

# A musical hit for the iPhone

March 26 2009, By John Boudreau

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The iPhone is many things - business device, gaming console, instant-messenger buddy. Ge Wang turned it into a flute.

The Stanford University assistant professor, who specializes in music and computer science, co-founded Smule, a Menlo Park, Calif., [iPhone](#) apps development startup with his friend Jeff Smith. Wang, 31, whose passion is "laptop orchestra," an ensemble that creates music from computers, said he has his dream job.

But last year, he and Smith, a successful entrepreneur who is getting his doctoral degree in music at Stanford, decided to launch a startup after Apple announced it was going to open an iPhone [App Store](#).

One of the 99-cent programs the company created hit iPhone pay dirt. Ocarina, a virtual flute - users blow into the device's microphone - has garnered nearly \$1 million. It was an instant hit, becoming the No. 1 paid program on the App Store four days after it was offered in early November. Three weeks later, it held the top spot in 20 other countries.

Such success stories, though, are rare, said Jeff Scott, founder of 148Apps.com, a San Francisco Web site that reviews iPhone apps.

"I talk to a lot of developers," he said. "Some of them who have three or four apps on the store are thinking they can make a living at it. But they aren't going to get rich. They get a chance to do something they enjoy and work for themselves."

And as the store gets more crowded - Scott reports there are now 27,000 programs listed on the App Store - it's exceedingly difficult for an unknown developer to get noticed.

Wang, though, helped create a global sensation. Smule markets the virtual flute with a video of Ocarina players performing "Stairway to Heaven." Fans post their own Ocarina performance videos on [YouTube](#).

"It's just people expressing themselves," he said. "I'm trying to unlock their creativity."

The accidental entrepreneur added, "If there had been no iPhone or App Store, there would be no Smule."

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