



Visualizer Animation Production

The Process and Benefits Behind a Modern Music
Promotion Tool

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ABSTRACT

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Animated music visualizers are a rapidly growing genre of motion graphics. Utilized on platforms such as YouTube and Spotify, visualizers are becoming a more popular way of adding promotional value to audio content without investing in a high-profile music video production. A visualizer is a looping animation that visualizes music or audio. A key factor affecting the rising popularity of visualizers is the added visual and artistic appeal they bring to the music at a low production cost. Visualizers are used by a wide range of creators ranging from A-list artists to smaller indie productions. Combining different elements of animation, narration, genre, and audio, a modern visualizer is an elevated evolution of the computer-generated music visualizer.

This thesis aimed to create a guide on the best practices of producing a professional animated visualizer. The research was partly based on an animated visualizer project. Some of the data was gathered from various visual art books, and the rest was acquired from either studies or online. A professional interview was conducted to gather specific information about similar commercial projects.

This study's key result was the added value that a visualizer gives an audio product when released online. As visualizers draw more attention from the public, the importance of written guidelines and instructions becomes critical. The data gathered by companies such as Spotify suggests that using a visualizer is highly profitable when trying to reach an audience online. According to data, a high-quality visualizer can lead to a 5% increase in streams and a 145% rise in the likeability to share the track.

The findings indicated that the usage of visualizers will only continue to grow due to their production cost and positive influence on promotion and streaming. Written guidelines about the production phases will be valuable both for professionals and individuals. Further research and analytics are required on the platforms to define more details and complex data about the impact of visualizers in audio promotion.

Keywords: visualizer, YouTube, promotion, animation, music video

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1 INTRODUCTION

Music visualizers are a relatively new branch of animation that is strongly developing and somewhat searching for its form. The rise in popularity and interest raises the question about the future of music promotion and how this form of visual media can be utilized for maximum profit.

This thesis focuses on music visualizers and their current and future marketing benefits on platforms such as YouTube and Spotify. The motivation behind this paper was to explore how visualizers are used in the world of music promotion. This thesis will also research strengths and weaknesses in using these forms of visual media compared to professional music videos and still images.

Features of 2D animation and illustration are also discussed. Also, the current state of traditional animation and its prospects are explored. The materials used for answering these questions were gathered by interviewing an expert currently working in visual media, advertising, animation, and illustration. Material gathered from the interview will also be utilized to answer the research question.

The theoretical and practical parts of this thesis are linked together. The theoretical part explores the uses of visual media and how animation and illustration combined can benefit the marketing of audio products, such as singles and albums. The practical part puts these methods in use in a creative manner.

The practical part studies the production of a visualizer animation to songs by an indie band called *Summer Salt*. The practical part explores the techniques and theory behind illustration, animation, and promotion all combined. This thesis will also explain how different techniques were used to provide the most effective and cohesive product.

The technical discussion will be built around how the promotion of this student project went and its results. Information for the practical section was partly gathered by artists working with current projects, including music advertisement and illustration. This data was used to analyze the results of the project.

1.1 Background of the study

The topic for this study was chosen to produce more written information about visualizers and their online audio promotion benefits. This sort of information is precious to modern content creators, and investigating the production pipeline has high value considering future parts. Combining theory and research with practical execution offers the possibility to study the topic with better overall knowledge. The research was also enhanced by interviewing professionals about the relatively fresh topic. This thesis's practical part was done as a personal project to gather more information about the technicalities. The practical experience also helped to troubleshoot the production pipeline.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

The goal of this thesis is to research the best methods for producing a visualizer animation. One of the objectives was to collect a complete pipeline for the production of similar projects of a smaller scale, all the way from pre-production to the release. These are the main research questions:

1. What are visualizers, and what is the production pipeline of creating a visualizer animation?
2. How do visualizers tie into understanding the modern scene of content creation and music promotion?
3. How can visualizer animations enhance and elevate an audio product?
4. What things should be taken into consideration while doing a similar project?

1.3 Limitations

Due to a limited amount of topic-specific research considering the branch of animated visualizers, this study was narrowed down to provide the best possible guide for the production process. The term is being used loosely in the current times. The focus will be defining the visualizer loosely and discussing an animated visualizer's production and benefits for the study's maximum benefits. Due to the broadness of the topics, things such as audio production was left out of the

thesis. Udemy offers good information on audio production, recording, and mixing. (Udemy 2021)

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In this thesis, the first part explains the rise in popularity of the visualizer and how it can be beneficial for audio marketing. The background, objectives, and limitations of this thesis are included in the first part of the thesis. In the second part, Visualizers, the study defines the term "visualizer" clearly for the project. The chapter also goes through the visualizer's history shortly. Chapter three, Modern Music Promotion and Visualizers, studies modern online music promotion to understand the benefits visual marketing brings to it and how visualizers are used in marketing in modern times. Chapter four is the practical part of the thesis, and it discusses the pipeline of a visualizer animation production to an existing song. Chapter five goes through the study results and findings, while discussion can be found in chapter six. Chapter seven is Conclusion. At the end of the thesis are the listed references and appendices.

2 VISUALIZERS

2.1 Defining the term "visualizer"

In this thesis, the term "visualizer" will refer to a wide variety of short animations, video clips, and computer-generated content used to visualize or promote audio content. The non-American variant for visualizer is "visualiser" (<https://www.lexico.com/grammar/british-and-spelling>). For consistency, this thesis will use the American English variant. "Visualizer" can sometimes refer to a job position in the film industry (GoConstruct 2021). In this thesis, the term will only refer to the genre of videos unless stated otherwise.

Explained in a short manner, visualizer is a video that aims to visualize music or audio somehow. Visualizers are often loopable or have some looping qualities to them. The term has been used loosely in recent years to describe various videos that somehow attempt to represent the audio visually. The videos can be made with any form of art, including videography, animation, and computer generation. This thesis will focus mainly on animated visualizers and consider other forms of visualizers during the process.

The term is currently used as an umbrella term to refer to videos that might stylistically differ widely from one another. It seems that professional production companies such as Dreambear Productions use the term visualizer on their website www.dreambear.org to describe projects they have made in the past, ranging from lyrics videos to videos with only short looping qualities. Dreambear has created projects for a wide range of A-list artists, including Grammy-winning artists such as Megan Thee Stallion and John Legend. For this thesis' purpose, we will also assume that lyrical content can be represented in a visualizer, and lyrics videos can also be considered visualizers since the professionals consider this to be the case.

The audio the visualizer is attached to can be anything. The audio can be, for example, either a single song, ambient sounds, or even a combined playlist. The audio content does not matter in the context of this thesis. To decide when a video qualifies as a visualizer, the genre needs some conditions. For this thesis,

a video's primary condition to be considered a visualizer is to visualize the audio with the visual content. The visualizer can attempt to visualize for example mood, lyrical content, genre, or narration.

Visualizers may appear in different forms of media besides the ones discussed in this thesis. For example, in a karaoke environment, the videos shown to the singer often include visualization of the music. These may be counted as visualizers, but since they have formed in a different manner compared to the visualizers attached to music marketing and online streaming, they will not be discussed further. Karaoke videos and other forms of music visualization not discussed in this thesis can be expected to exist as their own entity, not to be mistaken for official lyrics videos or visualizers meant for marketing or branding purposes.

2.2 An abridged history of visualizers and animation

Visualizers have been around for a reasonable amount of time, even though the modern social media environment makes them feel new for the average viewer. To create a guide on the best practices behind the production of an impactful visualizer, it is beneficial to understand their history. Animation and music visualization have a long history with an enormous amount of invention to benefit from as a modern creator.

Music visualization with the tools of animation is not a new invention. It was emerging in the 20th century in many forms, starting with *Steamboat Willie* in 1928 that was the first cartoon with synchronized sound. In the 1920s, Walt Disney brought more animated music visualization to the consumer for the first time in the first full-color short animations, *Silly Symphonies*. As Disney continued to make groundbreaking inventions in animation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* ushered in the "Golden Age" of animation. (Williams 2001, 17-18)

Walt Disney wanted to bring the concept of combined animation and music further away from slapstick towards a more artistic interpretation after releasing the short films. *Fantasia* was the film that brought this concept to life. For example, in the animation *Toccata and Fugue*, the animation comprises abstract imagery with no

classic storytelling elements (Picture 1). The film also consisted of several different musical animated pieces, trying out different ways to visualize music as imagery and stories.

With its pioneering inventions with animation and recorded music, *Fantasia* was one of the first major releases to focus on visualizing music with animation rather than complementing the animation with the music. *Fantasia* was considered a masterpiece in its time, and it is still universally acclaimed to this day (Benson 2017). As Disney was one of the significant animation developers, their work can be considered necessary in forming the modern culture surrounding all genres of animation everywhere, including in modern times.



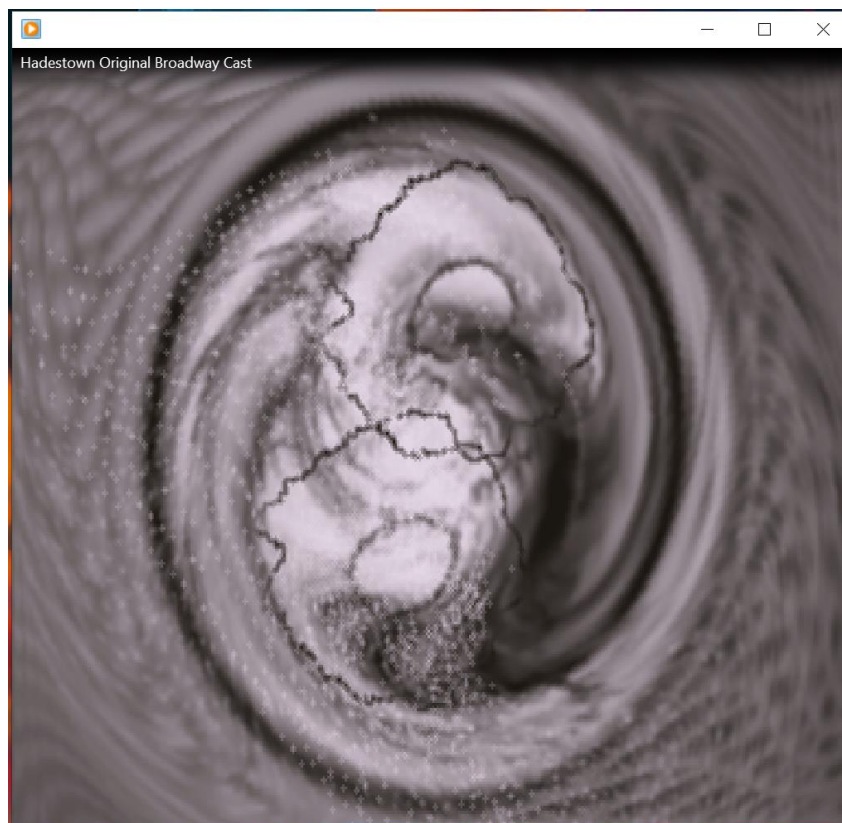
PICTURE 1. Animated visualization from Fantasia (Toccata and Fugue from Fantasia 1940)

The first significant commercial invention considering computer-generated visualizers the Atari Video Music in 1977. The home system is the earliest music visualizer that came to the market for consumers to buy. Atari Video Music was a machine that interpreted musical waveform as colors and shapes on a graphical

display. The product was considered a failure and was taken off of production in 1978, only a year since the release. Despite the failure, the product was a new invention and brought the possibility of computer-generated visuals to home stereos.

Music visualizers took several decades to become more prevalent in households. As personal computers slowly became more accessible to the average consumer in the 1990s, computer-generated visualizers started appearing on them (Rothstein 2019). Windows Media Player included visualizers in the 2000s on operating systems such as Windows XP. The visualization feature offered lots of variation between the visuals based on the frequencies of the music.

In the year 2021, it is still possible to download visualizations for Windows Media Player from www.support.microsoft.com. The visualizations vary from different colors and shapes based on the music frequencies (Picture 2). On the website, Microsoft defines visualizations as "colors, shapes, and patterns that move to the music in Windows Media Player Now Playing mode." (Microsoft 2021)



PICTURE 2. Windows Media Player visualization for the song "Hey, Little Songbird" (Pohjanen 2021)

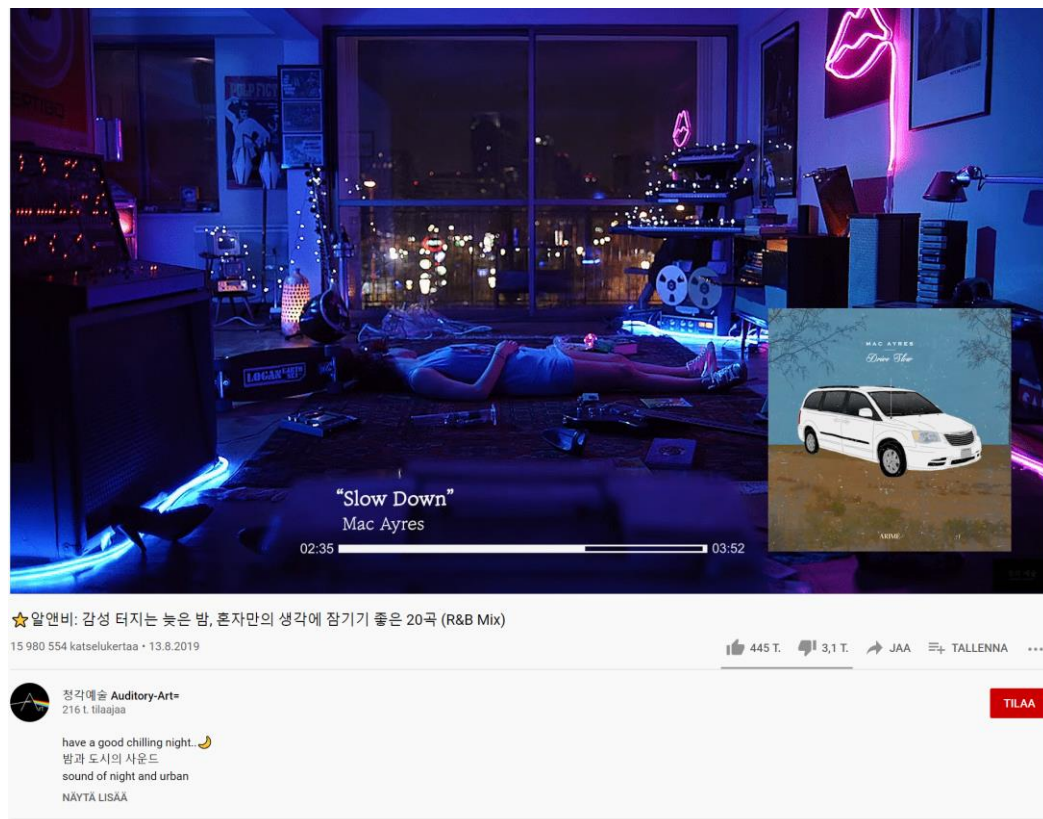
In recent years, visualizers have combined all the new inventions the modern age has to offer. Visualizers are not tied to the boundaries of computer generation anymore, and the term these days is being used quite loosely in a variety of projects. Ranging from computer-generated to hand-drawn animation, visualizers can be made with various media, and it seems to have grown into its own entity. Since mobile devices have become essential for everyday life, visualizers in various forms are now accessible for every content creator and consumer.

Visualizers can be used to visualize music in a more brand thoughtful manner, aiming to present the music on a deeper level rather than just frequencies and color. This representation does not require the budget Disney has for their projects anymore, but animation is also more accessible due to the accessibility of the trade's modern tools. The visualizer has been embraced especially by several communities on YouTube, including the lo-fi community and playlists. It has become a common trend for playlist creators and live radios to include a visualizer in their material, one of the most iconic and popular being the Lofi Hiphop Girl for the live stream *lofi hip hop radio - beats to relax/study to*. (Picture 3)



PICTURE 3. Visualizer on a YouTube live stream radio, *lofi hip hop radio - beats to relax/study to* (Pohjanen 2021)

The visualizer adds much visual interest to an audio product, especially on a platform focused on video. The community has embraced the visualizer as a standard for long playlists, and usually, the visualizers are aesthetically attached to the audio's mood (Picture 4). The visualizers may sometimes contain lyrics or play bars. The modern creators have made the visualizer a personalized tool that may cater to any audience or brand without being restricted by music frequencies.



PICTURE 4. Animated visualizer for a playlist on YouTube channel

청각예술 Auditory-Art= (Pohjanen 2021)

Visualizers have gained the interest of other music streaming platforms in recent years. Spotify released their own format, the Spotify Canvas, to compete with the video market of YouTube. (Perez 2019) Creators can create viral material with even their mobile phones, and video production is more accessible than ever. As more visual-focused platforms and features such as TikTok and YouTube Reels are competing for the audiovisual consumers' attention, the role of visualized music is more relevant than ever in 2021.

3 MODERN MUSIC PROMOTION AND VISUALIZERS

As technology keeps developing, music promotion is one of the most prominent marketing fields that seems eager to adapt to new media forms. Streaming services such as YouTube, Deezer, Apple Music, and Spotify have built themselves into multimillion-dollar empires racking in the revenue higher every year. While the businesses compete against one another, it seems that visualizers have been raising their heads in the competition as essential assets in recent years. With YouTube Music, YouTube Reels, and Spotify Canvas released in the last years, the competition seems to get tighter every year as companies fight for the attention of the consumers of music. Visualizers are utilized as a more tied in part of streaming. With the rising numbers in streaming, new forms of media are invested in by various participants, including professional productions and individuals alike.

3.1 The biggest music streaming platforms

When discussing the music streaming services, it is important to notify that plenty of prominent platforms were narrowed out of the conversation to focus on the most prominent platforms based on the data provided by Statista. In their USA-based research, it was revealed that during the last week of filling the questionnaire, the participants opened Spotify and YouTube the most in 2019 and 2020. (FIGURE 1). Of course, this data is only reliable considering the United States and other countries may vary extensively from the results, but the results show an estimate for western countries.

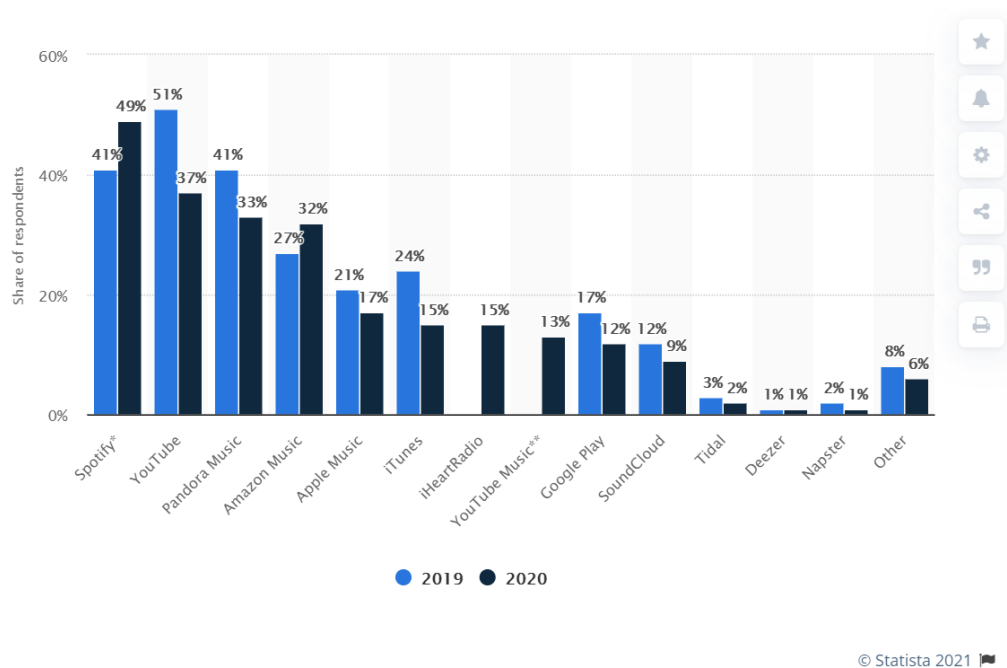


FIGURE 1: Share of consumers who used selected music streaming and download services in the last week in the United States in 2019 and 2020 (Statista Research Department 2021)

3.1.1 YouTube

YouTube has held the title of the most visited streaming site for several years. It is also the second most visited website in the world, second only to Google. (Neufeld 2021) Being one of the dominating powers of new media, YouTube has established itself as the go-to place for music videos and related content.

Some could argue that YouTube is not technically a music streaming service since YouTube markets itself mainly with its main product, video. YouTube initially launched its own streaming service YouTube Music in 2015. However, the popularity of the feature has not been able to surpass the popularity of streaming music from the origin app (Figure 1)

In recent years, many artists began releasing their music on YouTube for all fans to access. Starting from singles and B-sides, nowadays, it is widespread that an artist will release their entire album on the release date on YouTube. This can be considered a big difference from the atmosphere surrounding music streaming at the beginning of the 2010s. Taylor Swift famously took all of her music off of Spotify before releasing her album *1989*. Besides her, the world-famous Beyoncé

also kept her records off Spotify in 2013. (Frank 2014) Compared to the significant movement of A-list artists keeping their music premium in those times, it is evident that this phase passed. Eventually, artists moved to release their albums on Spotify, a subscription-based service, and YouTube, which consumers can access for free with advertisements. The reasoning behind this can be expected to lie within monetary disagreements and solutions.

The change in the atmosphere has been quite drastic. It is essential to ask what is the reason behind the rapid change towards the attitude about album streaming. One reason behind the change might rely on the fact that in December 2019, Billboard announced that YouTube streams would be counted the same way as streams from platforms such as Apple Music and Spotify. For years, Billboard charts mainly focused on sales when physical products were still the leading product artists would sell, but they have slowly adapted to the modern environment. The former seems like a reasonable reason behind the sudden change of attitude towards music streaming since Billboard has been considered one of the most important and influential charts for an artist. (Owsinski 2021)

Besides the standard video feature, YouTube Reels was launched a few years back to compete with the story features offered by apps such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. Although the feature is currently in 2021 not an essential part of music marketing, it needs to be addressed because it does offer the artists and creators another form of visual platform for advertisement and connecting with their viewers. Since visualizers are short videos, YouTube Reels provides them a possible environment to spread. TikTok has also proved itself a powerful platform for songs to go viral on, so it is natural for YouTube to trace the same feature. As the competition between quickly digestible videos will get more intense in the upcoming years, it could be possible that YouTube Reels will play an essential part in music advertisement in the future.

With the sudden change of attitude towards album streams on YouTube, visualizers are increasingly becoming a part of marketing the albums released by artists trying to increase their streams to compete on the charts while creating added value to the audio consumer.

3.1.2 Spotify Canvas

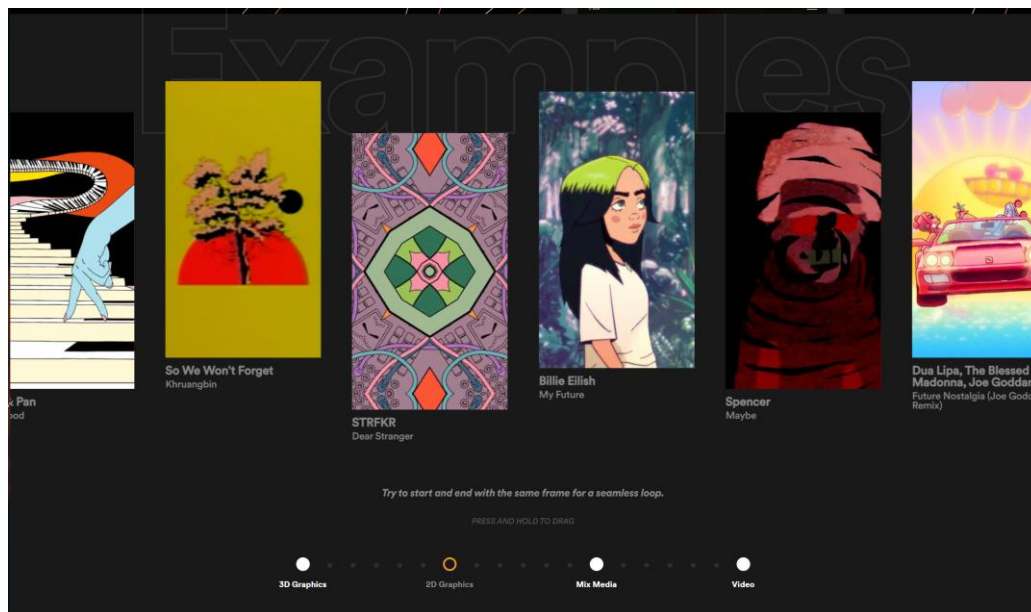
Spotify has publically utilized visualizers in their app since 2019. Spotify calls their visualizer feature Spotify Canvas, and it was launched into beta in late 2019. Spotify Canvas allows the artists to loop three to eight seconds of video footage and attach them to individual songs. (Perez 2019) The tool was first introduced as a beta feature that only certain artists could use, but it was launched out of beta in 2021.

Many influential artists have utilized the feature so far, including Taylor Swift, Billie Eilish, Celine Dion, John Lennon. Olivia Rodrigo recently broke the record for the most viewed Canvas. In a Rolling Stones article, Spotify's Head of Creator Product Marketing Sam Duboff acknowledges that music video clips are becoming rarer within the Canvas feature, and artists are shifting more towards more conceptual Canvases, including animation and 2D-graphics. To benefit from the risen demand in graphics for the Canvas feature, Spotify acquired its own music production marketplace, Sound Better, to assist users to browse for graphic designers. This is beneficial for their business plan since Spotify does not create the graphics, but only gives the user the option to utilize them in their audio promotion. (Hissong 2021)

On their website, Spotify For Artists offers tools and tips for the artists to promote their music, and Spotify has a page for the Spotify Canvas where they instruct the artists about the tool, what it is and how it can be used. In an introductory article from 2019, Spotify reveals a good amount of information behind the marketing strategy and meaning behind the Canvas feature. Spotify asserts expression and creativity as one of their main goals for the tool and connects with the fans on a deeper level. (Spotify For Artists 2019) The website also aims to showcase the possibilities of the Canvas for the artists in an interactive manner. The artists can compare all of the different methods other artists have utilized for their Canvases in a visual manner (Picture 5). The way Spotify presents its visualizer for the artist feels modern.

Spotify has not released the official budget that they had specifically for the Canvas. However, deducing that they have tested and developed the feature over

the last several years, it seems like Spotify has invested a considerable amount of money into Canvas. On their Press Release Details for the Financial Results for Fourth Quarter 2020, Spotify mentions them having tested the feature's function with control groups. On the Press Release, Spotify also states encouraging statistics of the test: A Canvas visualizer on a track results in the listener being +5% more likely to keep streaming. Canvases may also result in more shares and saves for the track. (Spotify Investors 2021)

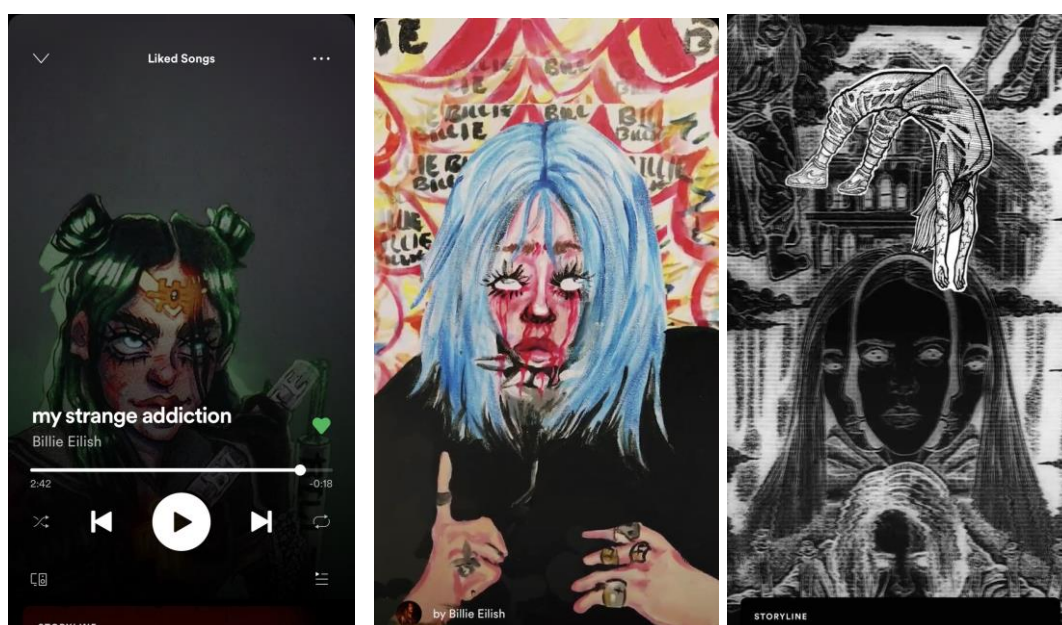


PICTURE 5. Interactive webpage for Spotify Canvas presenting a variety of different styles of visualizers. (Pohjanen 2021)

It is apparent that Spotify has recognized the benefits of visual media in audio marketing. With a lengthy beta test and endorsements from celebrities, the Canvas has quickly become a rising feature that clearly shows how quality music visualization brings in more users and streams. Despite the raving reviews from the company itself, it needs to be notified that the visualizer should be of quality and used with consideration. In 2019, many users complained that the looping visualizers were annoying and distracting at the beginning of the testing. Most of these problems were primarily related to the way the UI functioned, and it seems that the problem was mostly solved after Spotify gave the users the option to turn the Canvas off if they wish to. (Carey 2019)

Despite the former, the visualizer function's benefits should be acknowledged since the company acknowledges the massive possibilities the Canvas allows,

including narration, artistic impression, immersion, and visual interest. Spotify Canvas was a considerable part of the branding of Billie Eilish and her debut album *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* in 2019. She utilized fan-art in her Canvases for each song to add more character to her album and tell a story (Picture 6). Canvas provided Eilish a way to interact with her fans, ground her image as an artist, and feel more approachable than many other celebrities. *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* was awarded several Grammys in 2020, and it became the fifth top-selling album in 2019 (Billboard 2020). Considering streams, which the Canvas-fanart are tied to, the album also gained a Guinness World Record for the most streamed album in 2019 (Guinness World Records 2021).



PICTURE 6. Fanart-visualizers on Spotify Canvas for *my strange addiction*, *ilomilo* and *goodbye* by Billie Eilish (Spotify, 2019)

Since Spotify launched the Canvas tool out of beta in 2021, it has become available for all users. In the former years, the tool was available only for the most significant A-list artists. More data will most definitely come forward in the upcoming years since all artists, big and small, can benefit from the visualization feature. The research so far shows that there is a market for music visualizers. Companies are slowly trying to integrate more moving visual features into the audio services they offer, and these features seem to cater to both the artist and the typical listener.

3.1.3 Other platforms

Visualizers and music streaming are not only bound to the platforms discussed earlier in the thesis. The popular platform TikTok revolves around short video content. TikTok has established itself as the new leading platform for the youth, a never-ending variety of beautiful, fun, and aesthetic content combined with audio. TikTok has also proved itself as a platform that has the power to create viral content from anything, including songs. TikTok was the most uploaded app in Apple's App Store in 2019 (Mohsin 2021). Despite the former, TikTok will be left out of the main comparison of this thesis because even though the platform holds power in creating viral hits, the app is not used for similar music streaming purposes platforms like YouTube and Spotify are. TikTok has a limit of 60 seconds per video, so it is not ideal for music streaming in the way that this thesis focuses upon.

Other popular audio streaming platforms such as Pandora, Deezer, Apple Music, or Amazon Music Prime will not be discussed further to keep the study as concise as possible. The main criteria for choosing the platforms YouTube and Spotify for the focus of this study were their popularity in the USA and Finland for audio streaming purposes.

Several video platforms are attempting to compete with YouTube, such as Vimeo. Some video platforms can even be locals, such as the Japanese platform Niconico. As of 2021, YouTube surpasses even these local platforms in countries if possible to access. (Alexa 2021)

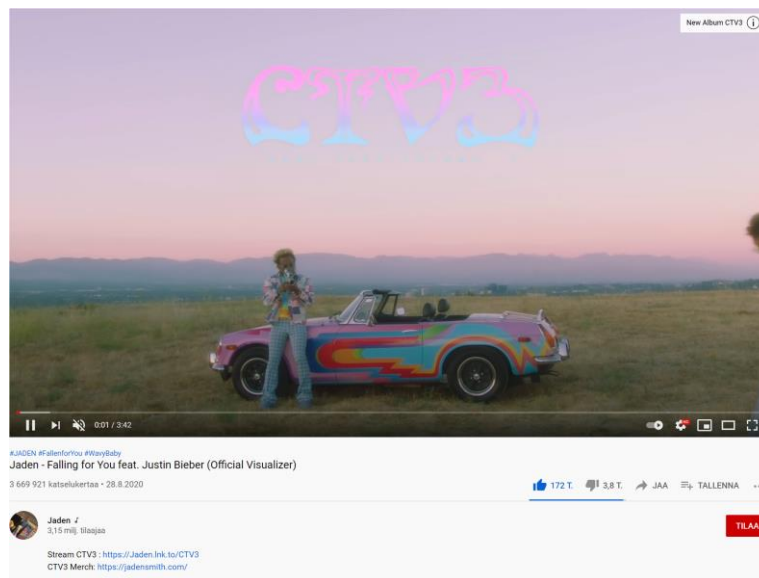
3.2 Grand production music promotion on YouTube

Having acquired the biggest streaming platform's status online, YouTube has also become the most profitable music promotion and marketing place. As YouTube has taken over the space where television used to be the primary source for music videos, YouTube has expanded music promotion in many other directions besides music videos. Official remixes, lyric music videos, live performances, acoustic performances, and Behind-The-Scenes are among the most

common content options musicians and labels have to engage with their audience on the video streaming platform. Consistent uploading is increasingly essential when promoting any content on YouTube. Having a massive amount of content on the ready for release is beneficial when raising number of views for the promoted artist. This is often one of the goals for the grand production music promotions. (McCauley 2019) Uploading material on a constant is one of the biggest struggles for smaller creators. However, when creating advertising for prominent record label artists, many teams often work simultaneously to create the official content for the fans to consume. According to YouTube's Creator Academy information, when an artist is signed to a label, the money usually comes through YouTube's licensing agreements. YouTube pays the label revenue from both YouTube Premium subscriptions, and ads run on free videos. (YouTube Creator Academy 2021)

The labor used to create the material for the promotion, including music videos and visualizers, is often freelanced or outsourced. The internet offers other specializing companies knowledge and professional skills outside of their region. From pre-production to post-production, the various phases of music video production often combine creative collectives. When a label requests a product, the marketing team of the artist might send the request to several production companies to compare the opportunities. Sometimes these requests are sent straight for affiliate companies to get the product faster, especially when working with a familiar company from former productions for similar projects, to speed up the process.

In a brief period of time, music promotion on YouTube has gained a new aspect for releasing the albums, utilizing visualizers. While lyrics videos have been around for a while, visualizers have been taking over posting the album online with solely the album art. Artist Jaden released his album CTV3 in 2020 with visualizers attached to all of the tracks. In the albums YouTube-visualizers, Jaden's marketing team applied the visuals of the album art to the visualizers. (Picture 7)



PICTURE 7. Visualizer on YouTube for *Falling for You* by Jaden feat. Justin Bieber (Pohjanen 2021)

When a prominent label backs the artist, more opportunities open for the promotion, and executing multiple marketing strategies at the same time become more manageable. Posting whole albums with visualizers has become a popular marketing tactic by the biggest record labels. With the rise of visualizers, we can expect more artists to pick this type of advertising as their approach to an album release. Especially if they have big record labels backing them up, wishing to climb up charts such as Billboard.

3.3 Indie music promotion and YouTube

Music and audio promotion are not only tied to grand production by companies such as dreambear on YouTube. With its accessibility, it has become the go-to for indie artists alike. Although the budget between indie and grand promotion often differs by thousands of dollars, many features and techniques utilized by grand production promotion are also being harnessed by indie artists. Utilizing paid advertising is accessible for smaller creators, even though the budget of indie artists naturally limits the possibility of pushing to product forward with funds compared to more prominent record labels.

Money is an essential part of modern marketing, but it is not required for artists to create engagement with their target audience. Besides the budget benefits,

streaming numbers, engaging content, and other similar aspects of visualizers, the visualizer also offers the artist a way to express their art. Artistic expression has always been an essential part of music and the visuals attached to it, and visualizers have provided the artists a new way to emit that aspect. The technology to create imagery from home has also become more accessible to most creators. With the possibility of creating a wide variety of content with minimum gear, the indie community has made the most of the accessible sources they have at hand. Visualizers and other forms of visual media online seem to slowly be taking over the spot of lyric pamphlets and album covers in a modern fashion, especially now that image creation and cameras are not only reserved for the minority who can afford the expensive rare gear. Most indie artists can build an impressive visual brand around their music nowadays, and many of these visuals become second nature to the music itself.

One of the most prominent trends within this group of creators has been 24/7 live-streaming channels that stream music constantly. Since the first similar channels were created in 2014, hundreds of independent channels now run similar content with looped visualizer animations and hundreds of songs as a playlist. These live streams often simultaneously promote music and are usually run by enthusiasts and individuals rather than big corporations. Sometimes, the problem is that these pirate radio stations are profiting from artists' music without the artists getting compensation for their music. An interesting detail to these online radios is that animated imagery is considered an essential aspect of the product. Some of the animated material is copyrighted from movies or animated series. (Bromwich 2018) However, some imagery, such as the famous studying animation of a girl studying, are commissioned from animators and illustrators (Picture 8). The creator of the Lo-fi Girl was an artist Juan Pablo Machado.

Considering more minor genres of indie-music consumption on YouTube, a community has also formed around a music genre called lofi. The audio can even be enhanced with ambient sounds, such as rain, traffic noises, or others. The ambient audio can be anything that feels relevant for the setting the video is trying to create. Visualizers may have the possibility to venture to some more experimental ways of presenting the music than music videos have. In the lofi community, the playlists and visualizers might sometimes be enhanced with other audio, such as

rain sounds, ambient noise, or anything relevant to the concept. For example, a song with indie acoustic sounds could be attached to forest sounds, campfire burning, or other ambient sounds that emphasize the mood the creator is trying to achieve. This aspect may appeal to the indie community due to its added expression and ease of creation. For the indie community, visualizers bring an affordable form of artistic creation that is not only a choice of budget, but is sometimes also attached to the genre and the artistic vision.



PICTURE 8. Lo-fi HipHop Girl illustration for the channel Lofi HipHop Girl, formerly known as ChilledCow. (Machado 2021)

There are several reasons behind the rising popularity of visualizers in the indie community. One could be how the visualizer can offer the artist an alternative way of creating engaging content. When creators make playlists with ambient audio and titles that aim to set the mood, the creator often gives the audience a different experience than a music video. These kinds of projects have the power to set the mood stronger and transcend the listener to a different place, time, and even a different story.

3.4 Features of modern music fan culture

With the rise of mobile devices, home computers, and accessible media, the fan culture revolving around everything, including music, has rapidly evolved in the last years. As technology has offered like-minded people a platform to connect despite differing locations, the different ways of interacting with the source material have gained various forms. For the benefit of understanding visualizers and music promotion, fan culture is an inseparable part of the summary.

Fan culture these days has formed a force with massive power that can affect the way trends head and the content that is released. Fans are likely to put their ideas and concepts onto the existing material. The LoFi HipHop Girl became a meme in the 2010s and later resulted in the whole branding of the YouTube LoFi subgenre to revolve around the girl studying. After becoming a meme, lots of material resembling the Lofi-girl was produced, including illustrations of the girl studying in different locations (Picture 9). The concept of the girl was kept the same, but the ethnicity and surroundings of the girl changed based on the country she was placed in. The fans of the music even started making content based on the idea that the animated girl had actually been studying the whole time, and material including parodies of her being captured against her will surfaced (Picture 10).

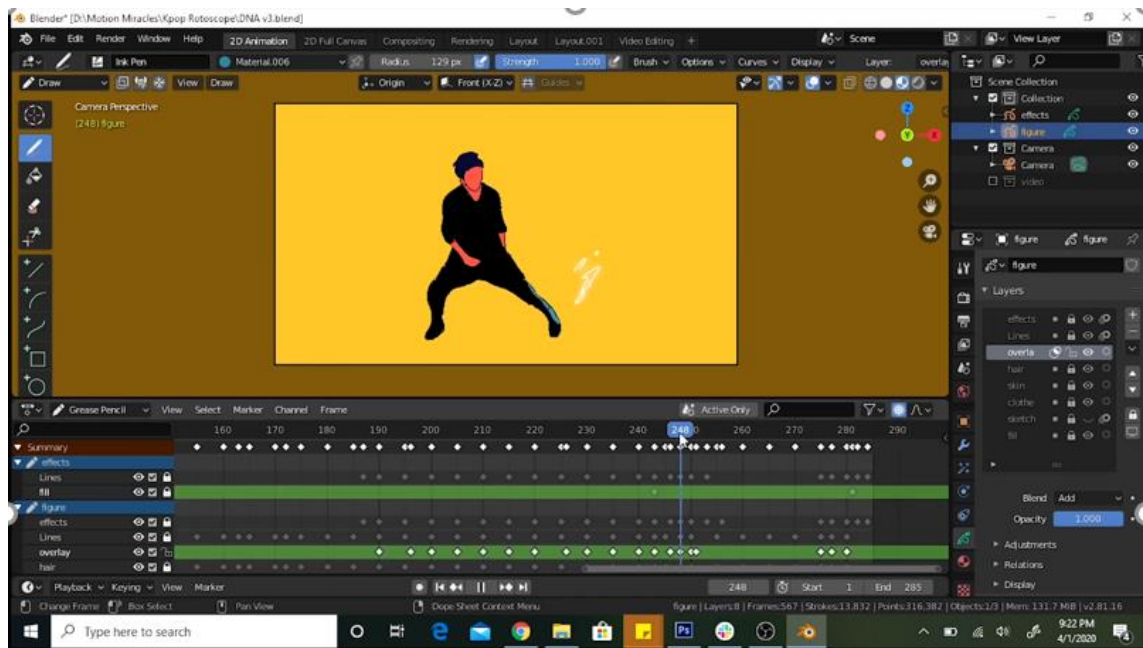


PICTURE 9. A Finnish Lo-fi Hiphop Girl fanart by Reddit user c4nni (u/c4nni, 2020)



PICTURE 10. Lo-fi Hiphop Girl fan video "Lofi Girl Deleted Scene" (Melkor 2021)

Fans also these days might create small content trends within their own small circle of subgenre. For example, K-pop fans in recent years have created small animated clips of their favorite idol's dance choreographies. The trend has become popular enough in the circles that the fans have started to make tutorials instructing their fellow fans on creating these videos. The fandoms seem eager to share the information around. (Picture 11) Understandably sharing information around also increases the amount of the material created, so it would be in the interest of a fan to ensure the rising amount of the content they desire to see. Tutorials are also a popular genre of videos online for peoples to view, so these videos tend to gain attraction and traffic.



Rotoscoping K-pop Choreography in Grease Pencil | Blender 2.8

PICTURE 11. YouTube Video “Rotoscoping K-pop Choreography in Grease Pencil” (Pohjanen 2021)

In “Spreadable Media,” the participation of fans in a product is discussed within the advertising circles the term “brand communities.” To form a strong attachment with their audience, many markets benefit from creating a sense of community, resulting in customer loyalty. (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013, 159) With the possibility to create a sense of union, music provides its fans lots of opportunities to connect with similar-minded people. With Lo-Fi Hip Hop Girl bringing people in need of focus assisting music together and K-pop fandom assisting each other to create more content, people seem to ask more from their music than they did before. Consumers seem to be often looking for a sense of authenticity, and that is something being a part of a fandom offers for the individual.

Considering how popular streaming and visualized music has become inside the online environment, the role of the visualizer is important to understand. As streaming becomes more conventional and popular, album sales have a very different weight and purpose than what they used to. Since the consumers are not buying the physical cd-copies of albums with their own album art and lyric booklets in the former manner, it can be argued that the visualizer and lyrics videos are satisfying the desire for visual material in the fans of the music in a modern way. This longing for visualized audio could resonate with the original purpose of

the lyrics booklets and album art. Since the digital streaming platforms do not always have the lyrics attached to them, it feels natural for consumers to shift towards alternatives, such as lyrics videos and visualizer releases for the albums.

In Paul Booth's *Digital Fandom: New media studies*, he compares the contemporary fandom to a game, where the players work together to solve the content and create more of it. (Coppa, Booth 2012) This idea, coined as Transmedia by Henry Jenkins can be adapted to all sorts of fandoms, including the ones who are consuming music. (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013) The music is not the only thing attached to being a fan, but visuals and the feeling of unity are finding a new, more critical form in the concept of being a music fan. Due to the never-ending thirst for new forms of content and ways to experience music, visualizers have gained rising interest in fans interacting with their topic of interest. The details may vary; whether the fans add rain sounds to the audio to tell a story or the fans rotoscope a clip of their favorite artist dancing in 2D, the visualization of music has become an even more essential feature of being a fan.

3.5 The impact of fandoms on music promotion

Considering the power that the masses hold these days over the music that reaches the top of the charts and the most streams, it is essential to discuss the impact fandom has on how music is promoted these days and how it affects virality online. With the rise of grassroots promotional campaigns, fans of artists have started to systematically maximize the number of streams to help push their favorite artists up on the chart. These fan campaigns usually include manipulating IP addresses to the correct location for the streams to count on specific charts. In a Rolling Stones article, Brittany Spanos takes a closure look at this modern phenomenon. The most famous artists these days may have a very dedicated fandom behind them, and with organized cooperation, the fandoms have managed to push artists forward on charts or competitions. According to Spanos, the fan accounts that run these virality attempting campaigns usually attempt to avoid appearing suspicious. A Spotify representative has stated that these manipulation attempts are fought back by streaming services with multiple fraud-detection measures, and fraudulent activity is taken seriously and investigated. (Spanos 2017)

The effect of fandoms on the entertainment industry is not only relevant in western countries. Most notoriously, K-pop fans worldwide are known to dedicate massive amounts of effort to push their favorite artists forward with the help of digital labor. In recent years, K-pop has managed to break into western countries with popularity, and along with the music, the fandom has also gotten more intense. Davey Winder discusses the K-pop fandom phenomena in his article for Forbes, touching the subject of how fans of the K-pop group BTS have gained an enormous amount of power online with the sheer number of fans working for similar goals. Known for bombarding the Dallas Police Department iWatch Dallas app with clips of K-pop artists during the Black Lives Matter protests for George Floyd in 2021, the power of fandoms is greater now than ever before. (Winder 2020)

Since fandoms can drastically affect many aspects online these days, it is crucial to understand where this sort of phenomenon originates from and how it might prove beneficial for anyone interested in modern music advertisement. Naturally, it is difficult for an individual to decide to start a massive fandom from scratch. Nevertheless, fans of existing artists and subjects have a dedicated attitude towards spreading positive material of their favorite artists and a desire to push the artists' interest forward.

Creating targeted content for these existing fandoms has an increased possibility of gaining wind under its wings, whether the attempt comes from a fan visualizer creator or a record label running the artist's brand. It is also always an easier attempt to create media to spread to a target group that exists since the topic or artist most likely already has online traffic. At their maximum effort, the biggest fandoms have the power to affect charts, and even smaller fandoms offer the creator a group of excited individuals ready to spread quality content of their interest.

3.6 Fan-generated visualizer content

Fan-generated content has been made for a long time. However, considering visualizers, the technological advances have made it possible for fans to participate in the environment of creating material for the music they love from the comfort of their own home. A good example is a Vaporwave subgenre, Simpsonwave, which made a splash in 2016 starting from Facebook and spreading to YouTube. Simpsonwave consists of edited clips of the cartoon series *The Simpsons* attached to seemingly unrelated vaporwave tracks. In Sam Sutherland's video essay about the phenomenon, it is estimated that Simpsonwave is connected to modern remix culture. He states that part of Simpsonwave's allure was that it based its remix identity into sincerity and nostalgia that resonated with the audience. He also brings up a thought that the accidental combination of the manufactured nostalgia of vaporwave and real nostalgia of seeing old "The Simpsons" episodes was a hit concoction for genuine emotional feelings in the viewers (Sutherland 2016)

Simpsonwave is an excellent example of how the internet can transform old forms of media to create new ideas and "aesthetic rules" that become highly associated with a genre or topic. Before 2016, *The Simpsons* was mainly deemed an iconic cartoon series without any music genre. With 147 000 subscribers, Lucien Hughes created the most popular Simpsonwave videos, including "S U N D A Y S C H O O L," which is a prime example of the subgenre and its visuals. (Picture 12).

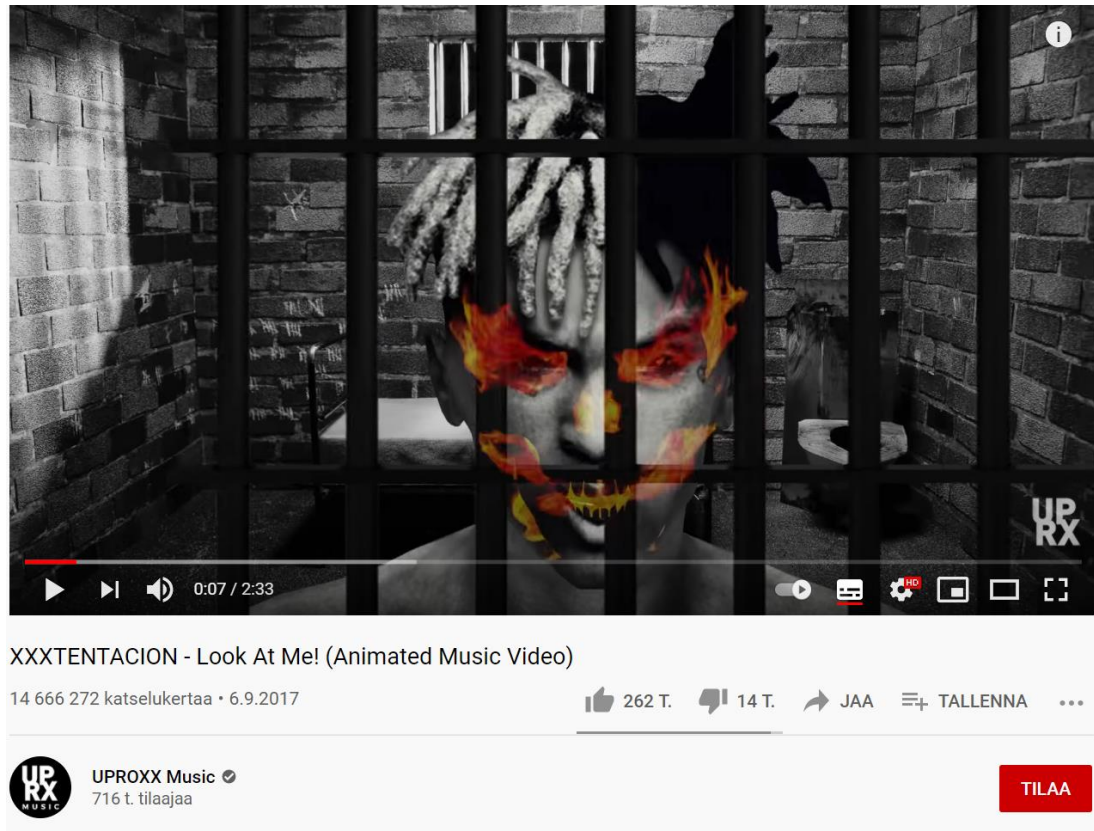


PICTURE 12. Simpsonwave video on YouTube, "SUNDAY SCHOOL" by Lucien Hughes (Pohjanen 2021)

In an interview for Pitchfork.com, Lucien Hughes clarified that he also believes that his videos struck a chord online due to a reason. The reason being the combined hit of nostalgia-seeking-Vaporwave genre and "The Simpsons," which almost everyone born between the late '80s and '00s has seen. (Lozano 2016) It seems that nostalgia is a beneficial emotion for both subgenres, LoFi and Vaporwave. These subgenres harness the power of human emotion to their advantage and result in intense reactions from fans. Fans also feel connected to the narrative aspects of the visuals, which open the genre for an audience that was not initially interested in the music. The narration opens a door for fans to relate to the music and invites them to create their content in the process since individuals with similar interests and resources often create these types of subgenres.

Fan-generated visual content is not only tied down to subgenres such as LoFi or Vaporwave. After the dawn of the internet and social media, many artists have benefitted from the talent of their fans. Artists now can benefit from this collaboration possibility by hosting, for example, competitions for the fans, where the price for the competition is the opportunity to have their videos posted as official

videos by the artist (Picture 13). Benefitting from the environment where fans are willing and excited to create content gives the artist a possibility to connect with the fans of their content uniquely, where they feel that their content matters and is seen.



PICTURE 13. Fan-created official video on YouTube for XXXTENTACIONs' *Look At Me!* (Pohjanen 2021)

3.7 The visualizers' benefits to budget restrictions

Visualizers offer loads of benefits to any artist on more practical levels besides identity, fan connection, and artistic vision enhancement. One of the most beneficial aspects of them is the highly reduced cost of visualizers compared to a music video production. Ranging from a DIY price of \$300 to up to the high-end price of \$300 000, music videos are lengthy productions that require equipment, professional personnel, and a lot of time and effort from various talented individuals. The music video budget also includes location fees, travel expenses for the crew, and food supply. (AD.JUST 2019) While considering the best options to produce visual content for an audio product, many projects often do not have unlimited resources reserved solely for music video purposes when other marketing needs

to be considered on the side. Compared to music videos, visualizers can provide creators a cheaper alternative. Although visualizer productions may also cost a hefty amount of money if produced by an animation company, it is undeniable that the amount of personnel, time, and gear required to produce a music video of the same level is most likely a cheaper alternative.

For the non-artistic individual, there are many options to get visualizers for projects from freelance with a small amount of money. On sites such as Fiverr, graphic artists can offer their skills for freelance in exchange for their predetermined pricing. Spotify also offers the artists freelancers ready to create Canvases with varying price ranges on their affiliate page, SoundBetter.Com.

4 ANIMATED VISUALIZER PROJECT

With all the information gathered about visualizers and music marketing, this information can be utilized in conducting a small-scale visualizer project. This project was conducted to help create a guideline for producing animated visualizers to put all the information and data from several sources into practice. This chapter will go through the phases of a more extensive visualizer production on a smaller scale and a team of one person. The main goal is to form a guide for visualizer animation production by creating a project and reflecting on it. The practical part will focus more on the technical aspects of illustration and creating the content for the visualizer.

4.1 Pre-production

Project pipelines generally help keep the production moving and progressing. Most professional visual productions follow the three main production phases: the pre-production phase, the production phase, and post-production (Yu 2017). The content of these phases may vary, but the key points often remain the same. According to the professional interview with digital artist and generalist Lukinmaa, one of the most important aspects of executing a project successfully is good planning during pre-production. When a professional company works for a client, pre-production usually involves planning, scheduling, and separating the different production phases clearly from one another. (Lukinmaa 2021) A pipeline for animation is a system that aims to align all of the components, including tasks and different skillsets, to a predetermined timeframe. For this thesis' purpose, several pipelines concerning details described by Lukinmaa, Dreamfarm studios, and Yu were combined to create the most fitting pipeline for a small-scale visualizer animation production.

4.1.1 The creation and brainstorming of the project

Every project starts with an initial idea of a product. To complement the thesis, the best possible product for the benefit of this research is to create a visualizer animation and study the different production phases on a smaller scale. Creating a project offers the possibility to inspect the more technical parts of producing

content. As there is no budget for the visualizer project nor a customer, the best decision is to rely on music that is already produced and create a fan-project to compliment a song of an existing artist voluntarily.

To benefit from the small production team and the restrictions it causes, catering to the indie community felt like the best possible option. A song with lo-fi-features would allow the style of the visualizer to be a bit rougher. At this stage of the project, considering the resources, the goal was to study the production pipeline of visualizer animations closer by doing a similar project. The most logical platform for this project was YouTube. The main reason behind this decision was that the project would be done as a fan project of sorts, and to access the tools like Spotify Canvas, the person posting the material should have access to an artist account. It was an easier decision to go with a material that already exists and expand on that original material.

4.1.2 Analyzing the lyrical content of *One Last Time*

The song chosen for the project is *One Last Time* by the indie rock band *Summer Salt*. The song's lyrics are reminiscent of old songs by artists such as Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley, with much imagery attached to love. The song tells the story of a person alone on a Valentine, reminiscing their lost love. According to the second chorus, the singer's lover has hurt the singer, which is not the first time. The song's singer has been toyed with, but they desperately hope their lover returns despite their lover having a fleeting attitude. The song is melancholic with a tiny hint of hopefulness. (Genius 2021)

The music has an all-American vibe with soft guitars, reverb, and a chorus singing "ooh-la-la" on the backing tracks. The song is an indie song, and it is not too polished soundwise. The song seems to aim for a homely sound, and it is often a substantial part of the indie identity. The recording has been done so that the audio is very low fidelity. Since lo-fi music has raised interest as a trend in the passing years, this is most likely an artistic decision.

Based on the lyrics, it is fitting to choose something that reflects the tones of melancholy, love, and nostalgia. Based on earlier research, nostalgia is also an

emotion that makes it easy to reel the listener in, so relating to nostalgia as much as possible seems beneficial considering the project.

After the source material was analyzed, it was essential to think about the target audience for the end-product. Since the song was already aimed towards listeners who enjoy music similar to genres from the 50s, the natural choice for the art direction was to aim the visualizer to the same group. The audio itself is a very classic song, so the classic American diner was chosen as the environment to emphasize the nostalgic elements of the song and its lyrics.

The diner has been a symbol of American cinematography for decades, and the setting of a restaurant environment would compliment the music perfectly. Contrasting a usually busy establishment with silence and gloom would bring good storytelling elements to the visualizer. Since one of the primary emotions visualizers often try to cater towards is nostalgia, the diner should have loads of believable artifacts inside, such as fitting furniture, neon lights, checkered tile floor, and more. Narrowing down the visual ideas based on the music provides a good base for the project to have the visualizer truly compliment the music and enhance the listening experience logically.

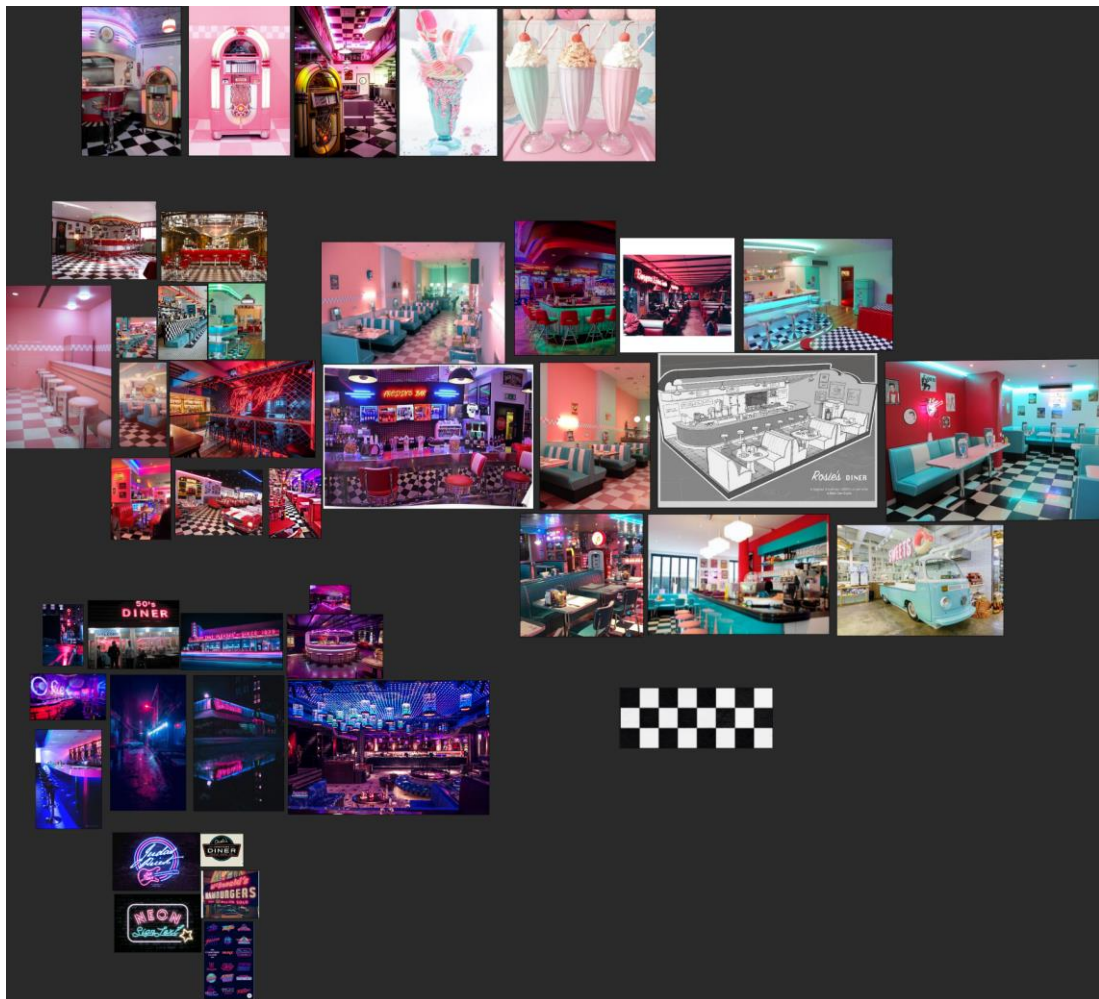
4.1.3 Reference boards

To start creating a unified result, one of the most essential parts of any production is proper research and finding good references to ensure a quality product. For creating reference boards, there are many options, such as Pinterest or photo-editing software like Photoshop. For this project, the free program PureRef was the program of choice due to its ease of use on PC. PureRef is a good choice for any visual work and free to download from the website <https://www.pureref.com/>.

A wide variety of reference material was gathered from Pinterest and Google Image search to capture the song's mood and visual aesthetic planned for the project. To find the most unified look, keywords used to search these references included words such as diner, vintage, 50s, nostalgia, jukebox, and neon. To

complement the overall look, it was necessary to narrow the visual style down to a clear representation of the vision.

In VisRef, the references were divided into their separate areas to ease the work: assets, environment, color, and layout. An effort was put into making sure that everything was visually cohesive so the look of the visualizer would be as narrow as possible to ensure a result tied together to the theme of the song.



PICTURE 14. Reference board for the visualizer animation project. (Pohjanen 2021)

While planning the visuals, nostalgia was one of the most important emotions the project wanted to tap in with the viewer.

4.1.4 Organizing the timetable

One of the critical factors in all professional productions is budgeting all of the aspects of the project. Time is precious when there is a deadline, and it is crucial to treat all aspects of the project as valuable, including time. Time is an aspect that should not be wasted, and at this point of the project, it was beneficial to lay down the schedule to get the production going on at a fast rate.

For the *One Last Time*-visualizer, scheduling was done with the help of Apple Calendar. The reasoning behind this was based on benefitting the most from the gear already acquired. Apple has the option to split the calendar into several workplaces. Since two of the devices that would be used to manage/produce the project were the iPad and iPhone, the calendar provided by Apple was a good choice due to the synergy between the devices.

Important aspects considering scheduling a project are splitting the pre-production, production, and post-production in a mindful way across the timetable. With a small-scale production, an agile method of production could be also considered as an alternative to the one utilized in this project.

4.1.5 Finalizing the production plan

Before beginning the production, it is always essential to understand all of the steps that need to be done to finish the project. For the *One Last Time*-visualizer project, the finalization was done by first going through the memos, references, and timetables and reassuring that all of the parts matched with the vision and deadline. In an interview held for this study, generalist Antti Lukinmaa describes a typical timeline for a similar project for an artist at a professional studio could possibly be around a month. After the illustrations would be done, the finalized images would be passed forward to the animator and other personnel working on the post-production. (Lukinmaa 2021)

Since the project for this study did not have the resources a grand production company has, team-specific aspects of the project had to be considered. The

amount of labor had to be cut down to the minimum to ensure the project would be done in time. The methods chosen to cut the workload included minimizing the animations to the easiest possible ones, basing the illustration on a 3D model, and rendering the image with speed painting techniques. The formerly mentioned are methods that well-respected concept artists and illustrators use in the modern days, including artists such as Mark Castanon (Robertson, Bertling 2013)

4.1.6 Copyright aspects of the project

When creating any project with audio one has not created themselves, it is crucial to know copyright basics. Especially considering the target platforms' policy. A keyword in anything related to YouTube and copyright is Fair Use. In its guidelines, Google states that fair use is a legal doctrine that allows a person to use copyright-protected material under particular circumstances without requiring permission or a license from the copyright owner. Different countries have their own set of rules about what material is acceptable to use without the owner's consent and for what purpose. In the United States, where YouTube headquarters is located, these are the four factors that are used to define fair use: the purpose and character of the use, the nature of the copyrighted work, the amount of the copyrighted portion used in relation to the copyright and the possible effect of the use upon the potential market or value of the copyrighted work. Since this thesis's product is meant for non-profit educational purposes, the usage of *Summer Salts'* music is acceptable considering the United States law. (Google 2021)

For Finnish productions, it is also beneficial to check the local law considering copyright. Since the Finnish law does not give any norms or specifications for fair use, the law is a bit more abstract than the United States law for copyright. (Korpela, 2002) Fair use is applicable only in the USA and Israel by law. However, since most new media and the most prominent online sources operate in the United States, it is beneficial to understand what the term and law cover on the platform, such as YouTube.

In Finland, most of the laws became dated almost a decade ago considering the new media copyright law. (Toikkanen 2012) According to Teosto, some form of progress has happened in the recent years. In 2020 an agreement was made

between the Nordic countries to modernize the agreements to a more current state. The agreement was signed by the different parties of the Nordic equivalents of the Finnish Teosto, and it ensures that musicians will get royalties when their art is consumed on YouTube in Europe, Middle-East, Africa and parts of Asia. (Teosto 2020)

For this thesis's purpose, *Summer Salts' One Last Time* was used under the expectation that the usage is legal. This is since the production is non-profit and for educational purposes, and the product is released on YouTube.

4.2 Production

Production is the phase that preferably comes after the pre-production phase has been properly executed. When production finally begins after several possible rounds of comments, meetings, and sessions during pre-production, the process must run smoothly to ensure a quality product. (Lukinmaa 2021) The production phase lays down the base for post-production that sometimes occurs during production. For example, film productions often work simultaneously on the post-production and production phases to ensure a unified end result. For this visualizer project, these two main phases were alternated in-between.

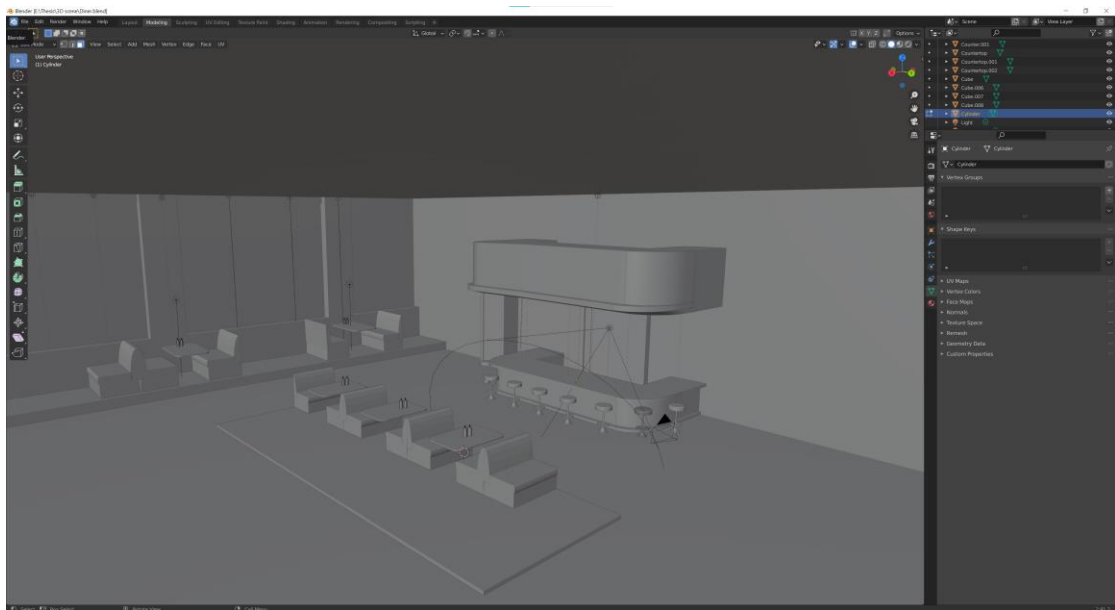
4.2.1 3D-modeling the structure for the environment

Modern concept art often harnesses 3D modeling to acquire more efficient results in a shorter period of time. Using 3D models as a starting point for the illustration provides the artist with tools, such as perfect perspective and the opportunity to try out different compositions with ease. According to critically acclaimed illustrator Scott Robertson, even though it is beneficial to understand the fundamentals of perspective, a 3D computer program eases many aspects of the image-building process. These include moving the point of view around, blocking out larger volumes, and trying out different camera lenses. (Robertson, Bertling 2013)

Based on Robertson's work, this method of using 3D as an underlay for an illustration was applied to the *One Last Time* visualizer project. The 3D modeling was done in Blender, a free software. The 3D assets were created from scratch since

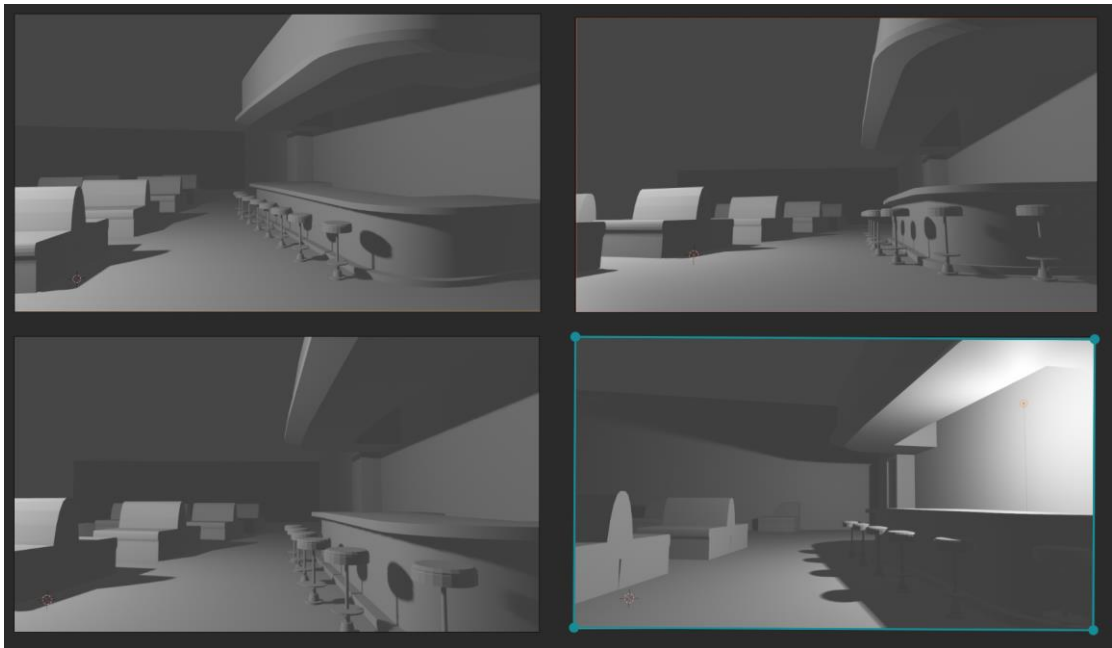
only the large volumes were necessary for the rendering. Laying out accurate materials, textures and lighting would have been a time-consuming process for the project, so those aspects were left to be resolved later on. Using a 3D scene as the base was the route this production took, but depending on the skills and preferences of the artist, other methods could be used to obtain a similar result. Some artists could use more traditional art methods and create the scene from scratch, while others might take the path of photo bashing and use a camera to shoot a similar scene. The photographs could, later on, be edited in Photoshop to resemble the end result. In the interview with Antti Lukinmaa, he states that in the professional industry of illustration, artists can often have widely different methods of production. The only thing that holds weight, in the end, is the end result and how fast it is possible to get there if there is a specific deadline to tackle. (Lukinmaa 2021)

To get the visual look of the diner right, the design was heavily based on the reference material gathered in PureRef during the pre-production. For any environment, it is crucial to consider the believability of the area since art similar to the one created for the project often aims to interpret reality. To avoid the uncanny valley and have the piece as believable as possible, it is vital to consider the area through logic. For the 3D scene, it was important to ask questions such as whether a customer could walk through here, where the windows would be located, how high the bar chairs would be, etc. All of these minor details will have an impact on the final image. Looking at the image through a view that showcases the area as a complete collection was essential to help apply this logic to the piece. (Picture 15)



PICTURE 15. An overlook of the 3D-scene created in Blender as a base for the environment.

After the initial shapes of the scene were created, the next step was to consider the composition. One of the most prominent advantages of using 3D scenes is trying out different angles for the final composition. To ensure an effective angle was chosen, several tryouts were made to find the best one. According to compositing master Marcos Mateu-Mestre, the proper use of lighting, staging, framing, and other possible elements play a crucial part in creating an image that is easy to read and serves the possible goals of what the artist wants to tell the viewer. (Mestre 2015) These conventions provided a helpful steady ground for the planning of the compositing, and all of these aspects were given specific thought during the compositing of the scene for the render. (Picture 16)



PICTURE 16. Camera angle experimentation with Blender renders.

At this stage of the production, lights were included in the scene to help later in the rendering. Lights were also placed in the scene for narrative purposes, highlighting the main character of the visualizer and framing the viewer's attention to a specific spot. After these aspects were considered, the final render the production settled down with was an image with a wide view and a harsh light. The wide view felt like a fitting choice to emphasize the main character's loneliness in the scene.

4.2.2 Rendering the background image in Adobe Photoshop

Once the rendering in Blender was done, the rendered image was moved to Adobe Photoshop to add more illustrative features and details to the image. The main tools for the rendering were digitally painting the image by hand and using an assortment of gradients and photo bashing to save time since there was only a limited amount of time left before the deadline. Photobashing is a technique, where the artist combined digitally several images to create one cohesive composite.

When first bringing the 3D gray box to Photoshop, it was important to refer to the reference boards as often as possible to create a believable space for the viewer. A gray box is in the art community a stripped down 3D scene, where only the

main volumes and concepts are displayed. Since the image was lacking in color, but the main values of the image were in place, the values could be digitally altered to have color. (Picture 17)



PICTURE 17. The final 3D gray box ready for illustrative rendering.

The color blocking was originally started by using the help of gradient maps to speed up the process. Gradient maps offer the artist the possibility to try out different color schemes fast and efficiently. These techniques are used by several professional concept artists, including Trent Kaniuga, a digital artist working in the game industry. (Kaniuga 2016) To get the colors to match as close to the vision as possible, the reference boards were utilized at all times to ensure a cohesive end product. Since nostalgia was picked out as one of the main themes during the pre-production process, the colors were set on pinks and blues to compliment the aesthetic classic American diners often have.

After the main color theme of the scene was decided, the next part of the rendering process was to add some items, such as neon signs, floor tiling, and a jukebox in the scene. Details such as the jukebox were handpicked to emphasize the nostalgic aspect of the visualizer and the music presented with the visualizer. These aspects of the image were done with a combination of photo bashing and hand-painting digitally. One of the techniques was to duplicate assets that were re-usable such as the chairs, to avoid wasting time. (Picture 18) To keep the

process as streamlined as possible, some artistic decisions were made to simplify the scene due to restrictions asserted by the approaching deadline.



PICTURE 18. Handpainting the gray box digitally with the help of gradient maps.

To increase the feeling of depth and ensure that the composition would focus on the character that would be seated next to the bar counter, shadows and lights were added with the help of the gradient tool. The gradient tool made it possible to make the darks even darker without relating to the 3D modeling program. When telling a story, it is crucial to focus on the essential part where the action is happening. Shadow and light can be used to hide and emphasize different aspects of the image, so these fundamentals should be considered while creating an image for any format, including moving image. (Picture 19)



PICTURE 19. Adding contrast to the image with gradient maps.

After the main shadows were set in place with the gradient tool and most of the assets were rendered to a satisfactory state, the next phase focused on the bigger picture. With the help of the raw camera filter, the tones of the colors in the image were tweaked to a more pleasing result. The colors were inspired by the art formerly collected for reference. The camera raw filter offers the artist an easy way of affecting the finished color scheme with as much control as possible. When controlling the individual colors, the saturation of the red hue was heightened as well as the blue and cyan hues. (Picture 20) With the image set with everything necessary to set the scene for the visualizer and the tone of *One Last Time*, the image was ready for further production phases.



PICTURE 20. Illustrated background ready for animation.

4.2.3 Creating the major animations

For the main character in the scene, it was essential to make the character feel as natural as possible despite being a simplified cartoon character. To gain a sense of realism to the animation and poses, it is essential to portray the whole personality of the character through the visual essence the character emits, one crucial asset being the utilization of gesture. (Griffin 2016) Since for the song *One Last Time*, the setting of the video was set on a diner, the positioning of the character felt the most natural next to the counter. Although the aspect of character placement was considered during the whole image rendering process, the exact position was decided after the setting was finalized.

Starting from a sketch, the character was seated next to the counter in a manner where she seems to be waiting. The decision behind this pose was also based on the lyrics of the song and positioning the character in a manner that supported the lyrical themes of waiting for a lover fitted to the entire concept. The sketch was created on Procreate on an Ipad Pro due to the ease of use the program has for simple animations and sketching. The coloring was also done in the program. The different animations of the character were created by hand drawing digitally. (Picture 21)



PICTURE 21. The first sketch and final character colored in.

Despite the character being animated by hand to get a 2D look to the visualizer, other animation methods were also used to speed up the production. To animate the shadow figures on the background and foreground, the silhouettes were moved with the help of key positions in Adobe After Effects later on in post-production. Using shadows instead of actual recognizable characters was to cut down on the production time and keep the focus on the main character. Turning the other customers into shadows helped create an intense feeling of loneliness and melancholy in the visualizer while providing a more streamlined animation production. (Picture 22)



PICTURE 22. Background shadows animated with Adobe After Effects.

4.3 Post-production

After all of the material and was produced for the project, the next step was post-producing the material. To create a final product, the background image and the animation assets need to be connected. The majority of this phase of the production was done in Adobe After Effects and Adobe Premiere Pro.

4.3.1 Compositing the visualizer in Adobe After Effects

Since the vision for the visualizer was to have the scene as lively as possible with minimum animation effort, a lot of the light effects, such as blinking neon signs, were created by simple commands that wiggle the key opacity of the assets. Instead of animating all these details by hand, several hours were saved in production time. The big spotlight covering the foreground with the character was also animated with the assist of After Effects expressions. The lights were set on a small wiggle effect to help the opacity changes randomize instead of static as they would be set manually.

The lights were not the only aspect of the visualizers that were touched upon in post-production. The shadows were moved around the foreground and background by changing the position of the assets, and to simplify the animated scene, the shadow customers were masked to move behind the windows seemingly. Due to the restrictions caused by the graphics cards of the computer this project was rendered on, these sort of artistic decisions were made to make the project as light to process as possible. Masking provided an enormous advantage at creating effects with the minimum amount of layers and render time. (Picture 23)

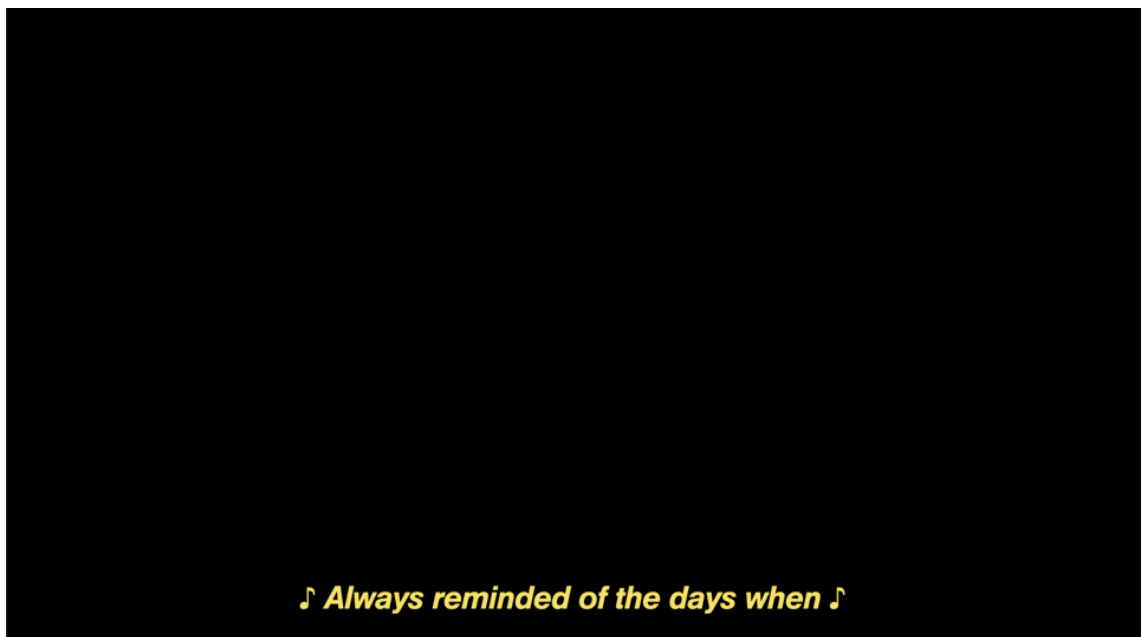


PICTURE 23. Compositing animations in post-production.

Since the rest of the project was optimized as light as possible, the rest of the rendering power was used to create particle effects in the scene. The rain outside was rendered with the help of Trapcode Particular, a plugin for After Effects, as well as the dust, flickers floating around the diner. Motion blur was added on the moving particles to blend them in the scene better and add up to a more natural finish.

Once most of the compositing was done, the next step of the visualizer was to add lyrics to the material. Lyrics are not an essential part of a visualizer, but the lyrics were added to pander towards the nostalgia and aesthetic of subgenres

such as vaporwave and similar 80's inspired art that has been resurfacing in recent years. The lyrics videos may be also reminiscent to the aesthetic and feel of karaoke videos. Gridtifi offers an article that presents an assortment of fonts that have been considered aesthetic. The one chosen for the visualizer was a yellow Helvetica font to resemble subtitles. The article provides instructions on how to create these popular stylized fonts. (Gridtifi 2020) The yellow subtitles added an extra layer of action to the visualizer. Hence, the viewer constantly has something new to see when they look at the visualizer, even if the character is not moving. (Picture 24)



PICTURE 24. Nostalgic subtitle-lyrics added to the visualizer.

The lyrics were precomposed into their own group to minimize the number of layers visible during the editing stage. Having the lyrics separate also made it possible for the production to move backward and fix the lyrics once small mistakes in timing and wording were noticed after rendering the first versions of the visualizer.

Adding small effects such as glitches and noise to the composition made the visualizer feel even more unpredictable and rewatchable for the viewer. Even though the visualizer mainly runs around looping animations, these little details in the beginning and end of the video help the visualizer's vintage aesthetic. The effects

were connected to the played audio. The glitches were one of the last things that were added to the composition. (Picture 25.)



PICTURE 25. Glitch effect on the visualizer.

To add more random movement to as much of the visualizer as possible, an artificial camera was set in the scene to create a small camera shake that mimics the movement a handheld camera has. This effect was created as the final effect in the production before moving the composition to the next software for the last finishing touches.

4.3.2 Color correction and ambient audio

Adobe Premiere Pro was the natural choice for color correction, and audio editing for the project since After Effects and Premiere Pro are easy to use together. Premiere Pro is also better suited for color correcting entire videos and cutting audio. Once in Premiere, the visualizer was run through several try-outs to get the color scheme as flattering and enticing as possible. Contrast, curves, and different lens profiles were tried out before settling down with the final look with vibrant colors but enough matte darks to help the video feel vintage. (Picture 26)



PICTURE 26. Options for color correction.

Artist Kevin Hong describes the artistic perception of the term nostalgia as a specific feeling of a “gentle sadness” or a longing for the past in 3Dtotal Publishing’s book *Beyond Art Fundamentals: A Guide to Emotion, Mood and Storytelling*. To emphasize the longing and melancholy of the scene, the visual material is placed under a grainy overlay once more to resemble an old video. When viewing the visualizer for rendering, these effects were reviewed multiple times to prevent the video from becoming too messy. (Hong 2016) Effects such as grain and blur can be useful in mimicking different moods, and when used in moderation, they can remarkably affect the result. After the color correction and final effects were set in place, the next phase was to export the video.

4.3.3 Exporting the final visualizer

To export the visualizer, the main tool for the rendering was Adobe Media Encoder. Media Encoder was used to export the project between After Effects and Premiere since working with an animation of any scale requires several views to spot all the possible mistakes that might have slipped through the review process. These mistakes were taken care of by rewatching the visualizer several times to ensure the lyrics were correct and the main character was not accidentally flickering due to skipped frames.

After the troubleshooting was over, the final export was done after eight versions. The ninth version was the one that was deemed the version to be released. The next step of preparing the visualizer for online purposes was to run it through Handbrake, a free conversion software, to have the video as optimized as possible for web usage.

Since the visualizer would be released on YouTube, one of the important aspects of marketing and uploading on the platform was to create a thumbnail for the video. The thumbnail the production settled down with was the first frame where the song's name is listed in the subtitles. Although the thumbnail would be small on some devices such as smartphones, the thumbnail is visible for even the larger versions of YouTube, such as on a smart television, so the subtitle was deemed an important part of the thumbnail despite the possibility of the text not being readable on all platforms. The text is somewhat visible, so it is enough for a thumbnail since the main title is described under the video in all cases. The main purpose of the visible lyrics was to add more content for the viewer, so their readability was not the main function.



PICTURE 27. One Last Time Fan-Visualizer thumbnail for YouTube.

4.4 Releasing the finalized visualizer on YouTube

After all of the technical aspects of the project were prepared, the next and final step was to upload the visualizer to YouTube. When uploading on YouTube, the platform runs a Content ID program on the material to ensure other individuals are not profiting off any copyrighted material. Since an established artist created the music for the visualizer, it was expected that notification might appear during the check. The Content-ID flagged the song, but only in a manner where the

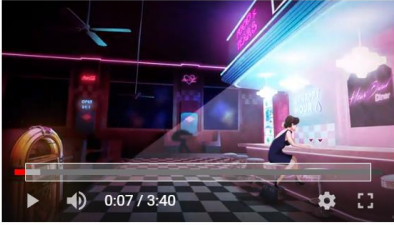
owner of the song is allowed to run an advertisement on the visualizer. The creator of the visualizer does not benefit financially from the revenue. (Picture 28) Since this aspect of the project was well clear before beginning the production, it caused no further problem during the release besides a notification.

Video: Il One Last Time by Summer Salt II Fan-Visualizer/Lyrics Video II
Tekijänoikeuksien yhteenveto ja tila

Videostasi tehty Content ID -vaatimus ei vaikuta kanavaasi. Tämä ei ole tekijänoikeusvaroitusta.

<p>Vaikutus kanavalle</p> <p> Ei vaikutusta</p> <p>Videostasi tehty Content ID -vaatimus ei vaikuta kanavaasi. Tämä ei ole...</p>	<p>Näkyvyys</p> <p> Luonnos</p>	<p>Kaupallistaminen</p> <p> Ei kelpaa</p> <p>Vaikka et ole mukana YouTube-kumppaniohjelmassa, videoissasi...</p> <p>Lisätietoja</p>
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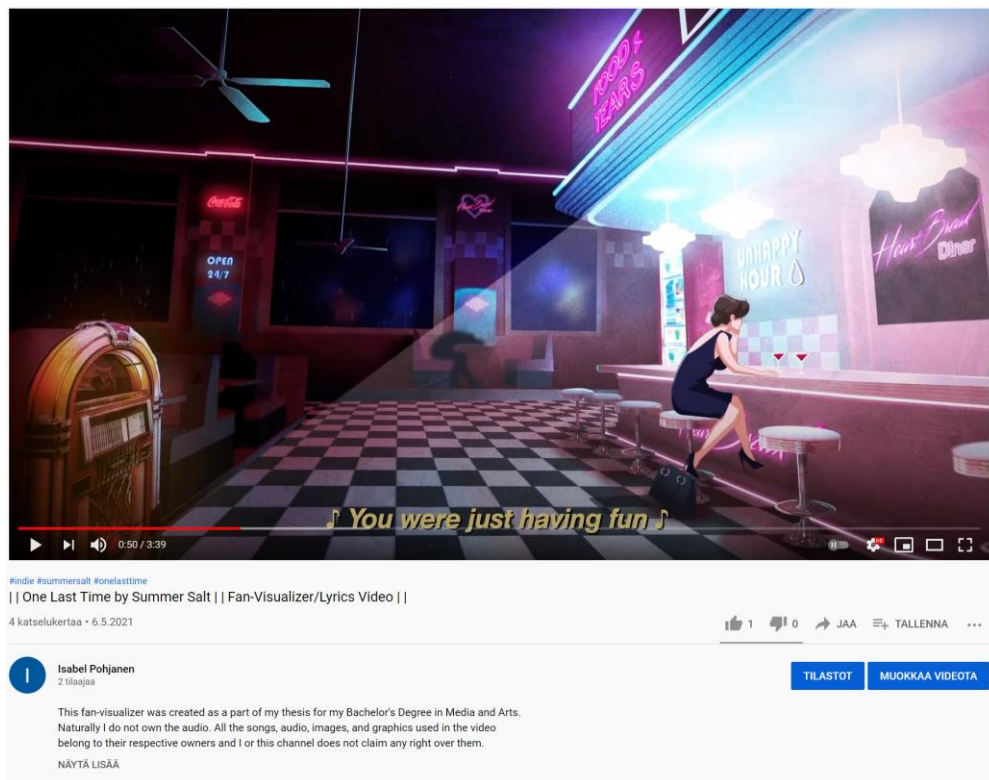
Alla näkyy videostasi tunnistettu sisältö sekä tarkemmat tiedot ja toimenpiteet.

Käytetty sisältö	Vaativuusty...	Vaikutus videoon	Toiminnot
<p>One Last Time Summer Salt</p>  <p>0:07 / 3:40</p>	<p> Videota ei voi kaupallistaa Tulot maksetaan tekijänoikeuden omistaj...</p> <p>Tekijänoikeuksien omistajan käytäntö</p> <p> Kaupallistettu joillakin alueilla</p> <p>Kohdat, joista sisältöä löytyi: 0:07 – 3:32</p>	<p>VALITSE TOIMINTO ▼</p> <p>Tekijänoikeuksien omistajat</p> <p>The Orchard Music Tekijänoikeuden omistaja: Cherry Lime Records</p>	

VALMIS

PICTURE 28. Content ID page for the visualizer project.

The visualizer was released on YouTube on 06.05.2021. (Picture 29) Due to time restrictions and the project's tone, no intensive marketing was placed on the product besides a post on the Reddit thread dedicated to Summer Salt. The visualizer gained a few views from individuals from the Reddit thread. The post also gained one Silver award from a Reddit user during the time of writing this thesis. For more successive marketing results, it would be beneficial to spend more effort and money in the marketing department. The practical part of this thesis aimed to study mostly the methods of visualizer production and its phases, so extensive marketing was not deemed necessary to arrive at this study's end conclusion.



PICTURE 29. The final visualizer released on YouTube.

During the time of writing this thesis, video is connected to the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qd18v43bvg>

5 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section will discuss the results and findings of the theoretical and practical part of the thesis. The main questions this thesis aimed to answer were stated earlier on in the first chapters, and they are:

1. What are visualizers, and what is the production pipeline of creating a visualizer animation?
2. How do visualizers tie into understanding the modern scene of content creation and music promotion?
3. How can visualizer animations enhance and elevate an audio product?
4. What things should be taken into consideration while doing a similar project?

5.1 Summary of findings

To answer the research questions, it is essential to start from the beginning. Visualizers are a wide variety of short animations, video clips, and computer-generated content used to visualize or promote audio content. Visualizers can be created with any medium, and the production pipeline of creating a visualizer animation is highly comparable to pipelines of any kind of video, illustration, or advertisement production. The production consists of three main phases: pre-production, production, and post-production. Visualizers have an aesthetic language and different subgenres of music may have their own recurring themes and stylistic choices. The modern visualizer can be considered an elevated evolution of the computer-generated music visualizer, which may combine different elements of animation, narration, genre, and audio to serve the viewer a product with meaning.

Creating a visualizer can be a long process that consists of a variety of production phases. As described by Lukinmaa, pre-production is a crucial part of creating a successful project that does not spend too much time reeling back and forth due to uncertainties. (Lukinmaa 2021) The project created for this thesis was cut down on the effort spent on several production parts due to the deadline closing in. These sorts of decisions are essential to ensure a project is finished on time.

Since the only budget the project had was time-related, finishing the visualizer on time was of the utmost importance.

One of the most essential findings considering this study is the data collected by Spotify about their visualizers, Canvases. The data gathered by them shows that using a visualizer is highly profitable when trying to reach an audience online, no matter the audience's size. According to their data and results, visualizers can add up to an average 5% increase in streams. This number is highly relevant, especially when considering artists who have thousands or millions of streams. Seeing a Canvas also makes the user +145% more likely to share the track, which provides the creator with even more added benefits.

Visualizers are a relevant part of the upcoming music advertising scene. They offer an artist a tool that they can use to visually promote their music in a smaller unit compared to a music video. Visualizers are being used for aesthetic, branding, and even in some cases slightly narrative purposes to elevate the visual identity of the artist, song or audio they are connected to. Visualizers are usually accompanied by music, and rather than being something that the viewer is meant to watch from beginning to end, they offer a different visual experience than a music video. A short video on Spotify might be viewed only once when changing the track to a new one, and they are something that the viewer has as an option to look at.

The visualizers might have different purposes, where a Spotify Canvas might serve more as a replacement for album art, while a visualizer such as the *One Last Time* project could be used more as a substitute for a lyrics pamphlet to sing along. Visualizers such as the Lofi Hiphop Girl may also serve as a companion, where nothing changes too drastically, but the visualizer remains there for the viewer to enjoy alongside the music when they feel like it.

Visualizer animations offer the artist an option to provide their fans on platforms such as Spotify visual content that could represent the music or be used as a way to connect with the fans otherwise. Data collected by Spotify shows that the visualizer has added benefits to the marketing and streaming of songs.

The most important aspect of creating a visualizer based on the practical project was the importance of following a professional pipeline and planning. To ensure a successful project, time management is important to consider before starting the production so the best effort can be spread smartly around the most crucial parts of the production phases. Good planning also helps the visualizer be targeted towards the correct target groups. This planning may help find visual cues and themes common in the media the target group usually consumes.

5.2 Improvement suggestions for the future

To create even more effective visualizers, written information and number-based data will need to become accessible in the following years as information is being gathered. The future information will benefit the visualizer productions to head in a more intentional direction.

It would be highly beneficial for big record label related projects to research more professional production methods and hire more personnel to allow a bigger production and more value to the end product. A small team will always provide little advantages compared to the possibility of working simultaneously on a more polished and bigger product. A quality product will reel the audience in and provide the listener the added experience the visualizer is supposed to offer to the person listening to the music and taking the time to look at the visualizer while doing so. For individuals working without the backing of a record label, simple visualizers shot even with a smartphone camera may bring value to the audio with minimum cost. The Canvas offers good data about the benefits, so creators of all backgrounds would benefit from utilizing the available free tools to their maximum.

It is important for individuals working on visualizers to work on similar projects as they were a bigger production. Since every project is a small production, splitting the project into clear phases and sticking to the original timeline is crucial to ensure that the visualizer is produced on time, especially since the individual is responsible for every role a production has. These roles include the producer and the variety of artists usually working for similar projects in established companies. Early planning will help the small creator tackle important problems that might

come forth later in the production, such as scheduling and techniques used for the art production.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Guidelines for producing an animated visualizer for YouTube

To conclude the observations of this study into a beneficial form, this guide was created based on the combined findings from the theory and the practical part gathered for this thesis. Creating a visualizer is a creative process that requires time, consideration, skill, and research if the desire is to make it function in the maximized possible way. Here are the most important things a creator or production should consider while creating a visualizer animation:

1. Think about the genre and audience. Mood, tone, narration, style. Whom is the audio aimed towards? What can the visualization bring to the table? What style fits best together with the audio?
2. Base the identity of the visualizer to cater to a specific audience. Leaning towards widely accepted trends and conventions within genres will help the visualizer find its natural audience and ensure the listener's engagement.
3. Plan the production and make decisions based on the timeline of the project. Follow the production tightly through calendars, schedules, and lists of deliverables. Time is often the most valuable asset for similar productions, especially if the required visualizer is big in production scale or there are several visualizers to make.
4. Consider the budget. What can be done in the amount of time and money given to the production team?
5. Where will the visualizer be distributed? Will it be a short Spotify Canvas or have more length and possibilities like YouTube videos do? Make sure the pros and cons of these platforms work for the benefit of your visualizer. Not all visualizers are the best choice for different platforms.
6. What kind of special effects can bring the maximum effect with the most minimal effort? Is it faster to create things by hand or in post-production? Is there a possibility to use reference or 3D as a guide to help the production move forward?

These guidelines are merely guidelines rather than actual rules. As more information and hard data of visualizers are bound to come forth in the following years, these guidelines are based on the core essentials pulled from the information collected for this thesis.

6.2 Recommendations for other platforms

When considering the usage of visualizers for other platforms, the most important things to be considered should be the limitations and benefits of the platform. YouTube has different benefits than Spotify has, and although the basics of engaging image and video creation remain the same, the two should be considered separate from one another. Other platforms should also be studied carefully to understand the specific nuances each of them holds.

The advantage of Spotify's Canvas is the possibility of looping the video for 8 seconds, requiring only a small sliver of footage compared to YouTube. Having only 8 seconds is also a more difficult time to execute content with narration so that some other artistic options might be the better way around the time limit. Connecting with fans or setting the overall mood seemed to be popular options. The same could be applied to other short-format platforms such as TikTok. The aspect ratios should be also considered, especially if the visualizer will be released on several platforms that might require for example horizontal or vertical versions.

Aesthetic possibilities should also be explored to get the most streams and benefit out of a visualizer. Leaning towards the target group's interests makes visualizers more simple for every platform, even though the platforms differ. The audience remains the same or at least similar in most cases, so understanding the relationship between the author and the consumer will bring more awareness and clarity to the whole production, including the finished visualizer.

6.3 The future of music visualization

Spotify and YouTube invest many resources into evolving the visual aspects of their music streaming platforms. We can expect the visualizer to gain more popularity with the new fresh layer of paint it has received during its evolution. Since the most prominent artists these days are utilizing the visualizer on the most profitable platforms, the visualizer could become a household name in music promotion in the following years.

These days artists often choose to release their albums entirely on YouTube, and more of them are gaining the visualizer treatment. The audience clearly feels connected to visualizers such as the LoFi Hip Hop Girl, and visualized content can raise the audio content is more noticeable in the internet market. Fan culture will most likely get an even more critical part in content creation, as more artists gain the information to harness the power of fandoms and content marketing. Material created by fans has already been utilized in Spotify Canvas and music video contests on YouTube. With successes such as Billie Eilish and her marketing, more artists are likely to start benefitting more from fan art and fan-made visualizers.

Artists with a background in either motion graphics, illustration, or other will have even more opportunities in the future to work on visualizers, and these projects may be through companies or freelance. As the demand for visualizers increases, the demand for artists does the same.

7 CONCLUSION

This thesis's main goal was to narrow down the modern use of the term music visualizer and create a guide on their production process based on field experience and research.

Professional production methods should be applied to new media, such as modern animated visualizers, no matter the target platform. Creating a successful audio promotion plan consists of various aspects, including a budget, time management, technique, and research on the target audience. Using a visualizer is highly beneficial, but it is a tool rather than a quick fix like everything else related to media and promotion.

The visualizer has caught the attention of the biggest streaming platforms. Due to the steady flow of visualized album releases on platforms such as YouTube and Spotify Canvas opening its doors for all artists, we can expect a rise in the following years. As big corporations and small individuals alike are starting to embrace the evolved visualizer as a tool, the artistic side of music and promotion can be estimated to grow even more prominent in the following years. Thoughtful content that resonates with the consumer on a deeper level is something music promoters should aim towards. In its many forms, such as lyrics videos and Spotify Canvases, the visualizer provides a fruitful platform for prolific content that the consumer can enjoy alongside the audio track.

Since the line between advertisement and art is blurring their separation in new ways online, engaging in new rising forms of media in marketing provides an effective way for content creators of every magnitude to create meaningful and compelling content. The average listener has more content at their hands than ever; creating genuinely engaging content has become more critical when marketing audio. Presenting the customers with accessible content has become a norm with streaming, and added visual content could increase the satisfaction and experience. Fan culture is an essential part of the modern music promotion scene, and the power of the community should be one of the main forces to harness if possible.

The observations in this thesis are general. Every visualizer production should consider their project as the primary source of information since there is no simple solution or a quick fix to successful music promotion. The *One Last Time* visualizer project's objective was to help create a general guide based on logic and research. The additional aim was to have a more focused look at the rapidly evolving field of visualizers. Further research is needed on several aspects of the topic, especially as more data is collected about the benefits of the visualizer, the production process of more projects, and the fan culture surrounding the visualizers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview with Antti Lukinmaa

Tell a little about yourself. Who are you and what is your career title?

I am Antti Lukinmaa and my official title considering my employment is digital artists, but in more detail I am a 2D and 3D-generalist. I do illustration and 3D-assets for marketing, games and a variety of other projects. I'm currently employed by Brink Helsinki OY.

How long have you worked in the field?

I have been a digital artist for approximately 15 years. 2D-generalist I have been for about 10 years and 3D-generalist for a couple years.

What is your current employer Brink Helsinki Oy specialized in, how long have you worked there?

Brink does mainly illustration and animation for marketing purposes, games and everything between. I have employed by Brink for the last year.

Do you have experience as a freelance artist or have been mainly employed by bigger companies?

I actually have done freelance on two separate occasions during my career and I had a five year career at Studio Piñata. I worked for games for a while and now I am back to advertising.

How often have you worked on projects that aim to visualize music, speaking of for example animation, lyrics videos etc?

I believe music and audio is often an essential part of any video-related production, since you have to always consider the entire concept, theme and other related aspects.

When working for a company specialized in animation and illustration, is it more common to have the audio come in when you get involved in the production pipeline, or to have the audio come in after?

It really depends on the project, both happen every now and then. The thing that mainly leads that aspect is what the customer wants, and we work based on that. Our customers are usually marketing agencies and game studios, so when we get a project like that, the customer usually always has already given some thought to the content and style. Very often they do have for example some reference songs to start off from.

Last year you created illustrations for an ad campaign where Helsingin Sanomat promoted their magazine with the help of visualized lyrics from songs that mention the magazine. How often are there similar projects on your table or was it a somehow unique working experience?

I would say it had a lot of unique aspects to it. Just the fact that we got to work with songs that are already well known hit songs from the radio was rare. Very often we work off of stock music or we hire a separate audio studio to handle the audio part, since the projects that require those resources are much more common.

Could you tell me about the process of working for the project for Helsingin Sanomat? What was the production pipeline like and what was your part in it?

From Brinks side, the process might have went approximately in a manner, where the customer, Helsingin Sanomat, have been sold the idea to by us. Alternatively, the might have bought the service from us after holding bids with other companies such as Studio Piñata and Kokoa or so on. The bids might have been also held internationally with other studios, the range is usually not limited by country regions, if the customer is a well respected one with a more than reasonable budget. After getting the calls, the potential companies have sent the customer an offer, and Brink has been chosen due to being the most convincing, cheapest or a combination of the former. That results in Brink getting the job. After that, there has been a lot of thought during the pre-production to solve how to get the music licenses. I don't really have any insight on that process though. But after Brink was selected, a decision was made on which individuals will be chosen to take care of the project, who will do what and so on. And that's where I come in.

So you were included mainly in the production part? Did you have any part in pre-production?

Yes I was mainly involved in the production, the ideas and concepts were pretty much set before I came in the picture and there was also two other artists working on the illustrations working on the typographies for the illustrations. Also Niko Rinta from Brink worked on the compositing, the animator was freelanced. I created the 3D models and textures. After that I made a still-comp, based on which Niko worked upon.

Looking back at the project, what do you think are the most essential production phases when a team of several artists is working on the same project for a big customer?

I think that in those cases, you always wish that the people who have done the sales have done the work in planning the bigger picture and as much details as possible. If the planning has been done properly, it is quite simple for us to come in and get our part done properly. If the pre-production and planning starts spilling

to the production, the whole project starts reeling back and forth. That usually results in zero satisfaction for all parties involved. So I would say pre-production and planning holds a lot of responsibility overall.

What do you think is the most crucial to reassure during the planning and pre-production to ensure the production phase is smooth sailing?

Having clear separation between the phases is critical. Deciding what each phase includes and sticking to that is also beneficial. We were working on 4 still photos and 4 animations, so each of them had to be treated as separate productions to keep the production crisp. For each production phase, at least one version should be created, but preferably more. Those should always be greenlighted by the customer before moving on to the next phase to ensure the project is moving forwards with the best possible effort.

How often as a professional illustrator do you have to take part in this planning and research for your projects?

It highly depends on what we have on the table. With some projects, we might have to “sell more” in a sense, especially if the customer is not buying only the production from us, but the visual development or parts of pre-production as well. During those cases you usually still do the planning with the customer to ensure a desired result.

How would you describe what pre-production planning with a customer might include?

The most important aspect is communicating clearly with the customer, what we are creating and making sure everyone is on the same page. That way we can make sure everything is clear and we don’t have to go back and forth, but we can get a clean product out as efficiently as possible.

Do you think pre-production has a special responsibility compared to the other production phases?

Absolutely, I think good planning is the most important thing. With a good plan, the whole production ends up being smooth sailing and many problems can be troubleshooted before they happen. Meanwhile, if the product is planned inadequately, it cannot be saved by production magic.

Have you stumbled upon projects where the poor planning has been a problem?

Several times, but I would say that it might also happen solely, because customers are different and not everyone is familiar with the steps that are required for a production to execute smoothly. Sometimes it might be difficult for the customer to plan just because they don’t happen to know all the things that are needed.

If we go back to the lyrics project for Helsingin Sanomat, how long was the entire production and your part in it?

On my personal workdesk it was approximately three weeks or maybe four. During that time I created all four illustration assets and the still comps. I can't really tell how long the whole production was in total, since usually the sales-part where the customer and the company are in talks takes a good amount of time and not much usually happens during that phase besides the former. Could have been some weeks in addition to the production.

What methods did you use to produce the assets?

I mainly utilized 3D Studio Max, and a lot of cloth simulation.

Is it something you have to often do for your job or was it specifically for Helsingin Sanomat?

The cloth simulation was a bit of a learning curve specifically for this project. I have used the same tools before, but I had not done a similar project that required that craftsmanship with such detail before.

Was it the most challenging part of the project to master the cloth simulation?

I would have to say the most challenging part was definitely the schedule of the project. The amount of work required for the end result was a bit hefty considering what the promised deadline for the customer was.

Would you say these methods mentioned before are the most common way a professional would work on this or does it depend on the individual?

Individuals always have their own process. Some artists might have just sculpted the required assets and not done simulations. Often there are no restrictions on how you have to do things, the end result is the most important thing.

How did you deliver the material for the professionals who worked on the project after you?

For the animator I provided the exported materials with base meshes, from which the animation positions could be simulated. For Niko I gave a .psd compilation, some extra passes and explanations. The customer was provided with tiff-files with full resolution.

Which illustration was your favorite one and why?

I think the pink Nylon Beat inspired image was my favorite, with the golden assets. The golden text was really sketchy to get into a logical physical form, where all of the reflections look beautiful. It was a visual challenge and it ended up looking really cool. I'm really proud of how that one looks, definitely my favorite out of the bunch.

Which illustration did you like the least?

My least favorite was most likely the one with lyrics by Sanni, the image with the tapes on the wall. I think that was because it was the last image I did for the project, and at that point I was working under a lot of pressure due to the schedule.

Would you be interested in doing similar projects again where music visualization is heavily in the center of the product?

Of course, it's my job. If I am being paid for the labor I do, then sure, I will gladly do similar projects.