Mashups – Project 1

* A description of the project and intended experience

My project is called DJ Mash. The idea behind DJ Mash is to facilitate music sourcing for users. On the home page, the user is prompted to type in his/her favourite artist. After pressing enter or clicking the “enjoy” button, an embedded YouTube video of that artist’s top trending song will show up, ready to play. As simple as that. There are links to two alternative web pages: “About us” and “Our favourite albums”. The “About us” page has information on what the site is, what API’s were used and how the work, and a brief background on where the idea came from. The “Our favourite albums” web page has a collection of 8 albums from different eras and genres. If the user hovers over the album cover, a link to the full album’s YouTube video appears.

* Your motivation and process for creating it

My motivation to create DJ Mash comes from my personal experience using different music platforms. What intrigues me about the music market is that different music platforms have different tracks and remixes for the same artist. For example, for electronic music DJs, SoundCloud and YouTube are really good platforms to source “unknown” tracks and different remixes; however, Spotify is really good to source higher quality music. Radio stations, on the other hand, source tracks from different platforms and have different measures to choose what they stream on their channels. Thus, I wanted to play a bit with this music network. Once the user types in an artist’s name, a request is made to Last.fm top tracks ranking, which sends that artist’s most popular track on their platform. With that track’s name, a request is made to YouTube in order to get the corresponding video and embed it into the web page. The “About us” page acts like a “Unique Selling Point” for the project, while the “Our favourite albums” page gives the users a tailored music choice in case they want to discover new music.

* Explanation of the design decisions

When it comes to design, I follow the philosophy of “the less is more”. Therefore, I adopted a very subtle pattern as a background, and only one vinyl icon at the bottom right of the page. In order to keep the colour palette consistent, I used a plain black font. The font style is “Roboto”, which is really easy to read and aesthetically pleasing. I decided to keep the headers and paragraphs narrow relative to the width of the web page in order to give a sense of space and freedom to the user. The “About us” page gives the project an identity. The “Our favourite albums” page is me personal favourite in terms of design due to the expressive album colours and the smooth transition of the hover function. Overall, I wanted the user to feel comfortable, unconstrained, and to navigate the website with as much ease as possible.

* Major challenges you faced

There were several challenges in this project. My initial idea was to use Spotify’s and SoundCloud’s APIs to compare the same DJ’s track. However, the SoundCloud search API was temporarily unavailable, while the authentication process for the Spotify API was beyond my technical abilities at this point in time. Thus, I decided to use YouTube’s and Last.fm’s APIs, which were simpler to incorporate into my code though they slightly changed the focus of my project. Another challenge I faced was the structure of the “Our favourite albums” page and the corresponding css styling, especially the hover function. At first, I tried using Jquery’s hover function; however, I did not figure out how to include text and hyperlinks once the user hovered the mouse on top of the album cover. After some research (and some luck), I found a great sample code (ref: <http://jsfiddle.net/HAcE2/>) for the hover function using css, which I adopted to my code and fitted into the structure of the web page. Overall, it was a great learning experience.

* Possible next steps

There are several next steps that could significantly increase both the functionality and the aesthetic appeal of my web site. First of all, I could incorporate the “Our favourite albums” page into the “Home” page in order to give the user the option of searching for a particular artist or retrieving new music from our library. On top of this, instead of hard coding the album covers and the corresponding album YouTube links, I could use an “album cover API” and the “Spotify API” to create a library of albums and randomize the ones displayed on the web page every time the user hits refresh. This way, the visual element will be more appealing and the amount of music the user can have access to will be larger. Another extra step could be to add functionality to the vinyl icon on the bottom right. I was thinking of making that icon clickable, so when a user clicks on it he would be redirected to a “bonus” page, perhaps a music related game. This would add some excitement to the project and reward curious users.