Berklee College of Music

Have Fun Be Lighthearted– A Creative Video Portfolio

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Music Production, Technology, and Innovation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

With a mission to convey the fun and lightheartedness that can be had with electronic dance music, this project is a creative video portfolio broken down into three original video series: *LIGHT-hearted*, *Mini Racerz*, and Ableton Live Performances. It is entirely self-produced and the videos utilize many different digital and technological mediums, including dance music, phone screens, animation, LEDs, and simple dance choreography. One of the biggest challenges faced was figuring out the longevity of the video series, and whether videos within each series should be tied together through a unique storyline or should simply be made to showcase the technical and creative processes explored throughout the year. While it was ultimately decided to go with the latter to maintain the videos' fun and momentary nature, future projects conducted by the artist may be pushed further and will continue the mission of bringing fun and lightheartedness to music and art.

Keywords: electronic dance music, fun and positive message, creative 2d animations, art on Instagram and social media, multimedia video portfolio, Arduino LEDs, music with smartphones

INTRODUCTION

Having already worked on different forms of musical and visual media, the catalyst for this project was the artist's great enjoyment of putting smiles on people's faces through his art. Many video works previous to this project were produced for the artist's personal social media accounts and were made with brightening up the daily lives of others in mind. This project, then, was a way of continuing that approach while bringing in more depth to his videos in comparison to those made before, adding more to work with and finding ways to put him out of his comfort zone. He wanted to create something that is lighthearted conceptually yet technically challenging. The viewer of this work should be engaged with what is in front of them and the viewing space should be relaxed, easy-going, and ultimately fun.

With a current hyperactive world of individuals taking to every social media platform, the videos of this project represent the newer wave of content– easy, accessible, simple, short, and engaging. This allows for them to thrive in a faster modern-day world where attention spans continue to decrease and where infinite scrolling initiates new ways of art and media consumption. With no video of this project exceeding the length of two minutes, each can be easily uploaded and shared on social media and can be enjoyed by large masses of people because of the quick accessibility these various platforms provide. Moreover, using many different forms of technology in a creative way hopefully provides a never-before-seen experience for the viewer, leaving them with wanting more.

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE ART

An artistic group that is inspiring to many and demonstrates a very active use of technology throughout their shows is the Blue Man Group. They've achieved a very refined performance that in addition to the use of many technological components, incorporates live music, art, comedy, theatrics, and improvisation. It is a constantly evolving show which allows for millions of people to stay engaged and come back for more. Before it all started, the founders of Blue Man Group asked "What would surprise people?" and "what's going to catch someone's eye and make them really think?" They felt something about a blue character was timeless, and a bit futuristic.[1] This allowed for a very forward thinking and innovative show because the founders conceived a new character that had not really been seen in the world and a show that was unlike anything else.

Kenichi Ebina, winner of the 2013 season of America's Got Talent, blew America away with his stunning synchronization between his dance moves and visuals made for large scale performance. His artistry is visually stimulating and a joy to watch. As an artist, he is described as "a self-taught 'Dance-ish' performing artist and director" and "his unique dance show with various dance styles, pantomime, illusion effects of sound & light, and multimedia, entertains wide ranges of people who are not even interested in dance."[2] Ebina, like Blue Man Group, has innovated a show that displays a thrilling and exhilarating performance from start to finish, constantly using technology as the main driver for entertainment factor.

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[1] Stifel Theatre, "Coloring the World Blue: The History of Blue Man Group," Accessed October 31, 2018. http://www.stifeltheatre.com/news/detail/coloring-the-world-blue-the-history-of-the-blue-man-group

[2] Kenichi Ebina, "Biography," Accessed October 31, 2018. http://www.ebinaperformingarts.com/en/biography

DESCRIPTION

As mentioned, this video project is broken down into three original video series: *LIGHT-hearted*, *Mini Racerz*, and Ableton Live Performances.

LIGHT-hearted is a video series comprised of short videos featuring a multimedia experience, with the goal of bringing the artist's video editing, electronic music production, and technological proficiency to a new high. The series started with a simple sketch to be able to visualize the overall composition of how the frame will look in all the videos. At the center is one or two phone screens on a tabletop tripod, and in front of those are LEDs. Having some difficulty articulating to colleagues what exactly this series is, a first simulation was created. The first simulation included one LED (powered via Arduino code), one phone screen, and a very basic animation. The artist appears on a rendered video that plays on the phone screen, and motions his hand to "turn on" a graphically designed button that was later animated in. When he motions his hand to activate the button, the LED sitting in front of the phone screen turns on. By synchronizing the hand motion, button animation, and timing of the LED turning on, the viewer is left with the illusion that the artist is turning on an LED *through* the phone screen. Happy with the result from this, two additional simulations were run in order to master the synchronization and flawless timing this series requires. Elevating the difficulty, simulation two used multiple LEDs, and simulation three used two screens instead of one (see fig. 1-3).
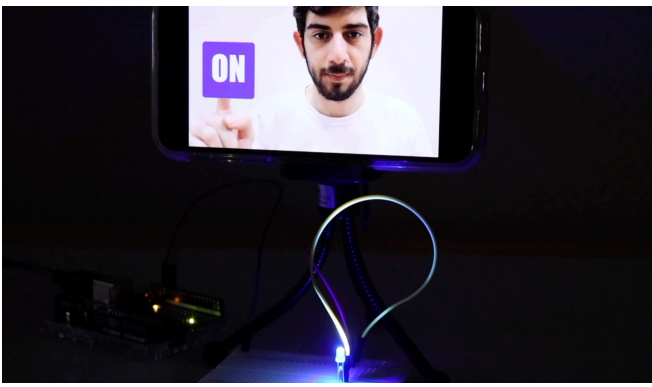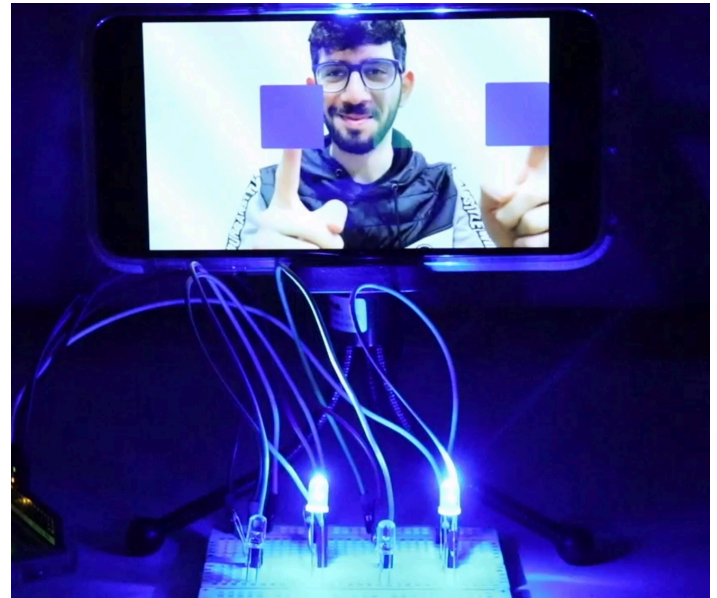
Figure 1- screenshot of simulation one.

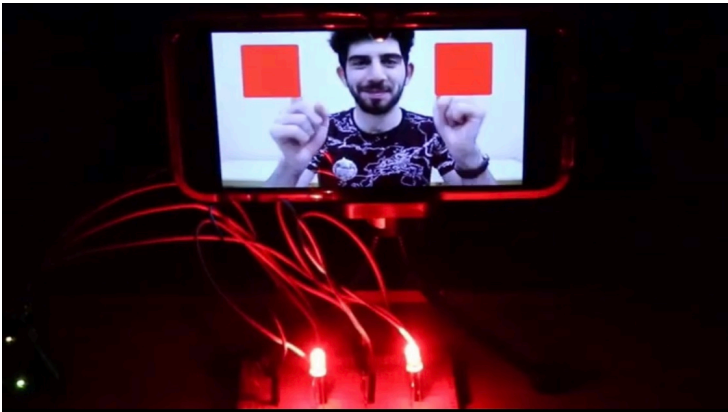Figure 2- screenshot of simulation two.

Figure 3- screenshot of simulation three.

Upon completion of the three simulations, the artist felt comfortable with the technical components of the series and was ready for exploration of more creative sequencing in the videos. This led to the first couple sequenced videos of *LIGHT-hearted* where two phone screens were used, with the artist appearing on a rendered video in one phone screen talking to himself in another rendered video in a second phone screen (see fig. 4). With a combination of additional animation, different colored LEDs, and some rather humorous dance choreography, the video series was really starting to come together.
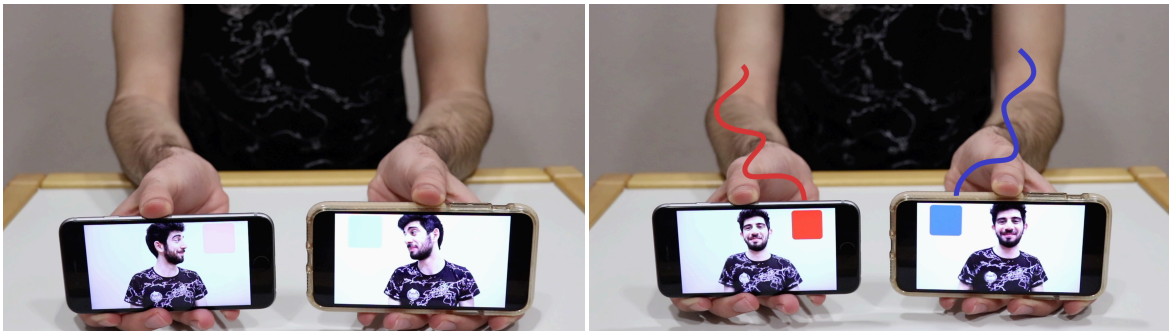
Figure 4- two screenshots of "You Ready?" - the first of the *LIGHT-hearted* sequenced videos.

That is, until a problem with formatting the series arose. The first four videos averaged about twenty seconds, and the artist's original intentions were to create ten minutes of content. This led him to decide that there should be some sort of storyline tying all the videos together. A storyline would allow the videos to extend longer– as there would be more scripting and more going on. But, after getting roughly five of the ten minutes of content under this new scope completed, and after spending countless hours on the longer videos, the artist started questioning if this is the route the series should go. He started seeing that many more efforts in character development and theatrics were taking place rather than focusing on the initial goal of the series, which was to highlight video editing, electronic music production, and technological proficiency in a creative and fun environment. While a narrative tying the videos together would have arguably given the series good substance and memorability, the artist was confident that more of the short, simple videos ranging between ten and forty-five seconds would be really effective in showcasing these fun and lighthearted videos that are easily shareable online and that demonstrate his personality and creativity. He went ahead and made three more fun, lighthearted, and humorous videos to close out the series, all of which continued the use of phone screens, dance music, LEDs, simple animation, and dance choreography.

Mini Racerz is the second of three original video series of this project. It is a self-developed interactive Instagram page that is comprised of, to date, seventy-five original animations made and uploaded every day. Each animation has a different racetrack design created using Adobe Illustrator and Adobe After Effects, with little cars racing around them via keyframe animations done in Final Cut Pro X (see fig. 5). This video series started as a very simple Instagram story post made in late 2018 and has now become a large racing community that grew to six hundred followers in the Instagram page's first three months. Read on to understand how this video series works and how followers of the Instagram page can be active participants.
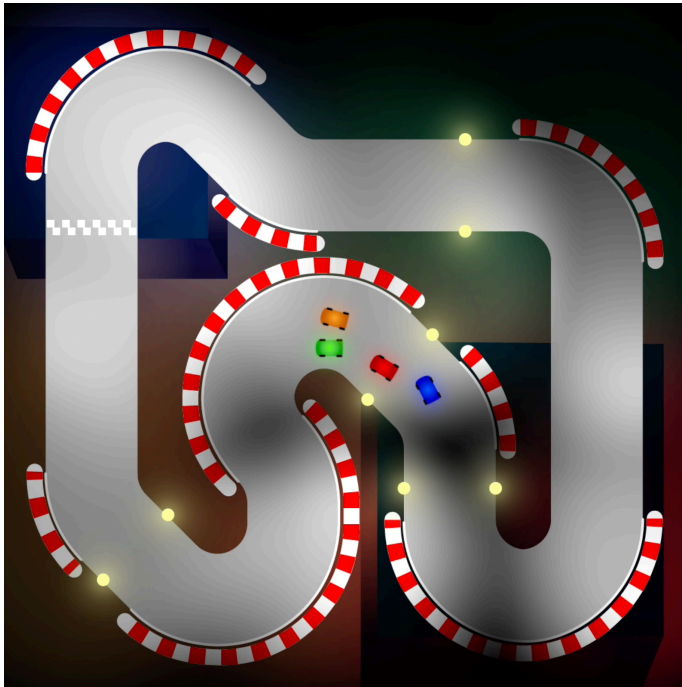

Figure 5- screenshot of *Mini Racerz*,
Track 25 from Season 3.

The day before a race animation is posted, a voting ballot is uploaded to the page's story utilizing Instagram's unique "questions" feature. On the ballot, everyone is asked which color car they think will win in the next race. Those votes are collected and saved until the race is posted to the page. Once the race is posted, the followers of the page open up Instagram at their convenience and watch the animation to see who wins. If they guessed the right color, they get a shoutout on the page's story and they are given one point. Whoever has the most wins during a current season gets put up on a leaderboard that is posted bi-weekly. Seasons are twenty-five races long and whoever holds the most wins by the end is crowned the 'Mini Racerz Season Champion' and is sent a little golden car magnet. Moreover, each race animation features the artist's original electronic dance music playing in the background, making the video series quite effective for the overall mission of this video project as a whole– bringing fun and lightheartedness to electronic dance music.

The last of the three original video series is Ableton Live Performances. These videos are made for the artist's YouTube channel and are meant to continue the overarching theme of having fun and being lighthearted with music. For each video, averaging about two minutes in length, the artist samples his voice with different words and phrases and compiles them into a folder. He then plans out a performance on a Novation Launchpad Pro and creates various beats in Ableton Live, using a combination of those samples he made, MIDI notes, and sound design. With the videos often being humorous, he enjoys coming up with vocal samples that echo words and phrases in pop culture (e.g., "Yas!"). Once a live performance is fully practiced and ready to go, the artist films it and uploads it to YouTube.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

In *LIGHT-hearted*, innovation is present in the artist's approach to convey fun and lightheartedness in music and art. Due to this video series not being just a filmed performance, and also not being just an edited video with visuals going on amongst various media, the artist has managed to create an interesting hybrid where he can not only display his sense of humor and personality in the performative aspects of this series, but is also able to display an artistic aspect through his creative sequencing and unique approach to using different forms of technology. Utilizing phone screens, dance music, LEDs with Arduino coding, animation, and dance choreography, he attempts to have the various digital and technological mediums used in a new and fresh way, and obtains an engaging and fun environment while clearly showing what his personality is and who he is as an artist.

Mini Racerz pushes the boundaries of what an Instagram page can be and tests what we think of when we say "social media page". Rather than a place to post latest performances, promos, music videos, etc., *Mini Racerz* goes beyond a typical artist Instagram page by incorporating elements of interactivity, daily participation, and incentives to win a real life prize by being a competitor and beating out other fellow competitors (followers) of the page. It attempts to create a new mini game space on Instagram and is forming a community in the process.

The Ableton Live Performances differ from other performances because of the unique vocal sampling done and how the artist chooses to sequence them. The video series is current and in the now and is aimed at bringing fun and humor to other's lives. It features electronic music that attempts to entertain many by being specific to trends and phrases said at specific time

periods. Like *LIGHT-hearted*, it is unique and innovative in how the artist exhibits his personality in a fun and creative way.

NEW SKILLS ACQUIRED

In *LIGHT-hearted*, new skills include coding with Arduino, working with LEDs, and being able to work with many different mediums simultaneously. This helps the artist's future because he can show that he not only has proficiency in music and video production, respectively, but can also creatively and compellingly work with many mediums for one project.

Mini Racerz helps the artist work efficiently in Adobe After Effects and also massively improves his daily work flow and file management and organization. After Effects was a software he was unfamiliar with prior to his graduate studies, and since starting this video series he gained substantial comfort in navigating and creating within the interface. Due to the video series being daily, the artist has also greatly improved his daily workflow with his art and has gained beneficial file management and organization skills.

The Ableton Live Performances allow the artist to acquire new electronic performance skills within Ableton. He has gained much more familiarity with the interface in general and has greatly improved his navigating and creating within the software, especially with sound synthesis and in creating sound design. The series also helped him in getting better at promoting videos on YouTube, where he brought his subscriber count from two-hundred eighty to five-hundred seventy in the span of five videos uploaded over four months.

CHALLENGES

As already mentioned, the biggest challenge with *LIGHT-hearted* was questioning whether or not there should be a storyline connecting all the videos. With a storyline came extra effort in developing characters and the theatrics of it all, and the artist came to the conclusion that shorter videos simply showcasing his use of various mediums and his personality would be effective in conveying the overall mission of the series and the project at large.

Mini Racerz, being a daily video series, is a challenge in and of itself. The artist spends two to four hours a day creating the animations which does not include the extra time it takes to upload to Instagram and keep tallies of the competitors' wins. Making sure there was enough time allotted each day was the biggest task.

No major challenges or problems arose with the Ableton Live Performances, other than the artist sometimes sitting and working for too long at his home studio and not taking enough breaks or standing up and walking around.

FUTURE RAMIFICATIONS

These three video series are only the beginning of the artist's journey. With the knowledge and skills now gained from his studies, and with perhaps a higher budget, he would like to continue working on all three video series, among new ones, to progress his artistic vision and continue his mission. He hopes to eventually work for companies such as Disney, Pixar, or somewhere of the like, and sees that these three video series were a great form of practice to start heading down that potential career path. Higher budgets and more time to improve may also result in larger stage projects and higher quality videos. The artist could also see his work

making an appearance in the contemporary art world, and will work hard to get his art seen in different settings and various formats.

CONCLUSION

Have Fun Be Lighthearted proved to be a challenging yet rewarding project. Through creating the three original video series and using many mediums, the artist has multiple videos to now show in his portfolio, and in the process of making the videos, has also really started developing his artist brand. Many more projects will come in the future, and the artist will strive to continue his mission of bringing fun and lightheartedness to music and art. He has shown his personality in differing and innovative ways throughout this project and looks forward to bringing positivity to future viewers' lives in all that he creates.

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     31, 2018. http://www.stifeltheatre.com/news/detail/coloring-the-world-blue-the-history-

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