Rap Cypher

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About the project.

The Rap Cypher project is a creative collaboration between the Fontys Academy of the Arts and Pixel Playground (Fontys ICT). Rock Academy students create and perform raps over instrumental beats, while ArtCode and ICT students design and technically produce the visual experience around the performances. The aim is to simulate a professional production environment where students from different disciplines work together, meet deadlines, and learn to combine music, visual art, and technology. The project runs from mid-February to the end of May and includes a test shoot and a final recording day. It gives students hands-on experience in creative production, teamwork, and navigating the intersection of ICT and the arts.

What we did in short.

We first had a presentation from all the projects we could choose from. After that, we had to pick two options, and one of them was the Rap Cypher project. Once we were assigned, we had a client meeting with two of the rappers, where we got a better idea of what they wanted and what the project was about. We also picked out a date for them to come look at the video lab so that they could get a sense of where they will be rapping and to further brainstorm ideas they have.

Soon after, we started making some early storyboards for the camera angles and choreography. Around that time, Jan introduced us to a videography book that explained the importance of three key things: Mood, Tone, and Style. That's when we decided to each make three mood boards based on those three elements to explore the visual direction we could take. It helped me focus better on how I wanted the video to feel. It also helped us as a team to get on the same page.

We also had a day at Pixel Playground (the video lab), where we got to look at all the equipment we could use and got some explanation on how everything works. After that, we had another meeting with the clients to show what Niels had made for the Colosseum set. This gave them something visual to respond to and helped us get closer to their expectations.

After that meeting, we made posters to promote and explain the project. I made a first version and showed it to Lody. He gave me some quick feedback. He said it looked a bit too messy and chaotic, and he even made a quick sketch to show how I could improve the layout. In his version, he drew two gladiators, but since our concept was more about nobles, I changed it to a noble with a microphone. That change really helped tie everything together. The new version looked a lot more organized, and Lody said it was a big improvement. It also made me realize how much design is about clarity and guiding people's eyes.

After that, we had another day in the video lab where we tested out the RED camera, checked different angles, and played around with lighting. Dirk, Jan, and Josh were there too, so it was super helpful to get direct feedback while trying things out. We could see right away what worked and what didn't, and that made the process smoother.

We also had a test day with the rappers, which was our first time seeing them perform on camera. That gave us a lot of insight into what adjustments we needed to make for the final filming day.

We made a test video and started editing it using Premiere Pro. It was tricky because the RED camera separates audio and video, so I had to manually match them. One of the rappers' audio was really soft, so I cut his part and turned it into a separate track to raise the volume. It was hard, but I managed to sync everything after some trial and error.

However, I found Premiere Pro really difficult to use. The preview isn't smooth before exporting, and Niels also couldn't get it to work on his laptop. So we went to Jan for help, especially for color grading. He introduced us to DaVinci Resolve and explained how to use it to color grade the raw RED footage. That program was much easier to use, and we all started working with it. The tools were easy to find, and we got better results.

The last filming day didn't go as smoothly as we had hoped. We had agreed from the beginning of the project that the rappers would wear togas to really match the setting and make the whole scene feel cohesive. Unfortunately, only one or two of them actually brought their outfit, and the rest decided last minute that they didn't want to wear them at all. This was really frustrating for all of us, because it had been a clear and important part of our concept from early on, and changing it so late in the process felt unfair.

Jan and I talked to them about how their decision affected the team and the effort we had put into preparing everything. After the conversation, they understood where we were coming from and agreed to go and get the proper outfits. It delayed things a bit, but at least we were able to stick to the original vision.

Despite the setback, we managed to get all the filming done. It was a relief to finish it, and to top it off, Studio040 even did a feature on our project, which was super exciting and made the whole experience feel even more real and rewarding.
(link to the article: https://studio040.nl/nieuws/artikel/studenten-van-fontys-krijgen-bijzondere-technologie-om-films-mee-te-maken)

After the final filming day, everyone on the team tried out color grading the footage, and we worked together to edit the final version of the video. We then presented it to our stakeholders, and seeing everything come together in the end was a really satisfying moment.

Reflection:

This part of the project really taught me how important it is to stay flexible and communicate clearly when working in a team. When the rappers did not bring their agreed-upon outfits on the final filming day, it was frustrating because we had made that decision together early on. It felt unfair, especially since we had built the scene around that concept.

That experience showed me that it is okay to speak up when something does not feel right, especially if it affects the whole team. I learned that respectful but honest conversations can really help solve problems, even under pressure.

Seeing the project come together in the end and even getting featured by Studio040 made all the challenges worth it. It gave me more confidence in handling setbacks and showed me that taking responsibility and standing up for the project can lead to a better final result.