

Wonder document - Music Impro App

Group members

Rune Rosseland - runebro@ifi.uio.no
Geir Snorre Berge - gsberge@ifi.uio.no

Introduction

What we have chosen for a topic for our project is the Music Impro App, which was one of the projects of this course in the spring of 2011. Our interest in the project and our preliminary take on the project is based on the 2011 groups presentation and a brief chat with the presenter on the 31st of August 2012. The representative for the group just became a father, so we have unfortunately not been able to get a deeper intro to their project ideas and needs at this time. We expect to get further information about this shortly.

Motivation

Since the Music Impro App is already an established group with their own set goals, we have for now considered the existing group as the project owners and that we are here to help out.

But we also have our own motivation, that sparked our interest for this project in the first place. We saw that this project overlaps on some of the same parts as we are in process of covering in our joint master project, which involves user visual and audio feedback from using Microsoft Kinect as an exertion interface.

Our master project is also loosely divided in two parts, like the parts of this project outlined in the presentation: One visual part and one audio part, where each one of us have main responsibility for one of them. This made us think we might be able to contribute some of our experience to this project, but also get some valuable ideas and inputs for our master project along the way.

Possible directions forward

As we don't really know very much about what the project owners want to focus on, we've examined their reports from last year, and tried to come up with some constructive thoughts and questions about how the product and user experience can be improved. The following is a list of questions and thoughts we think might be relevant for further development:

First of all, what is the core purpose of the app? Why make such an app? Do people really want to collaborate with their phones as virtual instruments? In which situations would such an app be used?

User tests from last year seem to indicate that the users have some trouble maintaining interest over time, which leads us to question whether the chosen way of co-creating is sustainable beyond initial use? What happens when the novelty-factor wears off? How can the design support sustained / prolonged use? The following is a list of questions and considerations we think might be relevant for improving the user experience.

Does the design afford progression and improvement? Or is the goal to make the user an instant maestro? How can progression, learning, and mastery be incorporated into the design in order to keep the user from losing interest?

A possible way to expand the functionality might be to make it possible to record and edit performances. In this way performances / songs / tracks can be improved upon, or used as basis for further co-creation and improvisation. The limited availability of master tracks also might limit its use as people quickly get bored of jamming over the same grooves. Giving the users the possibility to record and edit their own master tracks might help towards keeping users engaged. However, this expanded functionality cannot in any way raise the threshold for initial use and understanding for inexperienced users?

The potential for repeated use and co-creation will increase with the number of people installing the app on their phone. We wonder if more complex functionality availing for recording, editing, and further development of ideas (which require a certain level of knowledge of music and an ability to manipulate a more detailed touch-screen interface) will increase the general use of the app, thereby increasing the situations and contexts where jamming and co-creation can occur. In this way, novices can take part in jams with more experienced players, on their own terms, giving them a feeling of mastery and a possibility to learn. We propose that without giving the users a learning curve and a sense of increasing mastery, the app will be forgotten as soon as the novelty factor wears off.

Is it an option to give the user a choice of whether to trigger sounds by shaking, or by using the touch-screen interface, thereby not alienating those who prefer to use the touch screen?

From the conversation we had with the presenters, our impression was that input was also needed in developing certain graphical elements for the app. While they were quite happy with most parts of the navigation elements of the user interface, they were welcoming help on visualizing instruments in the navigation, but also on how to give visual feedback along with sound.

Possible topics we could look further into subjects like:

- Experimental graphical user interfaces, including buttons, icons and visual cues
- Visualization of sound through particle systems, animations etc
- Challenges when designing a GUI on a device with limited screen real estate
- Usability and user experience on mobile devices