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Cesar Uriel Rios Garrido

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Cesar Uriel Rios Garrido

Lanier Sammons

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Commercial Impacts of the *FIFA* Soundtrack Effect for Artists

There is no doubt that music helps better the gaming experience of any video game fanatic. Music can be found in video games across all different genres and is used for different purposes. Whether players find themselves fixing their formations in *FIFA 20* while listening to “Yo x Ti, Tu x Mi” or hear “Subwoofer Lullaby” in the background while running from a creeper in *Minecraft*, that feeling from both experiences would be extremely different with the absence of music. Various videogame franchises release original music along with their games. However, sports video games typically use previously written songs as the majority of their soundtrack. Soundtracks in games like *FIFA*, *NBA 2K*, and *Madden NFL* catapult both small and big artists’ careers and help them reach new audiences around the globe. Artists note the success levels of the soundtrack and look for a similar sound when pitching their work. As EA Sports Senior Music Supervisor mentions, “In fact, I’ve had artists and industry partners pitch their music to me, isolating one song in particular and saying, ‘this sounds like a *FIFA* song.’ To me, that’s that highest compliment we can get” (Butler). It is clear that inclusion in a game like *FIFA 21* boosts an artist’s growth and audience. With that clear, the real question is, how effective is this exposure? Do all artists get the same boost, or does this mostly affect big artists or have more impact for smaller artists?

Even though *FIFA* is now well known for its soundtrack and gameplay, the franchise had different beginnings back in the 1990s. With more than 20 versions under the title of *FIFA*, the soundtrack for this game has evolved and grown throughout all the different versions. The first title under the *FIFA* saga was *FIFA International Soccer*. Unlike newer and current versions of the game, that first delivery of *FIFA* included tracks exclusively composed for the game by Jeff Van Dyck. For the next three versions of the game, *FIFA 95*, *96* and *97*, EA decided to follow the same concept as in the first version. Composers for the next three versions included Jeff Van Dyck, Graeme Coleman and Mark Ortiz respectively. The fifth version of the series, *FIFA 98 Road To World Cup*, was the first to include previously written music as part of its soundtrack. The soundtrack included six songs, five of them falling under the genre of electronic music and one under alternative rock. From the six songs in the soundtrack five of them were performed by The Crystal Method and one by Hugga Bear ("*FIFA Soundtracks*"). The Crystal Method is an American band from Las Vegas. Just like the songs included in *FIFA 98 Road To World Cup*, their music is considered to be a mix of electronic dance with a rock feeling ("*The Crystal Method*"). At this time *FIFA* was not as globally established as it is today, therefore the lack of diversity in artists and genres existed.

After that first change in terms of soundtrack, the series continued to feature different artists and started to include other genres as well. Along with the integration of new genres came the integration of both renowned and unknown artists from different countries and languages. In 2003, *FIFA Football 2004* was the first version to include songs in languages other than English. The soundtrack for that year's game included songs in Spanish, Portuguese and German. The inclusion of new languages in the

soundtrack allowed artists from countries like Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Germany to be part of the video game. International bands included Cafe Tacuba, Vicentico, Tribalistas and Wir Sind Helden (“*FIFA Soundtracks*”). These new bands offered new sub-genres of rock like pop-rock and Latin rock. In contrast this year’s version of FIFA offers more than 10 different genres and comes with a separate soundtrack for each of the two main modes. The main soundtrack includes forty-three songs while the secondary has sixty-two; a couple of the songs are included on both soundtracks. According to EA, the two soundtracks feature “[t]racks by more than 100 artists from 23 different countries” (“*FIFA 21 Soundtrack*”).

FIFA soundtracks have evolved in all aspects; the inclusion of more and more songs, artists, and genres have created high expectations for each year’s soundtrack. Along all the years and different versions of *FIFA* the repertoire has expanded. Within all the versions, the soundtracks have included songs by recognized artists like Avicii, Imagine Dragons, The Strokes, J. Balvin, Bomba Estereo, Ozuna and many more. All these artists have helped the soundtrack play a key role in the game’s popularity but not all of these artists have iconic songs in the game. Four songs are emblematic of the iconic songs in FIFA: “Love Me Again” by John Newman, “The Nights” by Avicii, “On Top of The World” by Imagine Dragons and “Wavinhas’ Flag” by K’naan. Each of these songs has more than 250 million views per official video on YouTube (Avicii, Imagine Dragons, K’Naan, Newmann). These songs have also been included in many of the *Billboard* charts. Newman’s song reached the thirtieth spot in the Hot 100 in March of 2014, six months after the release of *FIFA 14* (“John Newmann”). Avicii’s “The Nights” was featured in *FIFA 15* and also reached high positions on different chart categories. In

April 2015, this song peaked at the third position of the Dance Club Songs, staying in the chart for thirteen weeks. Other charts featuring “The Nights” were the Australia Digital Song Sales, Mexico Airplay and the Bubbling Under Hot 100 (“Avicii”). Imagine Dragons’ song from *FIFA 13* was able to make it into the Hot 100 Songs. The highest position for the song was position 79 and it stayed in that chart for 20 weeks. Other chart appearances include the Alternative Digital Song Sales, Canada Hot AC, Bubbling Under Hot 100 and Alternative Airplay (“Imagine Dragons”). Lastly, “Wavin’ Flag” made it into the Hot 100 chart. The song featured in *2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa* stayed in the chart for 7 weeks while peaking at position 82. K’naan’s song also reached the first position of the Euro Digital Song Sales, as well as reaching high positions in France, Italy, Spain and UK’s Digital Song Sales (“K’Naan”). All these *Billboard* chart appearances happened after the release of their respective *FIFA* feature. As we can see through the short history of the *FIFA* video game series, the game helps songs become iconic and recognized. As Andrew Butler, an editor at *Dream Team*, says, “Play any one of a certain age Idlewild’s classic ‘You Held The World In Your Arms’ and there’s a good chance they’ll say: ‘That was on *FIFA 2003*, right?’ Certain songs from years gone by are now simply known as ‘FIFA tunes.’”

While describing the impact of *FIFA*’s soundtracks, EA’s President of Music, Stefan Schnur, says, “Originally, EA Sports *FIFA* soundtracks reflected world culture... Today, the EA Sports *FIFA* soundtracks have become culture” (Woodcock). So how does the soundtrack for a video game become culture? How does a video game like *FIFA* get the soundtrack for each year’s game? What is the process for the selection of

the songs? The process is very extensive and involves different people and duties.

Schnur talks about the process:

At EA, every soundtrack starts with a blank page, open ears, and the very best A&R team in the music industry...The only rule I have for my staff is that they cannot listen to the radio or read sales charts. Instead, we talk to everybody who works at every label (major and indie) in the US, London, Argentina, Spain, Brazil, Japan, Australia, France, India, South Africa, Germany and everywhere in between. We follow hundreds of independent labels and local scenes...Most of all, we pay attention to what's happening as much as we do to what's not happening in music on a global scale. If a song is currently on the radio or on top of the charts, it's already past its peak for us. Everything we do, particularly any sports games with a year in the title, must move music forward for the entire year to come.

According to Cybele Pettus, EA Sports Senior Music Supervisor, the journey is a long process where they look to represent many different parts of the world while also including renowned and less known artists. Pettus mentions, "We start the process almost a year before the game is released, so we have to be a combination of ultimate A&R (artists and repertoire) scout and music trend Nostradamus" ("How *FIFA* Brings"). The process starts with the team listening to the thousand of songs submitted to them. These songs can be pitched by artists, labels, managers or publishers. The team curates all the submissions through different phases and ends up with a small group of tracks to decide from. Pettus tells us, "We receive thousands of songs each year for *FIFA* soundtrack consideration, which must then be whittled down to a manageable pile. We listen together as a team, bounce ideas off one another, and often hotly debate

about artists and songs we love and feel strongly about " (Butler). Strong connections will help place your music in *FIFA*. Pettus mentions, "Having strong relationships helps, too. Of the 100-plus songs featured on the "*FIFA 21*" and "*FIFA 21 VOLTA*" playlists, 21 are from AWAL and its parent company Kobalt Music, who begin the pitch process for each *FIFA* release as early as February – if not sooner" (Hampp).

Even though having connections is helpful, smaller artists can also submit their songs for a chance to be in the soundtrack. According to Mary Woodcock, "The simplest way to go about getting your music in the *FIFA 21* Soundtrack is to submit it to EA" (Woodcock). EA has an intended email address for song submissions not only for *FIFA* but all the other video games they create. The process for creating the *FIFA* soundtrack is so extensive and broad because there are many submissions from different companies. Bradley Patter, associate director of creative synch at Kobalt Music, talks about already having ideas for *FIFA 22*, "I already have ideas going up for *FIFA 22*... We basically treat it as a year-round process. We're in constant communication with our writers and artists...so we can do playbacks with the EA team...[and] we'll get feedback on...which artists they want to hear more from and hopefully whittle down to a few placements" (Hampp). The work to create the soundtrack has now extended to other companies' agendas because they know of the global impact *FIFA* has, many companies and artists want to be part of it. Schnur mentioned how *FIFA* soundtracks reflect culture; for this reason the genres in the soundtrack are very diverse and take a long process to curate. Schnur points out certain challenges they face when creating each year's soundtrack:

The challenges of *FIFA* are particularly unique in that we want to find exciting new artists and songs that represent as many nations and genres as possible, then introduce them to the world. For *FIFA '11*, we're excited that Brazilian fans of Zémaria and Tulipa are hearing England's Ladytron and Sweden's Ram Di Dam. We're proud that Americans who love Linkin Park are discovering Ireland's Two Door Cinema Club and South Africa's Locnville. We wanted fans throughout Japan, France and Australia to find that their new favorite song is by Ana Tijou from Chile, Dapuntobeat from Mexico or Chromeo from Canada. Our goal with every *FIFA* soundtrack is to take the globalization of new music and new artists to a whole new level.

Schnur mentions how Americans discover artists from other countries by listening to the soundtrack. In an interview with the band DaPuntoBeat from Mexico, they mentioned how after being featured in the soundtrack they were getting messages from people in different countries (Dapuntobeat). This goes to show the reach of the soundtrack in comparison to other franchises presented by EA. In contrast to *FIFA*, *Madden*, an American football series by EA, does not have the exposure that *FIFA* offers. With respect to both *FIFA* and *Madden* soundtracks, Schnur says:

I'm incredibly proud of what we've accomplished with both our *Madden* and *FIFA* brands. Year after year, we've introduced some of the hottest new bands in the world including Franz Ferdinand, Jet, Ozomatli, Tribalistas, OK Go, Kasabian, Bloc Party, Avenged Sevenfold, Damian Marley, Arctic Monkeys, Kings Of Leon, K'naan, Yonderboi, MGMT and The Ting Tings through two of the very best sports game franchises in history. Even though there is a similar approach taken when

creating both *Madden* and *FIFA* soundtracks, diversity is not as present in *Madden* as it is in *FIFA*. The lack of diversity can be for many different reasons. For example, *Madden* is not marketed as globally as *FIFA*. A vast majority of *Madden* players are from the United States, making it clear why different sounds are not as important for this targeted audience. Another reason could be the size of both soundtracks. For this year's release *FIFA* has more than 50 songs while *Madden* only has 18 songs. Looking at *Madden 21*'s playlist most of the artists are American rappers. Stunna Girl, Tokyo's Revenge and Juice Wrld are examples of the rap influence predominance in the *Madden* soundtrack ("Madden 21").

More than a specific genre, the team in charge looks for a particular sound that is similar to recent *FIFA* versions. Pettus describes the *FIFA* soundtrack as, "A sound that's globally rhythmic, consistently surprising, and yes, always decidedly ahead of the curve" (Butler). *FIFA* has established a sound so now artists create their work around that sound, they try to create something that will work with the game. An example of that is Niña Dioz, a Mexican rapper whose song "Primero" is part of this year's *Volta Football* soundtrack. This is what Niña Dioz said after being questioned on how the song came to be, "The craziest thing was that I first did the song thinking that it could work perfect for the video game, and suddenly, pum, it happened!" (Reyna).

Even though *FIFA* soundtracks try to have a set standard for the sound they want, they hardly repeat artists in their repertoire. Two cases of repeating artists include Bomba Estereo and Chromeo. The Colombian band, Bomba Estereo, is featured in three editions of *FIFA* while Chromeo is present in two of the more than 20 soundtracks ("*FIFA* Soundtracks"). Keeping the same essence in their soundtracks while constantly

discovering new artists makes the game's soundtrack have such high expectations. It is no surprise that the process for choosing the songs for the playlist starts a year before the release of the game. The *FIFA* soundtrack has now gained attention from collaborators at companies other than EA. For this reason label managers are focused on delivering for each year's new soundtrack. For example, Jessica Kashdan, manager of creative synch at AWAL, calls *FIFA 21* the "holy grail in the entire sync business." Kashdan elaborates, "It's because of how pivotal and integrated the music is into the soundtrack. And *FIFA* has this captivating audience that's gravitating around the music. In my personal experience, I can't even count how many times I've heard someone say, 'Oh I know this music, it's from *FIFA*'" (Hampp).

Besides bettering the experience of the game, the soundtrack also looks to give exposition to new and upcoming artists. Yes, there are some established artists in the soundtrack. However, taking a closer look there are also small artists from different backgrounds, genres, languages and countries. Schnur talks about the effect of *FIFA* in upcoming artists' careers:

EA has a long history of placing independent and sometimes unsigned new artists in games, and we absolutely believe that our commitment to them has had a significant impact on their global careers. I'm always looking for artists who are original...and understand the unique relationship between music, gaming and the international gaming community. We love the passion and energy of new artists, and we'll continue to work with them every chance we get. Most of all, we love being far ahead of the curve: Our goal with every soundtrack we create is to

introduce gamers to their favorite new band through the experience of an EA game.

In today's world social media followers act as parameters of popularity. Looking at the more than 100 artists for this year's soundtrack, twenty of them have less than fifty-thousand followers on Instagram, one of the most popular social platforms. Out of those twenty artists, eight of them currently have less than ten-thousand followers.

Niña Dioz is one of the artists in which the EA music department has believed even with a low following on social media. Carla Reyna or "Niña Dioz" is a Mexican-born, LA-based rapper. Dioz, who was born in Monterrey, Mexico, has also been featured as part of another video game's soundtrack (Alonso). Dioz's "Criminal Sound (El hijo de la cumbia Remix)" was part of the GTA 5 soundtrack. This song is part of the East Los FM station repertoire. When asked how her song "Primero " got placed in *FIFA* and how it helped her career Niña Dioz mentions, "It's agencies that are looking for songs. Those who choose the songs are called music supervisors and their function is just that, to find music that works with the soundtrack of what they want to do. And it does help to boost song plays and get your name out there to people who still don't know you" (Reyna). As Niña Dioz said, being part of the soundtrack does help to get recognition and streams in platforms, how much it helps can be measured in different ways and vary from artist to artist.

Another artist featured in this year's soundtrack is the band De Lux with their song "Cool Up." De Lux is a band from Los Angeles, California, formed by Sean Guerin and Isaac Franco ("Artist to Watch"). For the duo, this was actually the second time being part of the game. One of their songs had already been featured in *FIFA 17* during a "Goals of

the Week" highlight video. When asked about how the song reached the team behind the soundtrack, Gurein said, "FIFA had originally used a different song of ours through, I think, FIFA 17 Goals of the Week. So we were already on their radar when they wanted to use 'Cool Up' in *FIFA 21*." In terms of recognition and streams in platforms, Sean mentioned, "Definitely noticed an increase in listens on Spotify and Apple. There are dozens of playlists for *FIFA* that include our song which adds to that." Lastly, this is what Sean had to say when asked about ticket sales after the feature in *FIFA*: "In terms of purchases or ticket sales, that is to be declared because the song was announced during COVID, and we were unable to perform at that time. When shows begin to open back up, it's possible *FIFA* may have an effect in an increase of show tickets" (Guerin). The fact that De Lux has been featured in *FIFA* content two times, goes to show EA's commitment to elevating new artists' careers.

DaPuntoBeat is another small band who has been featured as part of a *FIFA* soundtrack before. DaPuntoBeat's "0 (Dos Punto Cero)" was featured in *FIFA 21*. DaPuntoBeat is a band originally from Mexico City, and their music is a mix of rock, funk and electronic elements ("Dapuntobeat"). When asked about how their inclusion in *FIFA* happened, they mentioned the importance of their publishing company: "All this happened thanks to our back then publishing company, EMI Music" (DaPuntoBeat). The band noticed the international exposure they got when they heard from people in different countries: "The greatest impact was international, we would get many messages from many other countries." DaPuntoBeat mentions their ability to capitalize the exposure from the soundtrack into performance opportunities: "Of course, being in this type of soundtrack favored us; we were sharing the stage with bands who were

known at a worldwide level” (DaPuntoBeat). DaPuntoBeat was able to convert the exposure from *FIFA 11* into show opportunities and ticket sales, and for this reason they feel the effect on their career was a great push.

Joeseef, a twenty-five year old Scottish indie/pop singer and songwriter, is just another example of *FIFA* launching careers to greater levels. Joeseef’s “Does It Make You Feel Good?” was launched in sync with the *FIFA 21* release; the game was launched on October 6 while the single hit streaming platforms a day after and the full EP on the 9th. This coordination helped the single score spots on 22 of Spotify’s global New Music Friday playlists and 43 of Apple Music’s New Daily playlists. That collective exposure, coupled with EA Sports’ own FIFA’ 21 Spotify playlist (26,000+ followers), helped “Feel Good” achieve a 680% leap in total streams from October 8 to 9, and a full-week boost of 1,500%. In its first week of release, the song has been streamed more than 212,000 times on Spotify alone (Hampp). Today, the official video has a bit over three hundred and fifty-thousand views on YouTube (Joeseef). The *FIFA* soundtrack has given these artists a chance to be discovered through its global platform. Along all this years’ soundtracks there are many other upcoming artists who have also been affected in a positive way by being featured in the video game series.

While the exposure given to new upcoming artists is undeniable for the *FIFA* franchise, “big” artists also benefit from their songs being featured. Dua Lipa, pop singer, is the most influential artist in the soundtrack; she is a Grammy award winner from England (“Dua Lipa” [IMDb]). Not only does Dua Lipa feature as an artist in the soundtrack, but she also appears as a playable character in the Volta mode. Anitta and the band Royal blood are two other major artists featured this year. Anitta is a Brazilian

singer from Rio de Janeiro who performed at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games opening ceremony (“Anitta” [IMDb]). Royal Blood is an English duo from Brighton formed by Mike Kerr and Ben Thatcher (Barker). In 2015 they were awarded by the British Phonographic Industry with the Brit Award for Best British Group (Hann). These artists reinforce EA’s idea of creating a soundtrack that’s globally marketable. All of these artists’ songs appeared at the top of *Billboard* charts after the release of *FIFA 21*. Dua Lipa’s “Love Is Religion” peaked at the fourteenth position of the Dance/Electronic digital sales category in January (“Dua Lipa” [Billboard]). Anitta’s song “Me Gusta” featuring Cardi B and Myke Towers reached the fifth position of the Global Chart. Anitta’s collaboration also appeared in the Hot 100, Argentina’s Hot 100, Hot Latin Songs and Mexico Pop Español Airplay. “Me Gusta” lasted several weeks in most of these charts and reached top 10 in some of them. The song reached said positions three months after the release date and two months after the release of the game (“Anitta” [Billboard]). Lastly, Royal Blood’s “Trouble’s Coming” peaked at the first position of the Canada Rock chart and was featured in the chart for thirty-two weeks. This song was also able to secure the second spot on the Rock and Alternative Airplay chart four months after the game’s release (“Royal Blood”). Studying the *Billboard* charts shows just how much of an impact the game’s soundtrack has on renowned artists’ careers. On the other hand, smaller artists don’t appear on charts but do appear on thousands of *FIFA* players’ radars.

So, how effective is it to be featured in a FIFA soundtrack? It definitely is a big help for upcoming artists. It helps them have a platform to show their work to millions of people from all parts of the world. The artists I was able to contact all had a positive

mindset when talking about their appearance in *FIFA*. They all mentioned the opportunities they encountered after appearing in the game. Either by gaining new listeners on platforms, new followers on social media, or by being able to share the stage with big bands, all these upcoming artists benefited from the soundtrack's influence. Artists like Joesef, Nina Dioz, Dapuntobeat and De Lux are only some of the upcoming artists that have been positively affected by being featured in the video game series soundtrack. At the same time, recognized artists like Dua Lipa, Anitta and Royal Blood are also getting a push from *FIFA*. Their featured work has been positioned at the top of many *Billboard* charts, and official videos for their songs have accumulated hundreds of thousands of views. It is no surprise to check the comment section and encounter a comment with a couple "likes" saying, "FIFA brought me here." If we ask, do all artists get the same push from the soundtrack? Though that is a difficult question, it is evident there is a benefit from being in it. The franchise will likely be growing for the years coming just like it has been doing for the past 10 to 15 years. What that means for new artists is that they will participate in the growth of a platform to create connections and gain new audiences from different countries. As the game itself grows, the *FIFA* soundtrack will continue to be an effective way of pushing recognized artists to high chart positions and placing upcoming artists on the players' radars.

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