



LOST HORIZON

The team involved in Glastonbury's Shangri-La dust off their VJ kit for the debut of Lost Horizon Festival – a virtual production broadcast to a 4.36 million global audience.

Lost Horizon, recently crowned the world's largest virtual reality music and arts festival, took place on 3-4 July 2020 to a huge worldwide audience of 4.36 million viewers from over 1,100 cities and 100 countries around the world across VR, PC, iOS and Android mobile app, plus online streams, via Beatport, Twitch and across social media platforms. Behind the feat was a core crew of creatives and VJs with a longstanding relationship with Worthy Farm.

Having used visuals in the field for several years, from Glastonbury's video-mapped Heaven Arena to the more recent Gas Tower, Creative Giants Digital Curator, Simon Vaughan was integral to getting this ambitious project off the ground. "We could see the opportunity to remain being creative in the COVID-19 world and work with our community to do something ground-breaking," he said.

With the decision made to include the Gas Tower within Lost Horizon's VR festival landscape, Creative Giants assembled a core crew of creatives in More Eyes' Pete Thornton, We Are Midnight's Daniel Shutt, We Are Not Content's Malcolm Litson, and dld design's Nick Diacre. "Any project like this requires new ways of working, so it was key to have a dependable team that always succeed in adversity – something we are often against in a muddy field, but always deliver."

While Thornton led the VJ programming and production charge, it was a team effort, with each member of the crew playing a key role in a project where "extreme timelines" were in place. Vaughan explained that despite his longstanding affiliation with Shangri-La, this project was "next level" on all accounts – firmly pushing the envelope of innovation. "Each year, we push ourselves through heatwaves and thunderstorms to produce a spectacular in the Shangri-La field, and Lost Horizon was no different."

Pete Thornton, one half of TPI Award-winning visual outfit, More Eyes, picked up the story: "We were contacted by Simon from Creative Giants and our friends at Shangri-La back in March after Glastonbury 2020 was officially cancelled," he reminisced. "We had all been talking about the real-world festival prior to this, but as it became clear that wasn't going to be possible, the focus turned to a virtual-reality event instead. When they asked if we would be interested in getting involved, we all jumped at the chance."

The event, devised by the team behind behind Glastonbury's Shangri-La, in partnership with VRJAM and Sansar, and in collaboration with Orca Sound Project and Beatport, delivered a deep multilayered experience, filled with wild dancefloors, a visual feast of art and performance, and an interstellar line up of superstar DJs and underground artists, all taking part to raise money for The Big Issue and Amnesty International UK.

Created using Sansar, Wookey Technologies' photorealistic platform for virtual live events, Lost Horizon was a truly unique virtual and mixed-reality festival unlike any other, featuring computer-generated avatars and green screen 'hologram' performances from a line-up of global artists, including: Carl Cox, Fatboy Slim and Peggy Gou, to Frank Turner and Coldcut.

"The DJs visited their local green screen studios right across the world – London, Bristol, LA, and Tokyo, among others – to record themselves and their DJ sets," reminisced Thornton. "For the acts on the Gas Tower stage, these pre-recorded sets were then handed over to our team of VJs to work with. In total, we had 24 leading VJs and visual artists create fully custom 360° content for this special one-off show."

The final files were uploaded to Vimeo, integrated into the VR environment and mapped to the eight screens by the Sansar tech team led by Ollie Rankin. "Everything moves quickly, so you have to consider the



viewpoint of spectators, devising content which isn't too jarring. Creating and projecting 360° content in the real world is hard enough, but to deliver it within a live VR environment is a special achievement and a true first."

With a total of 24, one-hour sets to get over the line, time was against the team. The collective devised a way to standardise the final delivery of the work by the VJs. "This involved processing all the green screen content so it was essentially the same format and could be dropped straight into the VR environment," Thornton explained.

"DJs were scaled to be the same size and backgrounds were all keyed in the same way. That could then be combined with the 360° video content from our awesome line-up of VJs which included Enjoy Kaos, L'aubaine, Leds Akimbo and Joëlle. Very fortuitously, there was a Notch update halfway through production which was specifically for helping with green screen keying, which saved hours and hours of prep time."

Vaughan believed the sheer amount of work involved to achieve the virtual festival was much the same as in the real world. "The artworks the VJs made blew my tiny little mind. How the team pulled through adversity and found every way to make it work was outstanding," Vaughan said. "It really couldn't have happened without the pure dedication the team put in – going that extra step to making something truly special."

Performances from over 70 artists were captured in 12 countries across the world and production included custom merchandise for charities and custom avatars for performers, including Shangri-La legend Chris Tofu, in addition to the six-plus virtual worlds purpose-built for the occasion. "With it being broadcast in VR, we were wary of not overloading the optics of the viewer," Thornton explained. During this first fully interactive, multi-stage two-day event, in-world attendees had access to move around inside the

space, chat and interact with other festival goers, just as if they were at a real-life festival.

"During the first day, I was just on the standard laptop version to witness some of the various stages and streams from a 2D perspective," Thornton stated. "When the second day came around, I got my hands on a VR headset at More Eyes HQ to fully immerse myself into the digital world."

Revellers had the ability to communicate with friends either in a chat room or speaking directly via headsets. People could watch the various acts from wherever they liked and even teleport across the dance floor. "My avatar donned a skeleton suit with a Lost Horizon T-shirt, which I managed to pick up from the digital merch stall, complete with pink light-up shoes and a pink pompadoured quiff," laughed Thornton, recalling his three-year-old daughter's choice of outfit. Though despite his extravagant digital garms, the VJ wasn't the most extravagantly dressed in the digital field. "Like any festival, you got a sense of the fun from people dressing up. There were people dressed as a giant slice of toast, a floating turtle, a cow in a suit, a wireframe robot and some people just in their pants!"

In this new virtual horizon, acts performing on stage were also present in the virtual world, interacting with festivalgoers and experiencing this world-first event. Lost Horizon and Shangri-La Creative Director, Kaye Dunnings, commented: "I don't think you can ever recreate the feeling of being in a crowd of people, and how powerful that is, but it was spooky how similar it was to the real thing. I met up with friends, made new ones, was able to make an avatar that could dance (moves I could never pull off in real life!) and the classic festival experience of bumping between areas, overhearing conversations and marvelling at the wonderful looks people had created for themselves was just like people watching at a festival."



Fatboy Slim, who performed on the Gas Tower, programmed by Orca Sound Project, commented: “Thanks to the Lost Horizon crew for popping my VR cherry. The experience had almost the same euphoric feeling as being at a real festival. For those interested or in there with me, I was the one with Halle Berry’s body and a big smiley head, dancing my tits off, mind slightly blown by the experience of watching myself DJ. As surreal and trippy as a real late adventure in the Shangri-La.”

With nine camera angles in each of the four Lost Horizon ‘worlds’, the online Beatport/YouTube/Twitch streams were live vision mixed by the team at Video Illusions, to create the engaging and surreal streams beamed live and direct into homes across the globe. “The static feeds via mobile phone apps were brilliant. The sound quality was excellent, and you were able to choose which one of the fixed camera positions to view from. By diving into any of the various broadcast platforms, you could have a totally different experience,” Thornton noted.

The VR team had the ability to turn on and of an ‘anti-gravity’ mode, where avatars were able to jump around as if they were in space. “One of the best things about being inside VR was the ability to create your own viewpoints. While anti-gravity was employed, I managed to scale the top of the Gas Tower for a birds-eye viewpoint of the festival and the revellers,” the VJ reported.

The virtual festival set a new benchmark for engagement of audiences in immersive content, with a total reach generated by live virtual reality content totalling 11,792,896 people across the two-day event. “I think there is a future in this type of event,” Thornton hypothesised.

“I can see things like this run in tandem with live events, it’s an option for festival organisers to get a larger, global reach online – and while a virtual audience can never replace the energy and excitement, it’s ideal for situations like this where we all can’t be in the same room together.” Viewing figures aside, Vaughan said, that the DJs were impressed with the

experience and the efforts of the VJ team, “It was no different to anything they would perform in the real world,” he summed up. “Would I do it again? Hell yeah, although I would hope that we can be all together when we are actually making it, and not over Zoom!”

Lost Horizon and Shangri-La Director, Robin Collings commented: “We are back in creative mode, dreaming up ways to develop and re-imagine the whole experience, expand our audiences and make the platform more accessible.”

To close, Thornton praised the Shangri-La production team – Kaye, Chris and Robin – who did a “fantastic” job in curating the stages and bringing together global artists and VJs in such a short space of time. “There’s a lot of time and technology being invested into these types of shows now and nobody knows where it will ultimately lead to. The full VR experience felt surprisingly real, and close to a real-world event because of the immersive aspects. Being able to create an avatar, choose your outfit, look around in full 360°, meeting up with your friends inside VR and being able to chat directly with them was so much fun.”

Ed Jenkins and Jolyon Klean, Orca Sound Project, concluded: “Programming the Gas Tower in Lost Horizon felt like putting together a dream festival line-up. The goodwill and excitement surrounding such an innovative and experimental project just goes to show how the rule book has been re-written by the challenges we all face in the entertainment industry. Hopefully we’ve proven that there are new frontiers to explore and ways to communicate with fans that continue to push boundaries.”

TPI

Photos: Shangri-La
www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk
www.shangrilaglastonbury.co.uk
www.losthorizonfestival.com
www.moreeyes.co.uk