

# Let's Shake—Music is Fun

Dr. Kelvin Lee kai-wah

Animation and Media Arts, Academy of Film

Hong Kong Baptist University

kelvinee@hkbu.edu.hk

## Abstract

The phenomenon of people listening to music on their earphones to isolate themselves from the public strikes me as against the belief that music should foster bonding between people and draw us together. This motivates me to create participatory interactive art in the form of a web app, <https://we-shake.fun>, to bring people together to rediscover the forgotten joy of music as a social activity and to immerse themselves in the magic of music. This participatory interactive art seamlessly weaves together both engagement and playful elements into a holistic musical experience. Participants need to collaborate and pair up to perform the playful act of shaking their mobiles together to unlock one track at a time until all the tracks of a musical loop are activated.

## Participatory Interactive Web App

Without the hassle of software installation, participants can easily access the web app from their browsers at the URL address <https://we-shake.fun>. Upon successful connection, participants are greeted with the opening animation (fig. 1a) which followed by the main screen prompting for tap to proceed (fig. 1b).

The user interface is a stack of four color layers which represents the composition of a musical loop: lead melody in red, chord in green, bass in blue, and drum in purple. Each participant first starts with only one active track randomly assigned by the app. The active track is visualized in a bright colour animated to the rhythm of the track whereas all inactive tracks are dimmed with no animation (fig. 1c). In order to enjoy the musical loop with all active tracks (fig. 1d), participants need to communicate and

pair up to exchange their active tracks through the playful act of shaking their mobiles together.

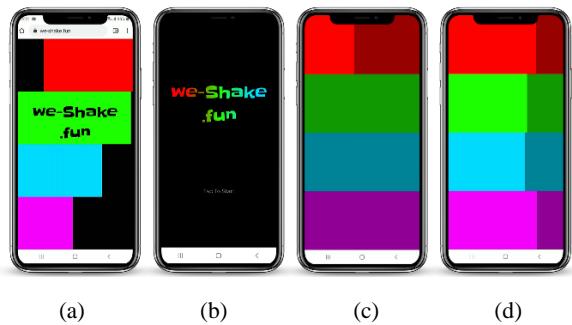


Fig. 1. (a) *Opening animation*. (b) *Welcome screen*. (c) *Active track in bright animated red*. (d) *All tracks are active*.

## Engagement and Playfulness

It is not easy to open a dialog with a stranger, let alone collaborate. Therefore, engagement is the key to connect people together and overcome the communication barrier. Artist Ekene Ijeoma has utilized engagement in his mobile app “Look Up” to subvert the habitual mobile behaviour of people and prompt them to look up from their phones at every intersection in NYC to greet each other (Ijeoma 2020).

Likewise, my interactive web app motivates participants to engage with each other through the playful act of shaking their phones together to activate the whole musical loop. Figure 2(a) shows two participants, one has an active lead track in red while the other has an active drum track in purple. To start the exchange process, they need to first highlight the drum tracks on their own screens and then shake their mobile phones together at the same time to trigger the process (fig. 2b). Upon successful exchange, both highlighted tracks will immediately turn into animated active tracks (fig. 2c). The

exchange process is repeated until all tracks are activated (fig. 2d). Basically, every participant has to pair up with three different participants in order to activate all the tracks to enjoy the musical loop. Consequently, this playful process draws people together and breaks the silence between strangers. In fact, the inspiration of play as an interactive social activity was proven to be effective in changing people's behavior as evidenced in the project "Piano Staircase" by the Volkswagen Initiative to encourage people to take a staircase instead of an escalator for a healthier lifestyle (Volkswagen 2009).

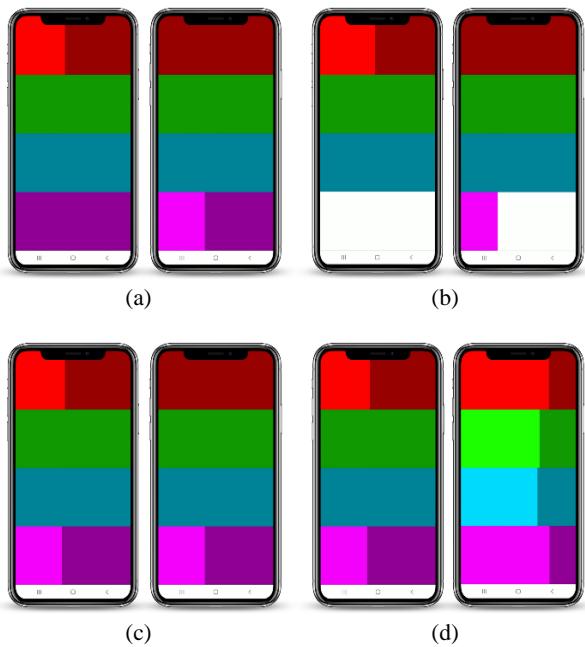


Fig. 2. (a) Two participants with different active tracks. (b) Participants highlight purple drum tracks. (c) Drum track successful exchanged. (d) Repeating the exchange process until all tracks are active.

## System Design

The participatory interactive web app works in tandem with the server-side component which resides on the Heroku Node.js server to handle all web app's requests. The web app is a collection of HTML, JavaScript, CSS, and media files working together to provide the functionalities such as user interaction, animation and music playback. The server will establish and maintain communications with all web app clients through WebSocket channels to synchronize the shaking actions between participants. Figure 3 illustrates the

communication processes between the server and clients in support of the shaking actions.

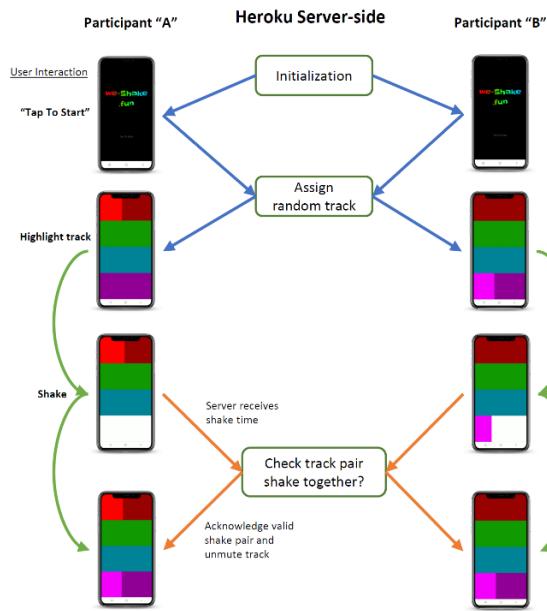


Fig. 3. Communication process of the shaking actions.

## References

- Ijeoma, Ekene. 2020. "Ekene Ijeoma." Ekene Ijeoma, accessed December 5, 2020. <https://studioijeoma.com/>.
- Volkswagen. 2009. "The Fun Theory 1— Piano Staircase Initiative." *YouTube* video, 1:47. October 26, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBymar3bds>

## Biography

**Dr. Kelvin Lee** is a senior lecturer in the Academy of Film, Hong Kong Baptist University. Armed with interdisciplinary knowledge and interests, his creative works span across variety of domains such as interactive arts, storytelling, and computer character animation.