Berklee College of Music

The Chariot: A Narrative Exploration in

the Digital World

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Abstract

With music now being consumed almost entirely in a digital realm, musicians today are tasked with not only creating compelling work, but distributing it with a unique approach that gives listeners another dimension to enjoy the music. Using the web is the most obvious route nowadays for music delivery, but this is rarely executed in an elegant way. Utilizing the web as a medium of artful expression, the Culminating Experience by Sam Kittinger, titled *The Chariot*, implements web design and development to create an online experience that showcases the conceptual narrative of a five-track original EP with an accompanying music video and interactive ancillary graphics.

1. Introduction

Coming from a creative background, Sam Kittinger worked as a visual artist and graphic designer, graduating with a Bachelors in Graphic Design in 2012. Through his time at school in Baltimore, Kittinger began writing and producing music as an additional artistic outlet. After graduating, he became more serious about music production, eventually releasing his debut album under the moniker Güttinger in 2017. The album collected songs written and recorded over a three-year period, and began to inform the sound Güttinger desired to embody. The debut album was released without fanfare, however, as no release plan or promotion was planned.

After deciding it was time to stop thinking of music as a hobby to be kept in the dark, Kittinger applied to Berklee Valencia's Masters in Music Production, Technology and Innovation program. His proposal for the culminating experience was to create a conceptual EP with a web component that users could interact with to explore the music in a more tailored environment. Six months later, Kittinger arrived in Valencia, Spain to start a year-long journey that would challenge him as an artist and producer.

2. Background

A variety of influences were identified for the music and visuals of *The Chariot*. Sonically, traditional Nordic folk songs, Perfume Genius' 2017 album *No Shape*, and Björk's orchestral-focused work spoke to the desire to create a dark palette that complements electronic compositions with sweeping symphonic layers. Visually, inspiration was pulled from Icelandic installation artist Olafur Eliasson (figure 1) and Japanese designer Yusaku Kamekura (figure 2), resulting in an aesthetic that plays in the space between saturated realism and blurred expressionism. The web experience draws inspiration programmatically and visually from the promotional website for the film *The Revenant*[1]: images and text move with the user's cursor, creating faux three-dimensional spaces.[1]
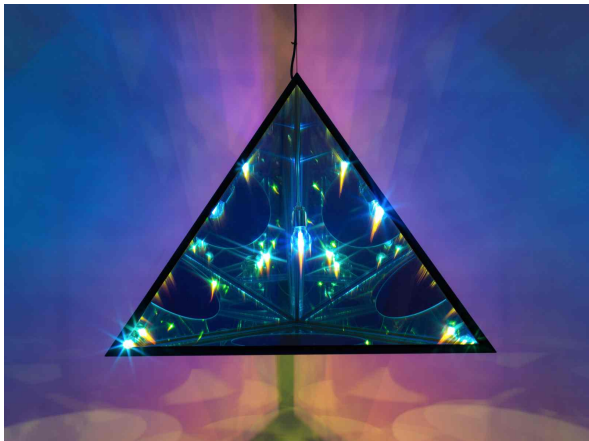

Figure 1. Eliasson, Olafur. The tetrahedral night. 2017. The tetrahedral night. In Olafureliasson.net. http://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK11050 1/the-tetrahedral-night#slideshow.
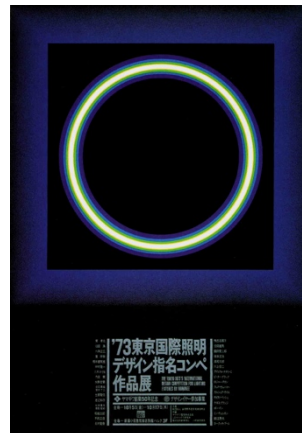
Figure 2. Kamekura, Yusaku. Tokyo International Design Competition for Lighting Fixtures. 1973. In Gurafiku. September 19, 2017. http://gurafiku.tumblr.com/post/165506360641/japanese -poster-tokyo-international-design.

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[1] The Revenant. http://200miles.com/.

3. Review of the State of the Arts

Research for this culminating experience has shown that while many musicians use the web to promote and supply extra content that coincides with releases, there currently aren't examples of website that follow—through sound, video, and collateral visuals—a conceptual narrative surrounding a release. Some websites that accompany releases collect relevant videos and provide streaming options[2], but do not fully reflect a narrative thread through the website itself. Artists have, in the past, created visual albums that feature music accompanied by videos that progress an overarching narrative, but without considering an artful way to exhibit these collections online.[3] Other promotional websites are just that—informational pages that, while beautifully designed, do not serve a larger musical narrative.[4] In this way, *The Chariot* is a unique online release.

4. Description

The five original tracks for *The Chariot* follow a conceptual narrative that pulls inspiration from the major arcana of tarot. The story revolves around a cast of characters based on some of the aforementioned major arcana, including 'the magician,' 'the chariot,' and 'the hanged man.' The music has flexible pop compositions that feature symphonic flourishes with instances of complex time signatures. Lyrics for the songs do not outright tell the EP's story in

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[2] Rag'n'Bone Man. http://www.ragnbonemanmusic.com/.

[3] Iamamiwhoami. https://www.youtube.com/user/iamamiwhoami.

[4] Nosaj Thing - No Reality. http://nosajthing.com/NR/.

full; however, the track compositions follow an emotional narrative that are mirrored in the visual elements of the video and website.

The music video for "The Hanged Man," directed by Valencia-based director and designer David Gaspar, was shot in Albufera, south of Valencia. The video was shot with a small crew and a few actors over a couple weekends, with editing and post-production completed in the weeks following. The video depicts a small portion of the EP's narrative–a turning point in the story where feelings of pride and despair are turned to wrath. The cast and visual palette is a unifier for both the video and non-video visuals created as additional pieces of the website.

Lastly, the website for *The Chariot* brings music and visuals together in a uniquely engaging experience for users. The scrolling single-page website uses small instances of videography and motion-controlled graphics to introduce tracks without accompanying music videos, and ultimately progresses the narrative of the EP. "The Hanged Man" music video is placed prominently in the middle of the experience, giving the audience a much fuller view into the narrative. Lyrics appear alongside each track, with credits included further down the website.

5. Innovative Aspects

The Chariot was created to showcase the student's abilities both as a musician and designer. Artistic growth was a primary goal of *The Chariot*, especially in regards to songwriting and producing, and in this aspect, the artist has innovated their own artistic identity. Additionally, *The Chariot* collects a musical narrative, including music, video, and ancillary graphics, into an online experience. This unprecedented product, excluding the music video, was

created solely by the student, and features expertise across many different mediums: production, video editing, design, and web development.

6. New Skills Acquired

The MPTI Program at Berklee Valencia was a jump-start for many new skills. Many new production and mixing skills were obtained over the course of the MPTI program, in addition to learning studio workflow and proper vocal recording techniques. This project has also been the first experience working with other musicians for compositional and mixing advice in addition to instrumental overdubs, including how to mic different instruments and how to instruct musicians on obtaining the material desired for a recording. The value of the program was amplified by the drive to complete this project to its full potential, making use of different peers' skills and resources made available by Berklee.

7. Challenges

The Chariot presented many challenges and required an immense amount of learning to achieve such a broad scope. Creating songs that challenged the student to work outside their comfort zone meant overcoming obstacles such as discomfort about sharing work, collaborating with peers and outside artists, and learning new skills. Personal, mental hurdles were the primary setback for much of the work: forming relationships with peers and collaborators in addition to finding time to complete the work with these collaborators was a challenge that was eventually

overcome with time management skills and consistent communication. Having the necessary knowledge to work within a studio and how to mix was a hardship that was conquered with the help of instruction by the faculty and fellow peers. Many challenged faced by the student were alleviated by having a peer group and faculty that were supportive of the vision and execution of *The Chariot*.

8. Future Ramifications

The Chariot is still an incomplete project. The sentiment that making the music is only a small portion of the battle is true for this project, as the next steps of marketing and releasing *The Chariot* have yet to begin. However, as a whole, *The Chariot* is an innovative project that will hopefully usher in a new wave of musicians that wish to showcase their project online in a more thoughtful experience. The hope is that *The Chariot* will inspire others to combine skills already known with the desire to learn and apply new skills and push outside their comfort zone. Additionally, the amount of passion put into this project ensure that the student will more fully consider how to release and market *The Chariot*.

9. Conclusion

The final culmination of *The Chariot* allows users to unfold a musical story in unexpected ways, blending visual artistry with a technical medium. Contrasting pop structures, industrial production, and orchestral flourishes will engage listeners with a sophisticated, listenable sonic palette. Finally, combining the website and music with expertly crafted imagery

and video allows the audience to fully grasp the conceptual narrative of *The Chariot*. With these methods, a cohesive artistic statement is presented to the audience.

The Chariot is a profound project for Sam Kittinger, and the scope of work accomplished over the past year has encouraged him to continue to improve upon this and future projects, taking his work out of the dark and into the public eye.

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