Technologies and practices to "uncomplicate" music

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"Music is complicated" is one of the reasons for not making music that many musically inexperienced people put forward. This is particularly true in Western culture, where often much emphasis is placed on being a good instrumentalist or singer, and on firmly grasping music theory, not to mention being "creative!" It is arguably hard to convince people that they can, in fact, make music, when faced with statements such as "I'm not gifted" and "I can't even play the triangle!"

Over the past few decades, technologies to make music making more accessible have flourished, arguably with some success. It is now increasingly common to find music making applications installed in people's phones and tablets, from simple toys, such as NodeBeat [1], to complex synthesisers, such as ROTOR[2], from complete DAWs, such as GarageBand, to a vast amount of educational tools, covering anything from theory to instruments, and even apps that mimic human creativity and play alongside their users.

However, challenging the notion that making music is for gifted people only can not be done through technology alone. Like with many "complicated" things in life, mentoring can help approach it. In my doctoral studies, I researched the role of digital tabletops as shared spaces where novices and experts can discuss music in equal terms [3, 2]. I developed tabletop musical software to compose simple melodies, with the goal of helping inexperienced people to discuss and reason about music, and supporting their creative process. Independently, I am working on musical apps and games aimed at children [1], that parents and teachers can use to stimulate musical interest from a very young age [3]. Findings from my studies suggest that combining an accessible music-making platform with expert guidance can improve novices' confidence in their musical abilities, and foster creativity, curiosity, and the desire to learn more about music.

References

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[3] A. Franceschini, R. Laney, and C. Dobbyn. "Learning Musical Contour on a Tabletop". In: *Proceedings of the Joint ICMC/SMC 2014 Conference*. Athens, Greece, Sept. 14, 2014.

[1] http://nodebeat.com/
[2] http://reactable.com/rotor
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1PsX5DHEgs