

# The sound of driving: VW plays a car's music (w/ Video)

28 November 2013, by Nancy Owano



(Phys.org) —Volkswagen calls its new concept "driving music reinvented" in the form of an app called Play the Road. We can think about the driver as a composer; we can think about the car as an instrument; we can think about the road as a sheet of music. Such are the suggestions from the concept creators, a collaboration between music producers, a musical group and VW, who have delivered a Play the Road app. This app creates music according to the driver's style in handling the car, from speed to steering and more. The system can generate music triggered by the car's movements; VW turned to the electronic music group Underworld on their project to help synchronize driving and music realtime, where the car itself becomes the instrument. The team faced the challenge to create "a nonlinear composition that would work as a dynamic soundscape for the VW GTI driving experience."

Underworld began composing based on driving data collected and they delivered "[music](#) stems" that could be attributed to locations and specific driving behaviors. How it works: a smartphone is tethered to a VW GTI's on-board computer and the data collection begins: steering, acceleration, speed, GPS, each turn of the wheel, each gear shift, each change in location, determine the sound

of musical elements composed by Underworld. The team had sought to gather as much driving information about the GTI driving experience as possible. Using the accelerometer and gyroscope in the smartphone they captured data recordings of the car performing numerous maneuvers. Cross-referencing the data with video footage, they began to attribute data patterns to [car](#) behaviors. Along with the help of Audio Specialist Nick Ryan, Underworld began composing based on the driving data collected.

"We want to listen to this bit of data here, but when we want to stop listening to it here and listen to this completely different bit of data here. How they all interweave, that's where the complication of the project starts to multiply," said Yuli Levtoy, music producer, who also assisted in the project.

To complete the process, all information was ported to Pure Data, where music and data came together. (Pure Data [Pd] is an open source visual programming language, which musicians, visual artists, and developers use to create software graphically without writing lines of code.) Different musical motifs were attached to different data streams, so the cars movements or locations would trigger the music live.

Commenting on the experience of putting this together, the VW site noted how the GTI became "an office for Underworld, Nick, Yuli and the precision driver Steve Gault until the final composition was finished." That is because the only way to refine the composition was to drive it, over and over. The team identified locations in the soundscape where the composition and PD patch could be tightened.

The [app](#) is not available commercially; instead, VW is using the app for a Track Day competition event, where entries close on December 2. Drivers who enter experience what it is like to compose music by [driving](#) around a special course. "You'll get

behind the wheel of the new GTI MK7 and experience our prototype project, transforming you from driver to musician, as you create music with your drive."

**More information:**

[www.volkswagen.co.uk/playthero ...](http://www.volkswagen.co.uk/playthero...)  
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