ALTERNATIVE GRAPHIC APPROACHES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE PROMOTION OF DIGITAL MUSIC

DİJİTAL MÜZİĞİN TANITIMINDA GRAFİK TASARIMIN ÖNEMİ VE ALTERNATİF GRAFİK YAKLAŞIMLAR

Dr. Dilek Nur ÜNSÜR

Giresun Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi Grafik Tasarımı Bölümü

ORCID 🆔: Orcid: 0000-0003-1243-6883

ABSTRACT

It is known that graphic design and music have a serious and deep-rooted relationship since the first half of the twentieth century. This relationship officially started with seeing album covers/sleeves as a design object and designing one of them for the first time in 1939. Before this breakthrough, there were instances where the ways of art and music coincided in sheet music and scores that well-known artists, such as Picasso and Dali, designed covers for. Besides these early artefacts, there were other ways to visualize music, such as graphic notations and music installations. Even though these kinds of creations were existed, the relationship between music and graphic design is mostly associated with album cover, which was an immense industry and had an important impact on promotion since then. With the contribution of design, album covers did not only become a commercial product, but also a tool for musicians to express their music and build a connection with audience. For this reason, despite different formats that have evolved and changed over time, such as vinyl record, cassette tape and CD, the album cover has not lost its popularity. But as the technology, the platform/medium and so the habit of listening music have changed, the necessity for an album cover and its vital function in promotion become debatable. At this point, following questions come to mind: 1) Is an album cover only way to promote music? 2) Should promotion only be related to commercial concerns? 3) Because of the digitalisation in music, what else can be done in promotion and to reach large masses other than physical branding? This study aims to answer these questions by bringing up the new and alternative graphic approaches, such as GIF album covers, motion graphics and illustrated books that are utilized to promote music in Turkey that no other study tackled before. In accordance with the constant change of technology, producing alternative approaches could help these two fields to empower each other. Also, the creative block in music production today resulted in discovering old/nostalgic songs, especially among the new generation in Turkey. This is why, some of the graphic approaches that are revealed in this study could be a good example to enrich the collaboration between music and graphic design, and lead people to find more unique ways that both of these creative fields could benefit from.

Keywords: Digital Music, Music Promotion, Graphic Design, Album Cover, GIF, Motion Graphics, Illustration, Alternative Approaches

ÖZET

Grafik tasarım ve müziğin yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısından bu yana ciddi ve köklü bir ilişkisi olduğu bilinmektedir. Bu ilişki resmi olarak albüm kapaklarını bir tasarım nesnesi olarak görmekle ve bunlardan birini ilk kez 1939'da tasarlamakla başlamıştır. Bu dönüm noktasından önce, Picasso ve Dali gibi tanınmış sanatçılar tarafından tasarlanmış partisyon kapaklarında olduğu gibi, sanat ve müziğin yollarının kesiştiği durumlar da olmuştur. Bu erken eserlerin yanı sıra, grafik notasyon ve müzik enstalasyonları gibi müziği görselleştirmenin farklı yollarına da rastlanmaktadır. Bu tür eserler mevcut olsa da, müzik ve grafik tasarım arasındaki ilişki

çoğunlukla muazzam bir endüstri olan ve o zamandan beri müziğin tanıtımı üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olan albüm kapağı ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Tasarımın katkısıyla birlikte albüm kapakları sadece ticari bir ürün olmakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda müzisyenlerin dinleyiciyle bağ kurduğu ve müziğini ifade ettiği bir araç haline de gelmiştir. Bu sebeple, zaman içerisinde gelişen ve değişen plak, kaset ve CD gibi farklı formatlara rağmen albüm kapağı popüláritesini kaybetmemiştir. Ancak teknoloji, platform/mecra ve dolayısıyla müzik dinleme alışkanlığı da değiştikçe, bir albüm kapağının gerekliliği ve tanıtmdaki hayati işlevi tartışmalı hale gelmiştir. Bu noktada şu sorular akla gelmektedir: 1) Bir albüm kapağı, müziği tanıtmanın tek yolu mudur? 2) Tanıtım, sadece ticari kaygılarla mı ilişkili olmalıdır? 3) Müzikteki dijitalleşme nedeniyle, tanıtım ve büyük kitlelere ulaşmak için fiziksel markalaşma dışında başka neler yapılabilir? Bu çalışma, GIF albüm kapakları, hareketli grafikler ve illüstratif kitaplar gibi daha önce başka bir çalışmanın ele almadığı Türkiye'de müziğin tanıtımında kullanılan yeni ve alternatif grafik yaklaşımları gündeme getirerek bu soruları cevaplamayı amaçlamaktadır. Sürekli değişmekte olan teknolojiye uygun olarak alternatif yaklaşımlar üretmek, bu iki alanın birbirini güçlendirmesine yardımcı olacaktır. Ayrıca, günümüz müzik üretiminde yaşanan yaratıcı tıkanıklık, özellikle Türkiye'deki yeni nesil arasında eski/nostaljik şarkıların keşfedilmesiyle sonuçlanmıştır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada ortaya konan bazı grafik yaklaşımlar, müzik ve grafik tasarım arasındaki işbirliğini zenginleştirmek ve insanları bu yaratıcı alanların her ikisinin de yararlanabileceği başka benzersiz yollar bulmaya yönlendirmek için iyi bir örnek teşkil edebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Müzik, Müziğin Tanıtımı, Grafik Tasarım, Albüm Kapağı, GIF, Hareketli Grafikler, İllüstrasyon, Alternatif Yaklaşımlar

INTRODUCTION

Like any other discipline, music also needs to be seen and promoted with the help of graphic design. To acknowledge and remember things are mostly possible via visuals, even though this thing appeals to ears, as in the case of music. Art director, Jeremy Hall explains why this is the case:

People neither hear nor buy music in a vacuum: for almost all the music they consume there is an accompaniment of visual stimulus. When someone chooses to attend a concert or buy a CD, the advertising, the concert programme, the venue, the CD cover are all part of the purchase. And the packaging, this visual wrapping, affects the way listeners take in the music, however minutely. The classical ideal of pure music – that it adheres only to its own internal logic, without reference outside itself – cannot be sustained in a market-driven world (Hall, 2001, para. 1).

So, the involvement of graphic design for the visualization and the promotion of music becomes inevitable. There were many ways to visualise, pack and promote music graphically through different approaches, such as the covers of sheet music/score and records (vinyln record, cassette tape, Compact Discs) and other alternatives, graphic notations and fanzines. But album cover was dominantly associated with music promotion, as it includes visuals of artist, lyrics and production information. This type of branding was a physical one that contributed concrete interaction with the music. But as the technology advances, the music mediums have replaced with purchasing music online and the album cover art started to appear in the thumbnail size on online platforms. At this point, the function of album covers becomes questionable. As the interaction between music and audience became less intimate and personal, this eventually could lead audiences to have less experience in recognising and remembering the music product. At this point, following questions come to mind: 1) Is an album cover only way to promote music? 2) Should promotion only be related to commercial concerns? 3) Because of

the digitalisation in music, what else can be done in promotion and to reach large masses other than physical branding? These questions will be tackled through some new and alternative graphic approaches that are utilized to promote music in Turkey both for commercial or non-commercial purposes. But before mentioning these approaches, a brief history of the relationship between music and graphic design will be presented, in order to understand their collaboration better.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSIC AND GRAPHIC DESIGN RELATIONSHIP

This relationship officially started with seeing album covers/sleeves as a design object and designing one of them for the first time in 1939 by Alex Steinweiss for the Columbia Records (Image 1). As Martin Chilton conveyed, the sales of records are increased with the help of his designs (Chilton, 2019, para. 3). In the album covers he created (Image 2), there is a distinctive use of graphic language in the form of illustration, bright colours and considered typography differently than other early packaging. Because, before this approach, there were sleeves from paper or leather or pasteboard covers that only contain plain text on front and spine to indicate the name of composer, musician and album.
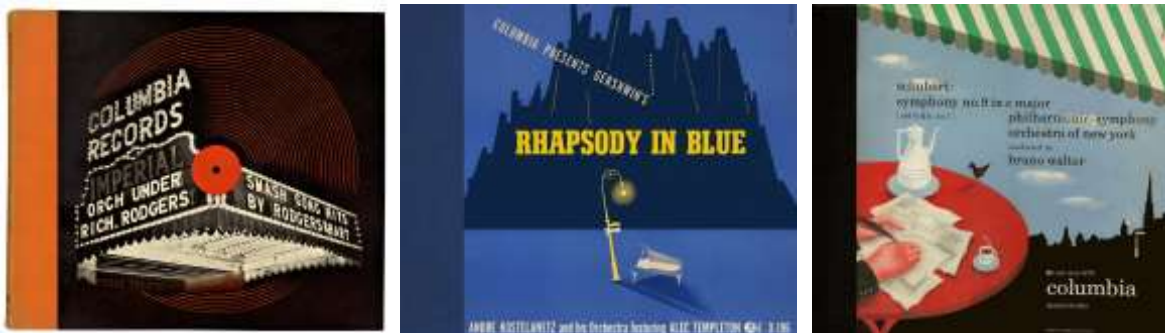

Image 1. First Album Cover   **Image 2.** Steinweiss' other album covers

Apart from the album covers/sleeves, there were instances where well-known European artists designed covers for sheet music and scores, in the end of the 19th century (Image 3).[i] Even in the same years, we see typographically impressive score/sheet music covers of the imperial marches in the Ottoman Empire (Image 4). So the creation of this kind of covers was not only limited to drawings. In the 20th century, the artists, such as Picasso and Dali, kept the tradition and produced more like these covers with the combination of drawings and typography. Of course, this relationship was not only limited to the album and sheet music/score covers, there were other ways to visualize music during the 20th century, such as graphic notations. Graphic notation is an alternative way for music notation that uses visual language differently than the traditional notation. It first appeared in the 1950s related to the movement of Indeterminacy created by John Cage (Image 5) (Kloth cited in Henderson and Stacey, 1999, p.16). Graphic notations presented an alternative way for the visualisation of music and helped musicians to express their music through visuals. As a result of these creations, some works were even considered artwork, as the art movement Fluxus took it out of its concept and led artists, such as Yoko Ono and George Brecht, created unrecognizable scores (Timin, 2008, para. 4). Besides this marginalisation, graphic notation is widely accepted and being used to create scores until today (Image 6).

Image 3. Sheet music cover by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 1895.

Image 4. Sheet music cover of 'Grand March', supplement of Malumat Magazine, 1895/1896.

Image 5. The score for John Cage's indeterminate composition "Fontana Mix" (BBC Radio 3).
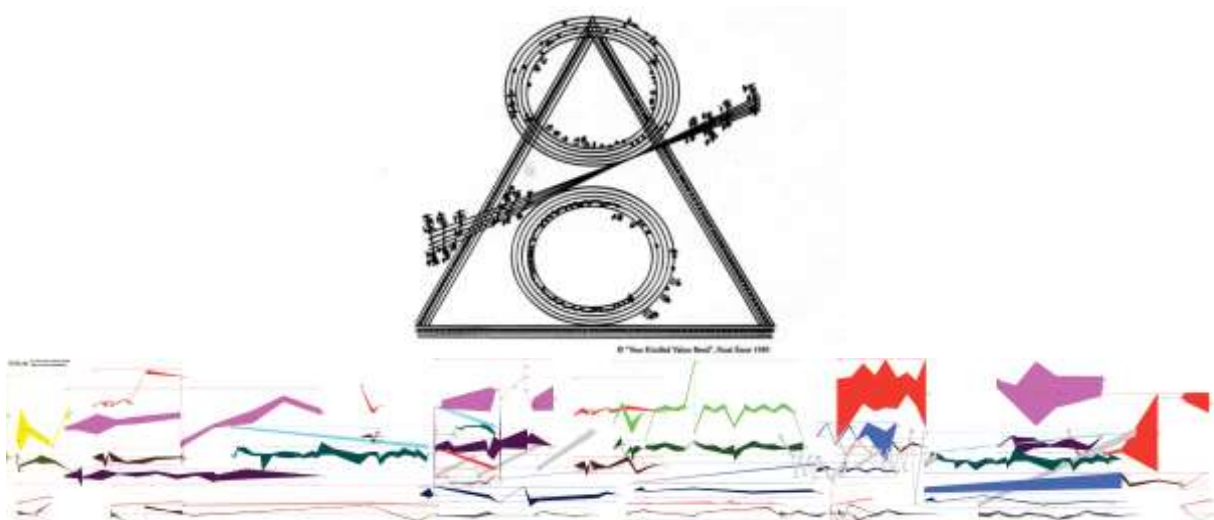

Image 6. Escot - Your Kindled Valors Bend, 1989 (Above), Hans-Christoph Steiner – Solitude (Below).

There was also another kind of music-graphic product, which is called Punkzine. Punkzine is a combination of words 'Punk' and 'Zines' of fanzine. Fanzine is independent publication produced by the people who are interested in esoteric topics, such as punk rock, science fiction etc. They are mostly produced by hand using photocopy machines and typewriters, but in the 21st century, most of them are created as online (Cogan cited in Merskin, 2020, 'Zines'). So especially, the enthusiast of music genre Punk created this hybrid product to express the genre's

ideology and related literature (Image 7). There are so many examples of it from the UK and the USA and even in Turkey from 1970s. This kind of music-graphic product helped these fans to share their enthusiast about Punk within their fan circle.

Image 7. British Punk Zines from the 1970s

THE DOMINANCY OF ALBUM COVERS

Even though these kinds of creations were existed, the relationship between music and graphic design is mostly associated with album cover, which was an immense industry and had an important impact on promotion since then. Chilton describes cover design as: "[…] one of the few mediums which reached millions of people in the golden age of radio and before television had become king." (Chilton, 2019, para. 5). With the contribution of design, album covers did not only become a commercial product, but also a tool for musicians to express their music and build a connection with the audience, as designer Vaughan Oliver agrees:

The goal we're [graphic designers] aiming for is to reflect the music; the sleeve should be a gateway into what the music is about without defining it but also providing a suggestive mood and atmosphere (cited in Chilton, 2019, para. 45).

For this reason, despite different formats that have evolved and changed over time, such as vinyl record, cassette tape and compact disc (CD), the album cover has not lost its popularity. Even after the digitalisation of music, the vinyl albums (LP) became popular again, and the album covers became a collectable object, considering their art value. In the 60s, even the famous bands, including The Beatles and Pink Floyd, hired artists, graphic designers and art students to design their album covers (Image 8) (Chilton, 2019, para.25). Later, some famous graphic designers, such as Steven Sagmeister created witty designs (Image 9). With the instances of creating logos and visual identity for bands, especially in case of the indie music, the relationship between music and graphic became more inseparable and visible. But as the technology, the platform/medium and so the habit of listening music have evolved, the necessity for a physical album cover and its vital function in promotion to convince audience become debatable. Furthermore, the size of the album cover artwork shrunk into a thumbnail size in digital music platforms, in order to be used as a face of digital tracks. This is why, design writer Steven Heller pointed out the need for a change in designing album covers for the thumbnail size:

The space allotted to album art may be a fraction of what it once was, but that just sets the bar higher. If musicians can continue to innovate in the digital age, then designers must take up the challenge of the minimalist thumbnail (Heller, 2009, para. 5).

Image 8. (Form Left) The Beatles – Revolver (1966), Pink Floyd - Dark Side of the Moon (1973).

Image 9. Album Cover Designs by Stefan Sagmeister.

While minimalist thumbnails could be a part of the solution, album covers should not be considered as the only way to make music visible and marketable. So, in this environment, some alternative ways could be created in order to make music reachable and memorable as in the case of album cover art.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PROMOTE MUSIC IN TURKEY

The alternative graphic ways that are observed in Turkey in the course of time and presented in this study, could give an idea for the promotion of music in its digital age. The first approach could be the active use of illustration and motion graphics. Gökhan Yücel, a creative director from Fikr'et Design Agency, founded a project called Anatolian Rock Revival Project in 2014. The aim of the project was creating illustrations and animations for the forgotten and underrated songs of the Anatolian Rock genre between the years 1964 to 1980, to revive and present them to new audiences (Ereşter, 2018, n.p.). Turkish illustrators are hired to create illustrations, in order to be used as promotional posters, which contain the name of singers and songs, the project logo and a QR code that would lead to music video in some instances (Image 10). Apart from posters, illustrations are used as a background image of music videos that are shared on the project's Youtube channel (Image 11). Lately, they even created a music video using the technique of motion graphics (Image 12). The diversity and different illustrative approaches can be observed through the works, as it is in the songs of Anatolian Rock genre. This approach led audiences to discover an almost forgotten music era, due to the political overshadow in the

country at that time. It also helped young and undiscovered Turkish illustrators to involve in such a unique project and make their graphic works more visible.

Image 10. Promotional Posters. Ilustrations (From Left): Nuri Keli, Sibel Açıkalın Akgül, Mert Tugen.

Image 11. Video Background Image. Illustration: Hüseyin Sönmezay.

Image 12. Still from the music video in motion graphics. Illustration and Animation: Gökalp Gönen.

The second initiative is GIF album covers that are created for helping to revive and discover old album covers of Turkish music artists. Some parts of the selected album covers are set in motion, such the earrings of Sezen Aksu and the hair of Çelik (Image 13). The designers, Yiğit Karagöz and Deniz Yükselci made a statement revealing their intention on why they created this project:

We thought that no star appears in Turkey lately. So we said, let's own our "stars" that the years have not aged, so we updated their unforgettable albums…Sorry, we did GIF. We redrew and animated the album covers and made them suitable for "like" and "share". We wanted them to be shared and recalled in the following days when we realized that "stars" were not easy to raise. We hope to make such album designs for our new "stars" in the future… (Özögretmen, 2016, para. 3).

The album covers that they chose are also very distinctive and memorable ones in the history of Turkish Music. But considering their release dates, it is not possible to be remembered by the younger generation. So this kind of modern adaptation by using the GIF technique could catch the attention of the young people in Turkey and lead to discover the songs and the musical quality of these music artists.

Image 13. GIF Album Covers.

Another approach could be creating animated music videos. Although there are instances where animation and motion graphics are used as a technique that helps to visualise songs, filming singers traditionally is a more recognised way. However, all the genres of music could benefit from these alternative approaches apart from traditional filming. The animated music videos of the composer Can Atilla could be considered as a substantial example for this. The animation artist, Uğur Erbaş created animated music videos, considering Atilla's new age music and reflected it by creating surreal imagery and atmosphere that combines both imaginative and realistic components. His case was unique and pioneering in many ways that no other creation

is existed in Turkey at that time in the early 2000s. In his first music video for the song 'Cariyeler ve Geceler', he set a scene that illustrates Istanbul in the future (Image 14). In the second video for the song 'Sultanlar Aşkına', he animated the conquest of Istanbul, by creating the city in 1453 this time. In his last music video for the song 'Aşk-ı Hürrem', he harmonised both real shootings of a model and the animation technique to visualise the arrival of Hürrem Sultan at Istanbul. In this video, he uses graphics to create metamorphosis, such as moving ships that are later placed in the map of Piri Reis presumably (Image 15) and the face of model that turns into the image of Hürrem Sultan (Image 16). Because of the works' success and also their frequent appearance on TV channels, Uğur Erbaş is rewarded by many music and film organisations.

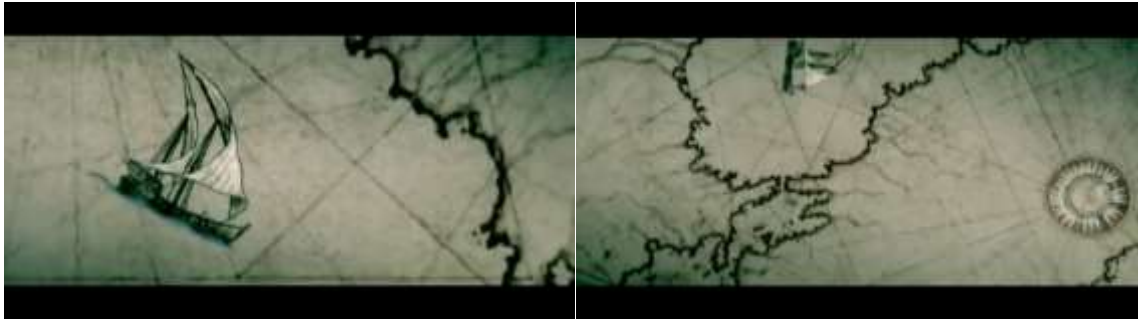**Image 14.** Still from Cariyeler ve Geceler (2005) - Can Atilla. Animation: Uğur Erbaş.

Image 15. Still from Aşk-Hürrem (2007) - Can Atilla. Animation and Video Direction: Uğur Erbaş.

Image 16. Still from Aşk-Hürrem (2007) - Can Atilla. Animation and Video Direction: Uğur Erbaş.

The last example could be illustrating the history of a music genre and era through book design. The authors and illustrators, Berk Kuruçay and Emirhan Perker created an illustrated book called 'Yalnızlar Rıhtımı: Çizgilerle Türk Rock Tarihi' that gathers the historical information about the artists and music bands of Turkish Rock genre. As it can be seen in the page examples, they visualise either the artists or their albums, and give some brief and highlighted information about them, along with lyrics of one of their songs and a QR code that leads to the music video of this song (Image 17). This project also aimed to present a music era and its music artists for the people who have not discovered this genre yet, or the people who are keen to keep this kind of informative product as a collectable object.

Image 17. Berk Kuruçay and Emirhan Perker, Yalnızlar Rıhtımı: Çizgilerle Türk Rock Tarihi (2017).

CONCLUSION

Album covers and other methods that are created in the past are not the only ways to promote music. Especially, in the digital age of music, new ways for the promotion should be discovered, as in the examples that are presented in this study. Also the issue of whether the promotion should only be for the commercial purpose needs to be reconsidered. As in album covers, the financial side should not be the only consideration when promoting music via graphic design. To share information about unknown or underrated musicians and introducing people with their music could be another important motives for using illustration, motion graphics and animation techniques in promotion.

In accordance with the constant change of technology, producing alternative approaches to promote music (whether commercially or not) could help these two fields to empower each other. Because even though music needs being represented and promoted visually, graphic designers could also benefit from their creations for music, as Chilton suggests: "[…] the music sales industry had a global impact, because it provided designers with a way to express their creativity and originality to the whole world." (Chilton, 2019, para. 5). And, this kind of collaboration could open up a new market that initiates more creative works and increase the appearance of these disciplines. Also the lack of music production and the repetition of same melodies/sounds lead people to discover old/nostalgic songs, especially among the new generation in Turkey. This is why, the graphic approaches that are presented here could help to discover new music and be a good example to enrich the collaboration between music and graphic design, and lead people to find more unique ways that both of these creative fields could benefit from.

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