a panoramic image.

## Gallery 2

Online photo galleries – with panoramic photos or simple snapshots – keep popping up on the Internet like mushrooms out of the ground. The most widespread software solution is Menaltos Gallery 2 [2]. In the past, the PHP-based software was vulnerable to all kinds of security bugs, in part because it suffers from functional overload.

The online setup – with no fewer than 10 configuration steps – is a clumsy piece of work and unnecessary if you

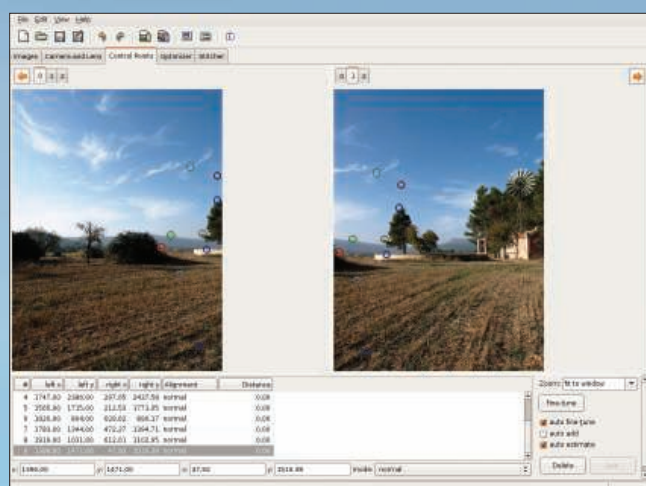


Figure 1: In Hugin, users draw circles around reference points to stitch images together for a perfect fit.





just want to publish a couple of photos on a website.

## Bpgallery

With the Gallery 2 problems in mind, Brett Parker created a shell script as an alternative to the many heavyweight gallery applications. Users can set a couple of environmental variables, such as the width of the HTML page, and pass the photo folder in to the script as a command-line argument.

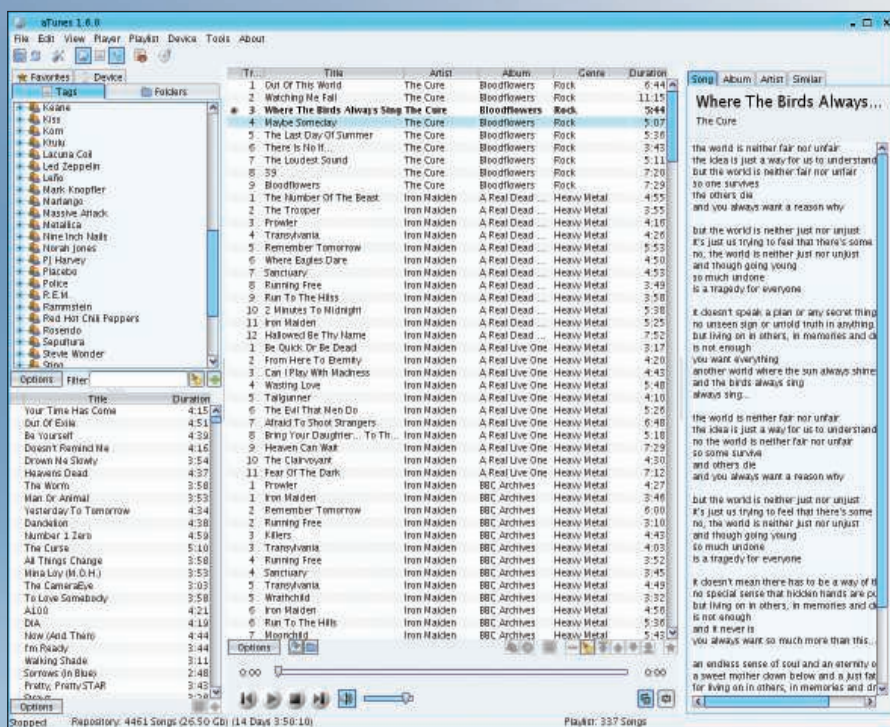
The solution, known as Bpgallery [3], can't hope to compete with the functionality of Gallery 2; on the other hand, it doesn't need PHP support or a database. Bpgallery simply creates a static HTML page that you can then upload to the server.

## Original

If Bpgallery is too simplistic and Gallery 2 is too complex for you, the Original gallery software offers a compromise [4]. The small but powerful Original tool is written in PHP, and Ximian developer Jakub Steiner now takes care of its development. Original generates an attractive overview page with main and sub-albums. It can sort photos on the basis of user input, and users can view either thumbnails or full-scale images.

## Beyond Amarok

After all this visual input, it's time to treat your ears: If you are looking for a platform-independent audio player that fares well compared with iTunes, why not try aTunes [5]? The software is based on Java, works on any Java-capable op-



**Figure 2: aTunes not only looks good, it has a full set of features that any music player should have.**

erating system, and requires MPlayer [6] on Linux. The aTunes interface adapts to suit the underlying operating system and desktop theme.

aTunes draws a diagram for each album and shows which tracks the user has played most frequently. Adding lyrics is a mouse click away (Figure 2). They appear on the right side of the player window during playback. Like its role model, iTunes, aTunes supports album genres and uses an intelligent database to manage the tracks. A playlist with various track selection functions rounds off the feature scope. If you want

to know more about the artist you are listening to, you can search for information on Google Video, YouTube, or Wikipedia without leaving aTunes.

## Freevo

With photo albums and a music player, you now need TV and video-recording software to convert your PC into a full-fledged multimedia platform – enter Freevo [7].

The developers call Freevo a “Home Theater PC Platform.” Behind the attractive Freevo interface, users will find functions for playing movies and music. If your computer features a TV card,

Freevo also gives you live TV, including an electronic program guide if you have a digital TV card. A photo album function means that Freevo can act as a digital slide projector.

A clear-cut web interface makes the program easy to use, and if you have a remote control, you can use it in the program. Themes allow users to customize the program's look and feel.

On the project website, the Freevo developers warn users that the project is still under very active development and that some components might not work from time to time, but the Linux alternative, MythTV [8], is still very much rooted in the beta phase. ■

## INFO

- [1] The Hugin homepage: <http://hugin.sourceforge.net>
- [2] Gallery 2: <http://gallery.menalto.com>
- [3] Bpgallery: <http://www.sommitrealweird.co.uk/development/bpgallery.html>
- [4] Original: <http://jimmac.musichall.cz/original.php>
- [5] aTunes: <http://www.atunes.org>
- [6] MPlayer: <http://www.mplayerhq.hu/design7/news.html>
- [7] Freevo: <http://freevo.sourceforge.net>
- [8] MythTV: <http://mythtv.org>