



Music: The Transcendence of Energy

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Introduction

Music embraces people unlike anything else in this world. It's difficult to define, as it affects everyone differently. It provides an experience that takes you away from ordinary, beyond comprehension, and into a highly saturated imaginative realm. A realm driven by dynamic frequencies, echoing melodies, resonating chords, harmonizing movement, and an eye opening overture of synesthesia. This is the transcendence of energy.

Imagine. A silent room absent of liveliness, looms as a curious figure enters. The darkness illuminates with colors, patterns, and textures mimicking the weave of instruments. The dreary figure is quickly injected with life and curiosity. The visuals are spectacular, and the music gives you inspirational chills. These are the creative ends of the world in which my project resides. The once silent room inspires people to think, act, and feel the unknowns that life has cloaked.

I created an animation that brings a higher level of awareness to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions experienced when listening to music. This animation will express the cognitive processes, physiological changes, and amplified senses through abstract visuals, human anatomy, and the world around us. Music will survive as long as humans do, and that's why this timeless project is so pivotal today, and will inspire the people of tomorrow.

Contextual Background

The relationship between music and film is a passion of mine I knew I wanted to pursue. Watching the Video Music Awards was a pivotal starting

point. I began analyzing set locations, special effects, camera angles, scene transitions, character development, and symbolism from winning videos. This gave me a good idea as to what the various components of a well-structured music video were, but I wanted to go beyond that and find out why they were chosen.

In order to discover the message and story behind great music videos, I looked at three of the most influential music video directors. Spike Jonze has worked with artists such as Jay Z and the Beastie Boys. His work has a reoccurring theme of honesty that brings out the artist's true character. Aerosmith and Madonna are among many artists David Fincher has worked with. His work uses gloomy colors, expressionistic depictions, and glamorous personas. Michel Gondry has worked with some of the most influential artists including Kanye West and Daft Punk. His work includes inventive set locations and discreet image manipulations. I tried making connections between these three very different directors. I came to realize they all had a very specific style, and stayed true to it throughout many years of their careers. I looked at my past work and noticed I used silhouettes in many of my projects. Silhouettes allow people to understand what the subject is, without limiting it. There are times when knowing details of the subject is beneficial, but also times when keeping it conceptual permits the mind to imagine. In order to successfully communicate an idea, you first have to understand the analytical sub-components that make abstraction possible. It's difficult to effectively explore new routes, if you don't know the intention of the preliminary destination.

Knowing the structure and processes of our brain, informs us how easily it can be manipulated. Anita Collins and Oliver Sacks both provided me with valuable information regarding this phenomenon. Anita Collins is a PhD Neuroscience graduate from the University of Melbourne and Oliver Sacks is a Neurologist and Author. A TED-Ed by Dr. Collins and the book Musicophilia by Oliver Sacks both touch on similar topics. Everyday tasks take place in a very specific part of the brain. The left hemisphere is analytically dominant and the right hemisphere is creatively governing. Music activates both of these hemispheres, strengthening the corpus callosum, which connects the two. A stronger corpus callosum produces faster reaction times. I wanted to explore this information and express the fact that when music gets louder and more complex, stimulation in the brain increases, which directly impacts how we think, act, and feel.

John Cage and John Luther Adams are two artists that understand the fundamentals of music, and therefore can make interesting artistic decisions while bringing the message full circle. John Cage is known for his experimental music. In his piece Water Walk, he performed a series of noises one after another. The noises were completely unrelated. John Luther Adams also studies the interaction of sound. In his project Inuksuit, he spreads out instruments throughout an environment and allows the audience to walk around and take it all in. This project is unique because no performance is ever the same. Both of these projects confirmed that music doesn't have one meaning and people interpret music freely when there are no limitations. These two projects changed

my music selection from an instrumental to a soundtrack for this very reason. I also did research on Peter and the Wolf by Serge Prokofiev. In this piece, each character in the story is represented by a different symphonic instrument. This made me realize that sound can have a personality. Maybe people have such an intimate relationship with music because of it's ability to posses human-like characteristics.

I then looked at the benefits of music that were continuously popping up in multiple research studies. Music reduces stress and anxiety, helps with pain management, improves immune functioning, aids memory, and helps us exercise. I came across a video in which an Alzheimer Disease patient tries to walk. His movement was very tense, immobilized, and stagnant. Music was then played and his mobility became free and fluid.

Methodology

There aren't right or wrong ways of completing a task, it completely depends on what the artist is comfortable with. Methods can be quite simple, or in my case, exceedingly complicated.

My process started by practicing various phases of production. Some of these phases include set location, lighting, prop design, camera angle, camera movement, scene transition, video editing, and audio engineering. For experiment one, my goal was to create a promotional video for Khris Sanchez, a Vocal Performance major at the University of Michigan. My initial step was to have an in-depth interview with Khris so elements in the video would be closely identifiable with him. After the parameters were established, I storyboarded

everything out by breaking down the video into small 5-10 second increments. The finished video made him look confident and passionate about his future career, but it seemed boring and typical. The most noteworthy part of the video was when I introduced animation. Moving forward, I knew my project would flourish on the post-production end of the spectrum.

Experiment two told a story of a couple working through their problems. A small portion of the video derived from footage I shot. Most of it was created in Photoshop and Illustrator, and then manipulated in Final Cut Pro. The imagery turned out to be much more interesting, but the story was too simple and linear. The music was re-enforcing the imagery when ideally the imagery should be interpreting the music. Up until this point, the message of the video has been vague. I was pairing stimulating imagery with compositionally profound music and expecting vital significance. The imagery and music was fighting this significance I was hoping for, rather than enlightening it. Moving forward, I needed to communicate how one thinks, feels, and acts when listening to music. I needed to show how imagery and music could intertwine to boost the audience's experience, rather than existing side by side independently.

Experiment three exposed the process our brain undergoes when listening to a song. This direct correlation would allow the audience to easily relate to the visuals. The effects were conveying the emotions of the song more efficiently than the imagery was. I needed to create an effect that would represent the music more effectively. My attempt to create this effect in experiment three was a complete failure. I hoped the effect I created would work seamlessly, but it ended up possessing characteristics that were exactly opposite of the song.

With experiment five, I wanted to tap into an abstract world where the message was clear, while still allowing you to interpret it in multiple directions. I envisioned literal imagery uniting with imaginative patterns in order to reveal an atmosphere driven by musical manifestation.

Creative Work

Music: The Transcendence of Energy is a four minute animation bringing it's audience on a narrative experience. The animation starts by building up a figure's brain piece by piece. Before bringing in abstract aesthetics, I first wanted something analytical and scientific that the audience could relate to. I used color to differentiate between different neurological pathways and areas of the brain. These five colors also represent our five senses and are present throughout the entire animation. The opening sequence ends with the figure shifting from a side view to a back view. This was my way of transitioning from a third person perspective to a first person perspective. I wanted the audience to understand that the figure was being affected by the music, before becoming that person and directly experiencing those effects.

After the transition to first person, the viewer is taken into a dark cave. As you move closer, lines flash on and off correlating to the pitch of the notes being played. To give these lines a musical aesthetic, they vibrate taking on the characteristics similar to a guitar. When you are fully submerged in the cave, abstraction takes over. During this middle section of the animation, I wanted some of the imagery to be clear, and some to be very confusing. The relationship

between clarity and confusion is what allows the audience to freely interpret what it all means. My hope was that this relationship provided a diverse range of meaning depending on the audience's prior knowledge, background, and personality.

There are three main events in the mid-section of the animation. The first event illustrates a face fading in with beams of light going into its ears and out its eyes. This signified music being heard and directly impacting what was seen. The second event starts with five arms linking. These arms get dots all over them, begin to shake, and produce upward growing lines. This represents how we get goose bumps at certain moments of a song and the hair on our arm stands up. The third event shows these growing lines intertwining and eventually connecting to a figure's stomach. An object is slowly ingested into the mouth, and travels down to the stomach where it transforms into a butterfly and flies away. This represents the feelings of a having a pit in your stomach and getting the butterflies.

A hand slowly reaches for a light switch, which provides an exit from the cave. Five figures in different positions fall from the sky, further expressing how our senses have been manipulated. The animation ends with these five colors coming to a single point, which illuminates the final image of a figure sitting on a bench looking out to the world presented before him. The figure slowly changes colors with expressive lines emerging from its head. This shows how the experience has changed how he thinks and feels about himself, as well as the world. It is a moment showing the impact of music even after it's done playing.

Although the driving energy behind music is different for everyone, reflection is inevitable.

My research set large goals for this project, and after looking back at my animation, I believe these goals were successfully met. Analyzing the Video Music Awards gave me insight on what makes a narrative compelling, and how to achieve that. Looking at work from music video directors Spike Jonze, David Fincher, and Michel Gondry allowed me to find my reoccurring style and how to utilize it effectively. Anita Collins and Oliver Sacks provided information on the structure and processes of our brain. Knowing how our brains work, allows us to better communicate how it's affected. John Cage, John Luther Adams, and Peter and the Wolf by Serge Prokofiev enlightened me of the unusual characteristics and personalities of music. Every instrument and genre has its own meaning that can be applied in many different ways. Learning about the benefits of music and how it can be used for various things, including Alzheimer's disease, forced me to rethink the power of music. It not only is an enjoyable activity, but can impact how we function in our every day lives. Synesthesia showed me new ways of abstracting line, form, color, texture, space, and value to bring music to life.

Conclusion

The goal of my project was to create an animation that brings a higher level of awareness to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions experienced when listening to music. This animation expresses the cognitive processes, physiological changes, and amplified senses through abstract visuals, human anatomy, and the world around us. The finished video embodied

everything I learned from my research and five experiments. The music possessed ambiguity and personality, while not being recognizable. The narrative was obvious, while still allowing it to be interpreted freely. Imagery had analytical context, as well as an abstract interpretation of synesthesia. I've grown close to psychology and neurology and see myself exploring these fields in greater depth. This project has opened up a wide range of possibilities between graphic design, video, and music. The more informed people are of this relationship, the faster music will grow as an influential entity. Music is far greater than the usual. It exceeds limits and extends beyond ordinary experiences. This is the past, the present, and the future. This is the transcendence of energy.

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