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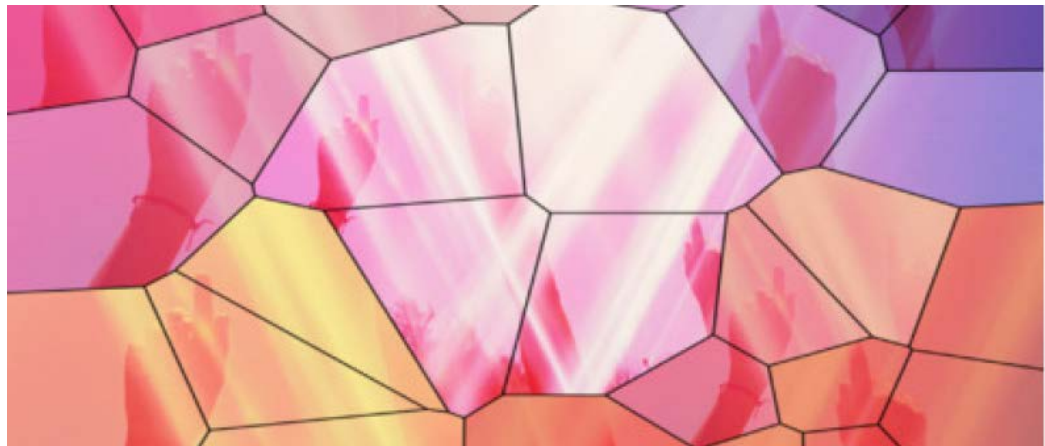
Q&A With Scott Snibbe, Designer of Passion Pit's New Interactive App

"By bringing in an app experience, we bring back a multi-sensory experience to music"

By **Sheena Lyonnais**



August 2nd, 2012



Passion Pit plays Osheaga this weekend, but they have another thing to celebrate. The Passion Pit: Gossamer app was released in mid July and features a multi-dimensional way to listen to music. Scott Snibbe, famous for creating Björk's groundbreaking Biophilia app, the first album to be released through a fully interactive app, designed the app. We talked to Snibbe about what the element of touch can do to enhance the listening experience and the future of music engagement.



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TS: Can you tell me a little bit about the Passion Pit app?

SS: The Passion Pit app has two interactive experiences for each of two songs: “Take a Walk” and “Carried Away.” People can enter into an interactive music video for either song, watching as photographs by artist Mark Borthwick are sliced and diced to reveal reaching hands, sunbursts, frolicking young girls, and other generally joyous material that complements Passion Pit’s positive tunes. And there are also two “remixers,” one for each song.

How did this app come to be? Did Passion Pit come to you?

The app came about through discussions with their label, Columbia (part of Sony Music). We were looking for a first project together and they suggested Passion Pit as a great match for our style, and one whose audience might be into the app format.

What was the creative process like?

The label and Passion Pit gave us a lot of creative freedom. They gave us the songs and album artwork and we came up with a number of ideas then settled on two.

Did the app turn out how you had envisioned it?

We had initially proposed a full interactive album treatment, which is where my heart leans most: to reinventing the album experience, which is basically now dead, by engaging people with a whole album’s worth of music, complemented by interactive visual materials. If this app is a success, perhaps we’ll expand into the full original idea!

Can you tell me about the remix features and how they work?

In each song’s “remixer,” you can make your own music with Passion Pit’s raw material. “Take a Walk” is a kind of string instrument, where the strings are created by your touch, rather than plucked. New melodies play out in “Take a Walk’s” guitar line over looping background tracks. “Carried Away’s” remixer is a screen full of twenty or so drum pads where each cell turns on one of the looping “stems” from

the original song, or plays a note from the synth instruments. With practice you can actually play out the whole song while you sing on top.

Why are interactive apps appealing to artists?

Few musicians think of their work as simply a one-dimensional stream of sound. The mp3 is in some ways the least-interesting form of musical distribution yet invented, as it robs music of tactile and visual form, and the necessity to listen to it straight through. So by bringing in an app experience, we bring back a multi-sensory experience to music: sight, touch, and sound together. Our brains are wired to experience a multi-sensory world, not just a single sense-stream.

So an app lets an artist start to convey a bigger vision of their art. The interactive element also conveys some of the excitement of a live event by allowing participation, change and variation each time you dive in. And many of the ways we make apps also let people experience what it's like to be musicians and create music themselves, which is to most artists more pleasurable than almost anything else.

Why do you think more artists should be paying attention to interactive promotional tools?

The world is changing. The birth of apps is like the birth of cinema, opera, or the LP. Old formats are dying and apps are just born – very exciting both creatively, and as a new way for artists to also make money.

Do you think this is the future of music engagement?

In my opinion, yes. For music as a soundtrack to your life, mobile devices are where it's at. But for a reinvigoration of full-contact engagement with music, an app is the only viable current option, besides going to a live concert, which is a rare and special event. Apps scale to everyone interested in "full contact" music, and they can use it wherever and whenever they choose.

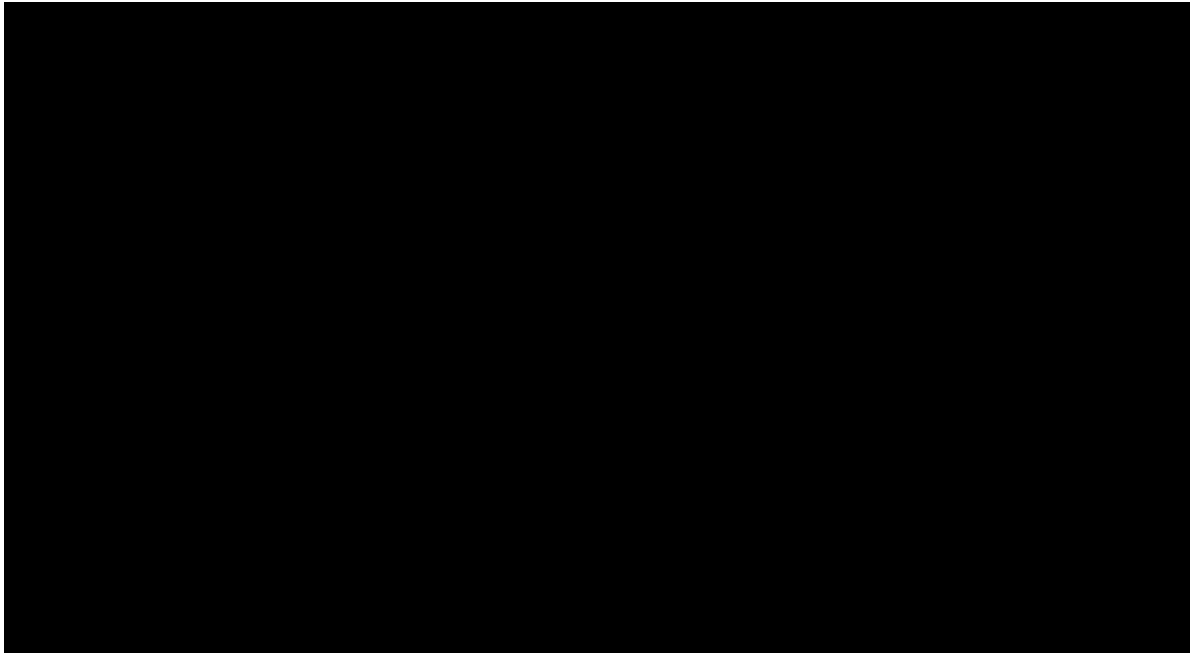
You also worked on Björk's famous Biophilia app. Can you discuss the differences between the two projects?

The Björk project lasted 18 months and involved 20+ people and has a major conceptual core, much like a Sgt. Peppers or *Dark Side of the Moon* ambition. It is a milestone in the medium – the first app album. We were lucky to have many, many

months to refine and revise ideas, and even throw out ideas that didn't work and restart from scratch on them. This app is a smaller, gem-like project, focusing on two songs, and we're really pleased to get it out there to show the range of the medium.

What has it been like working on the frontier of such a cutting-edge industry?

My team and I are ecstatic. I'd been working on this type of project for 30 years since I was a little kid with my Apple II+ computer. Once the iPad came out, all of a sudden there was a way to finally distribute interactivity as a mass-media art form like music and movies. We are so excited about our current projects, and the future of our medium, and strongly believe that music apps will become a popular mass medium.



The app is available from the [Apple iTunes store](#) for \$1.99.

Sheena Lyonnais is Toronto Standard's Tech and Business Editor. You can follow her on Twitter at [@SheenaLyonnais](#).

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