

Virtual reality, apps add interactivity to music videos

April 25 2017, by Kristin M. Hall



In this Nov. 24, 2016, file photo, country music singer Eric Church performs at halftime during an NFL football game between the Washington Redskins and Dallas Cowboys in Arlington, Texas. Church is one of many musicians using new technology, including 360-degree cameras, virtual reality musical experiences and vertical videos, to reach the smart phone generation of music fans who are discovering new music on their phones and tablets. (AP Photo/Ron Jenkins, File)

More musicians are using new technology, including 360-degree cameras, virtual reality musical experiences and vertical videos, to reach the smartphone generation of music fans who are discovering new music on their phones and tablets.

Pop singer Ingrid Michaelson made a music video using only Snapchat filters and the electronic band Gorillaz released a six-minute VR music video that was the most successful VR video debut on YouTube with over 3 million views in 48 hours.

"We're beginning to see not only the ability to take your music and your live concert streams and your VR and 360 experiences with you on mobile devices, but to merge together the two in really unique ways to provide really fantastic experiences for fans," said Vivien Lewitt, YouTube's global head of artist relations.

Lewitt said more than 60 percent of YouTube watch time now happens on mobile and tablets.

Nineteen-year-old country singer Bailey Bryan is addicted to Instagram and loves Snapchat a little too much sometimes, so those mobile apps became the framework for her first music video for her song "Own It," which is meant to be watched vertically on a phone or tablet.

The video, which introduces Bryan through the lens of her phone's various apps, is designed not for broadcast on CMT or MTV, where previous generations first experienced music in a visual form. Bryan said most people react with confusion when she shows them the video on a cellphone.

"It starts with unlocking the phone screen ... and they will be like, 'Oh, hey, you got a Snapchat—wait, wait, what's happening?'" Bryan said. "And then they are like, 'Oh, this is the video!'"

Some bands are using VR technology via phones or headsets to add interactivity to a recorded performance. Rock band Young the Giant shot a live performance at the YouTube Space in Los Angeles with 360 cameras above, below and throughout a crowd of neon-painted dancers for a music video for its song "Silvertongue."



In this Nov. 14, 2010, file photo, the British band Gorillaz performs at London's O2 Arena. The band is one of many musicians using new technology, including 360-degree cameras, virtual reality musical experiences and vertical videos, to reach the smart phone generation of music fans who are discovering new music on their phones and tablets. (AP Photo/Mark Allan, File)

Payam Doostzadeh, bassist for the band, said it's a challenge to recreate being at a real concert on a phone.

"You're viewing it on a smaller screen, and maybe you don't have

headphones on, so you're not hearing the full sound," he said.

Fans of country star Eric Church can purchase a 360-degree video of his full 2016 Stagecoach Festival performance, which they can watch through their iPhone or Android phone via Google Cardboard or Samsung Gear VR. The "Springsteen" singer said he's not much of a VR-technology geek, but liked that the cameras gave fans a different perspective on the live show.

"There was a camera between me and my drummer and you can kind of turn around and see the drummer and turn back around and see me," Church said. "It's like you're in the middle of everything."

Members of the rock band Saint Motel have VR headsets, and frontman AJ Jackson attends VR conventions. They have been creating hybrid music videos, which Jackson called a "virtualizer," that combine a lyric video, live performance video and graphics in a 360-degree video environment.

"It's a lot of people's first VR experience," Jackson said. "You've got to take it slow and you've got to make sure everyone's first experience is great."

Jackson said he doesn't want to stop creating traditional music videos, but smartphones have opened up new avenues for visually creative bands to experiment and find new audiences.

"Everyone has a smartphone, so everyone has an ability to see these 360 videos and they all have the ability to do VR," Jackson said.

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