



Ryan Camarda: Director/Producer

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Logline

A documentary about one composer, thousands of songs, millions of videos, and billions of views. Kevin MacLeod: he's the world's most-heard living composer that nobody's heard of.

Story and Topic Summary / Synopsis (Including cultural relevance and timeliness)

Royalty Free: The Music of Kevin MacLeod is a documentary on Kevin MacLeod, a composer who has released thousands of his songs for free and unwittingly became one of the most-heard composers in the world. The film will discuss MacLeod's practice of releasing his music "royalty free," which allows anyone to use his music for free, from the biggest Hollywood studios down to grandmas making cat videos. The film approaches the subject of Creative Commons licensing* (see further explanation of Creative Commons below)¹ through the lens of Kevin and his two-decade long practice of releasing free music, and the practice's impact on an evolving media landscape where anyone can create media that can reach millions of people.

The film also delves into the digital audio revolution, which is the digital transformation of sound that allows one person with a synthesizer keyboard to become an entire orchestra. This democratization of music has uplifted millions and enabled great creativity but it has also threatened the livelihood of analog musicians such as recording artists, orchestra, and Broadway musicians. This film explores the impact of the digital audio revolution from composers to listeners, from a single keyboard across the globe.

The content emerging from the modern internet landscape solidifies this digital audio revolution as not just a future inevitability, but a current reality. The video creators using Kevin's music reach more people on a daily basis than every cable, broadcast, and network in western media combined, based on unique internet views.

¹ Rather than fighting technology, the Creative Commons organization, which was founded in 2001, created a series of licenses that allowed people to choose how much of their rights they wanted to give away - within the Copyright system. Thus it allows musicians more freedom of choice in the distribution of their music. This has led to an explosion of creativity and sharing never seen before. In 2016 there was an estimated 1.2 billion Creative Commons licenses used.



The world of internet videos is no longer a niche platform or cute pastime that media can highlight as end of night news segments, it's a multibillion dollar industry whose stars can outearn any of the highest paid news anchors.

However, mainstream media still largely views internet content as the realm of the amateur. However the level of commercialization, professionalism, and artistic quality of today's content is not only competitive with other media, but impacting a much wider reaching subset of the population. In fact, media studies is currently focused on the importance of user-generated content to our socio political understanding of the world. We're not saying Kevin's music is changing political minds here, but we are acutely aware of the value that his music brings to content creators and their ability to achieve professional sounding videos. They bring in the audience, and Kevin's sound gives them an audiovisual credibility that they didn't have to pay for. For artists starting out, this is critical. It lends an additional layer of creative voice to their content. Anyone connected to the film industry knows that any ol' smartphone can generate gorgeous picture quality, but it's the sound that separates a professional from an amateur. Kevin's business model supports emerging artists with their craft. Yet it could also be destructive to the economic reality that devalues creative artists' work in the first place.

The film explores issues of workers' rights and technological unemployment, with creative labor being increasingly devalued and demonetized as technology advances. The film tackles both the positive and negative potential of the Creative Commons business model - exploring this very

complex environment through a diverse set of interviewees who live and create on all sides of the technological and artistic spectrum.

In 2003, the New York City based musicians' union Local 802 went on strike over the reduction of the minimum live musicians in an orchestra and fears over replacement by digital orchestras. The fear of musicians being replaced by synthesizer artists like Kevin has been going on for decades. Local 802 went on strike in 1975, 1993 and the aforementioned 2003. The number of minimum musicians for a large Broadway show has gone down from 26 to 19 musicians. In other fields such as TV, movies and video game soundtracks, synthesizer players like Kevin have a bigger impact, especially in the lower budget titles.

History has shown that every time there is a new medium or business model, the old guard tries to attack and snuff it out. When photography was first invented, painters and critics demeaned it by saying it takes no skill and lacks the artist's touch. Then when motion pictures came around, theater critics scoffed at it and said it was nothing but a fad and that film actors paled in comparison to the "true stage." When FM radio was first invented, David Sarnoff, president of the Radio Association of America at the time, managed to persuade the US government to delay the deployment of FM radio because FM was seen as a business threat to AM radio.



As Lawrence Lessig said in his book "Free Culture," we live in a Permission Culture in which oftentimes, the innovators must pay the past creators in order to be allowed to proceed. As samples get better and musicians like Kevin become increasingly capable of replacing orchestras, people have and will lose jobs. Technological unemployment is an issue we must actually grapple with, rather

than simply focusing on preventing its progression. Facing what is happening economically will allow us to explore new and innovative ways to ensure that artists can actually make a living within the current technological environment, perhaps even taking advantage of new and evolving opportunities that emerge from within it. The film includes interviews with music and technology experts, users of Kevin's music, academics, and online personalities across the web. A selection of interviews include:

Hank Green, of legendary Vlogbrothers fame (with his brother John Green), and a combined 10 million subscribers across his YouTube channels, and over 700 million views. He co-founded a worldwide convention network that includes VidCon and NerdCon.

Larry Miller, an Associate Professor and Director of the Music Business Program at New York University Steinhardt School of Business who focuses on technology and entrepreneurship in the world of music.

Joshua Mailman, Adjunct Professor of Music Theory/Music Psychology at Columbia University

Christopher Sprigman, a full Professor at the NYU School of Law who specializes in copyright, intellectual property, patent, and trademark law, as well as a Member of the Creative Commons Board of Directors.

Tom Ridgewell (aka TomSka), an online content creator with around 5 million subscribers and over 1 billion views

Steven Williams (aka Boogie2988), an online content creator with around 4.5 million subscribers and 750 million views.

Derek Muller, an online content creator and science educator with a PhD in physics with the University of Sydney, with over 5 million subscribers and around 450 million unique views.

Jack Vale, an online content creator with a combined 1.5 million subscribers and over 350 million unique views of his videos.

Marie Meimberg - President "Webvideopreis"

Emily Richards - Musician, Steward at ccMixter.org (a Creative Commons-focused website dedicated to sharing and remixing compositions)

Filip Pokorný - Sound Engineer at TC Lemons

Story Overview

In 1996, during the early days of the web, Kevin MacLeod, a software programmer with an interest in composing, founded a personal webpage, Incompetech.com (named so after his fascination with incompetence and technology). After a composition that he created for a composing job was rejected, he put the music on his website for free hoping that someone out there would find a use for it. We tell the story of how, in almost two decades since

Incompetech's humble beginnings, it has grown from a few songs to thousands that have been heard by millions of people worldwide.

Throughout college and beyond, we, the producers, used Kevin's music without realizing who Kevin was, or how big he had become. Curious, we began to research him, wondering how someone whose music was so widespread could be so unknown? The more we learned, the more questions we had: What do other composers think of his business model? What are the positives and negatives of the explosive creativity enabled by the democratizing feature of the digital audio revolution? What is Kevin's business model, how does he make a living giving away thousands of his own compositions for free? Why does Kevin release his music for free?

We've gradually come to expand the film so that it is about more than just Kevin, and also more than just compensation for art, it's about the value we place on creative work in society and the evolving landscape of technology and its influence on our consumption, production, and distribution of the work itself.

Narrative trajectory

Royalty Free chronicles Kevin's rise from humble beginnings in the Green Bay area of Wisconsin to a worldwide phenomenon that little have realized they know. Then we explain why his music matters, whose works it makes a difference to, and the evolution of the technological and economic landscape that made this all possible.



- I. Opening sequence: introduction to the main issues of the film,
- II. Kevin's composition process,
- III. Why soundtracks are important (what does music do to understanding visuals)
- IV. What makes Kevin's music connect with creators, and viewers alike,
- V. Kevin's childhood and background,
- VI. Digital audio revolution background,
- VII. The Creative Commons business model,
- VIII. The Broadway musicians' strike, workers rights,
- IX. ASCAP memo against Creative Commons

- X. Kevin's personal life (struggles, friends, life etc)
- XI. Youtube, international reach
- XII. Ending sequence: Kevin's impact

Artistic Approach

The film utilizes a standard approach to in-depth interviews in order to engage with viewers in a format they feel most familiar with, as the film highlights a subject matter that is equally accessible to a wide berth of individuals. Just as many of the content creators have a massive following online, the film seeks to engage fans of said work with a stylistic approach that feels approachable, but elevates the discourse from simple and light to darker and heavier subjects toward the film's conclusion.

The film seeks to weave together the narrative between Kevin's approach to music with the digital audio revolution and technological landscape that allowed his business model and musical philosophy to not only be possible, but thrive. It was important to the filmmakers to also include examples of the impact of said music, by engaging viewers with samples of the content. Exploring both sides of the narrative drove the interview-heavy stylistic approach.

The film utilizes Kevin's music to evoke familiarity with his work, increasing understanding of how Kevin's music engages audiences in the thousands of projects he finds it in.

Story access

The film is already shot, the interviews have been conducted and we are looking for post-production funds.

Noteable Press for Royalty Free

- <http://www.indiewire.com/2014/11/project-of-the-day-royalty-free-the-music-of-kevin-macleod-68173/>
- <https://www.kickstarter.com/stories/freemusic>
- http://freemusicarchive.org/member/cheyenne_h/blog/Royalty_Free

- <http://www.musicfilmweb.com/2014/11/royalty-free-kevin-macleod-music-documentary-kickstarter/>
- WhooNew Local 5 Live (Green Bay Tv):
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2tk3fBIM3PBUG1icG5aY1hWNIE/view?usp=sharing>

Director's Prior Work

Ryan Camarda is a disabled filmmaker who has worked as a freelance Director, DP, and Producer. He graduated with honors from Binghamton University with a degree in Cinema and History. He was a curator for the Unwavering Truth exhibit at the Queens Museum (Exhibit bio here: <http://bit.ly/2p4RWRh>), in addition to having his work shown as said exhibit. In combination with the exhibit, he made an accompanying film, *Unwavering Truth* (seen here: <http://bit.ly/2FsotLZ>; keep captions enabled when viewing). *Unwavering Truth* is a short documentary about two women and their struggles with Neurofibromatosis Type 2, a neurological disorder that causes tumors throughout the body, causing disfigurement and sometimes causing death. Ryan approached the creation of the film with an intent to show the disorder under stark terms usually not displayed by films about illness. Additionally his short, *The Craigslist Files: Episode 1 – Donnie and Charlotte*, was selected as a Best of New York film in the 48 Hour Film Project festival. His short, *Departure*, was selected for the Melbourne International Student Film Festival.

Sample of filmmaker's past work description

The sample of the filmmaker's past work involved an intricate personal lighting set-up, with a unique voice that includes an interviewee signing her dialogue with captions that highlight the sound barrier between the subject and the audience. This connects Camarda's past work with the current documentary through an appreciation of how sound moves people, and how deeply important audio is in our daily lives and experiences.

Relevance past work to current project

The current project utilizes Camarda's direct cinematic approach to expand upon broader tangible economic issues facing our evolving technological landscape. He highly values the Creative Commons work he was able to utilize in his own films over the years and wanted to take a deep dive into the world of technology, music, and video production. As an artist and content creator, Camarda brings experience from both sides of the issue to the table and appreciates the engagement he's received from across the globe.