

Ubisoft Jams with Nintendo DS

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The South by Southwest Festival (SXSW) isn't necessarily known for the product-announcement frenzy that occurs at CES, so it was a pleasant surprise to see a cool new toy on the trade show floor Thursday evening.

Ubisoft has made Jam Sessions for the Nintendo DS portable player. Basically, it's a tool, toy, and game for anyone who plays the guitar or wishes they did.

Chord possibilities and progressions are displayed on the top touch-screen, and a single line, meant to represent a string, is displayed on the bottom touch-screen. You can strum the line with your finger or a pick, plug the output into an amp or input on your computer, and just like that, you have a lifelike guitar sound. The tempo, tone, and distortion level are up to you (there is also an acoustic mode), and there are effects options, such as reverb and chorus.

How does it sound? I was impressed. As a musician, I would never confuse it with a real guitar, but if someone played it exceptionally well, I might fail a blindfold test.

Jam Sessions isn't really meant to replace the guitar, of course; it is a tool for musicians who can't take their guitars with them everywhere. You can create multiple progressions, and switch between them with a left-side button on the DS in order to create a verse-chorus pattern. Any songwriter will tell you the most annoying thing in the world is having a catchy tune in your head but no way to actually record it or remember how it sounded once you finally get a guitar in your hands. With Jam

Sessions, there will be no more lost classics!

Of course, it's also a toy, and if you're all thumbs when you pick up your buddy's Strat but can handle a game joystick like a pro, your rock and roll dreams may have just been answered. Jam Sessions hits stores in June for approximately \$30.

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