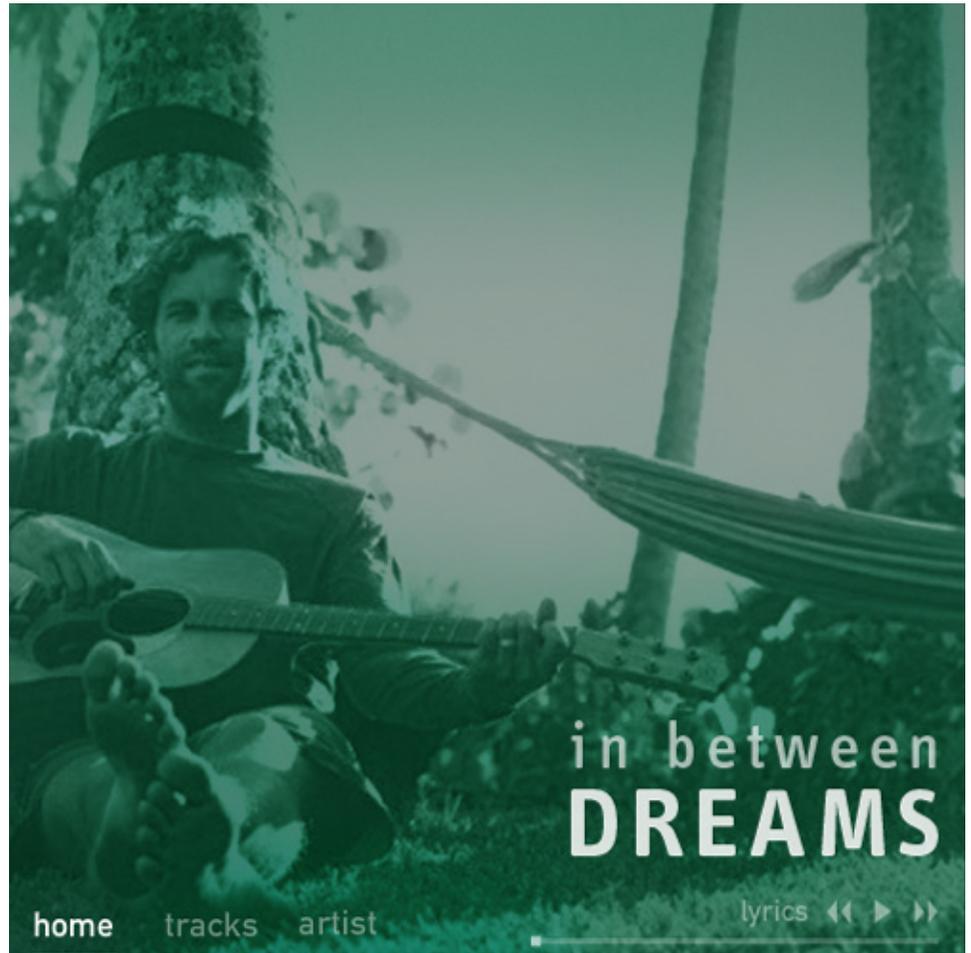

Michael Zalla
Interactive Album
Jack Johnson: In Between Dreams

Spring 2013 —
Interaction Design Overview
Instructor: Ian Bellomy



Jack Johnson: In Between Dreams

Problem Statement

Create an interactive album for desktop use that includes a band or artist biography, a track list, and supplemental content (such as song lyrics). Conduct preliminary research that allows you to become an expert on the content, and develop a critical understanding of the material; follow up this research with sketches and design ideation. After developing these sketches into pixel-perfect digital comps, the interactive album should be built and programmed in Flash as a desktop application.

Audience

In following with Jack's soft, friendly music, I have designed my interactive album to serve casual listeners who may or may not be familiar with Jack Johnson and who wish to explore his music and biography in a peaceful and unobtrusive setting.

Content Summary

1. Describe the music as if to someone who has never listened to it:

Jack Johnson's music has always offered itself as a soft, easy listen, and *In Between Dreams* is no exception. The stripped-down production focuses on Johnson's formula of rhythmic guitar and calm, contemplative lyrics, with which the band has found considerable success. Each of the album's songs features a distinct riff-driven melody to cradle Jack's warm voice and thoughtful lyrics. The album's music aligns most closely with the genres of acoustic pop, folk rock and alternative rock.

2. Describe what the artist(s) sings about:

Jack Johnson maintains a laid-back reserved demeanor and voice across the album's fourteen tracks, whose subject matter and lyrics examine love, loss, and social behavior.

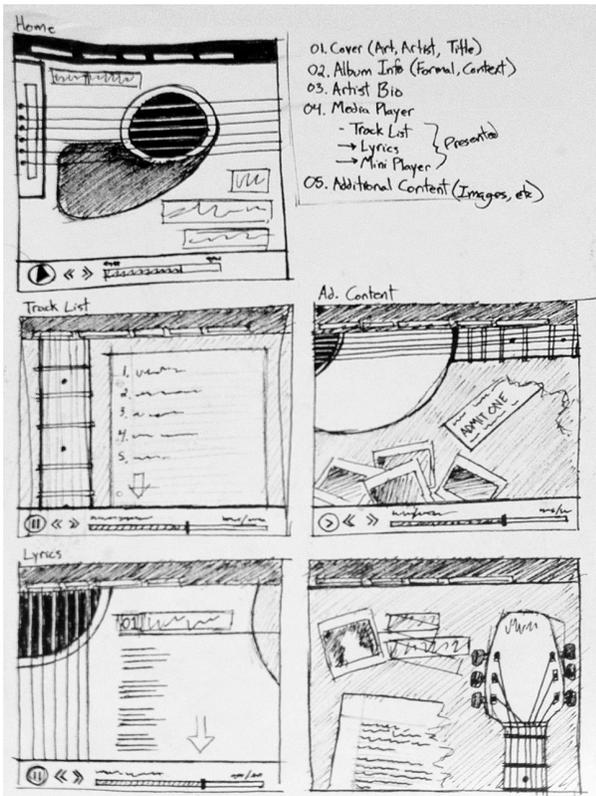
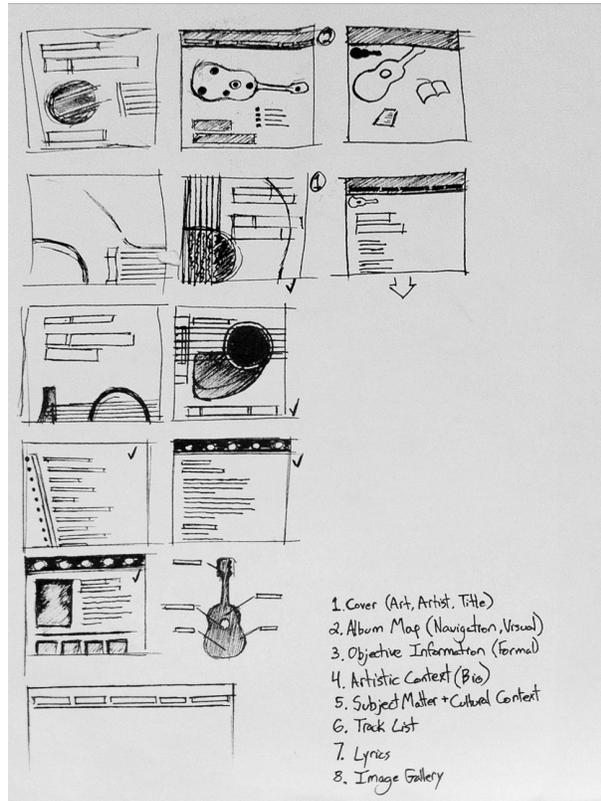
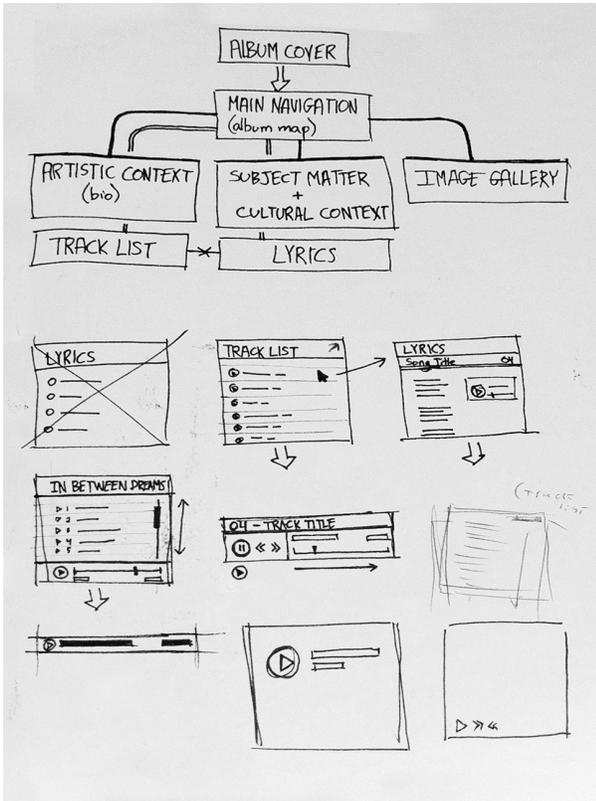
3. Describe how this album relates to the rest of the artist's work:

In Between Dreams was released on Johnson's Brushfire Records label on March 1, 2005. The third studio album from Jack, *In Between Dreams* features the same acoustic-driven reveries as heard on previous albums like *Brushfire Fairytales* and *On and On*, while offering new music moods, as heard in the lullaby-esque 'Breakdown' and the bossa-nova rhythms of 'Do You Remember.' The album takes a small turn from past projects with a brighter and more upbeat sound.

4. Describe the notable contextual thing(s) that would impact how we view the album:

Soft rock and alternative rock strengthened its hold on the commercial music industry through best-selling albums like Coldplay's *A Rush of Blood to the Head*, The Shins' *Oh, Inverted World* and U2's *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*. Johnson's *In Between Dreams*, as well as *On and On*, worked to solidify alternative rock's place as an enjoyable (as well as profitable) genre.

Ideation Sketches



Top Left: General "sitemap" and content organization

Top Right: Rough metaphor ideation

Bottom: Refined sketches for design direction A

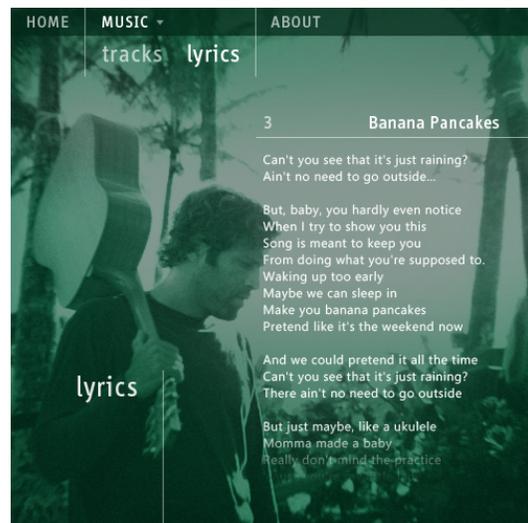
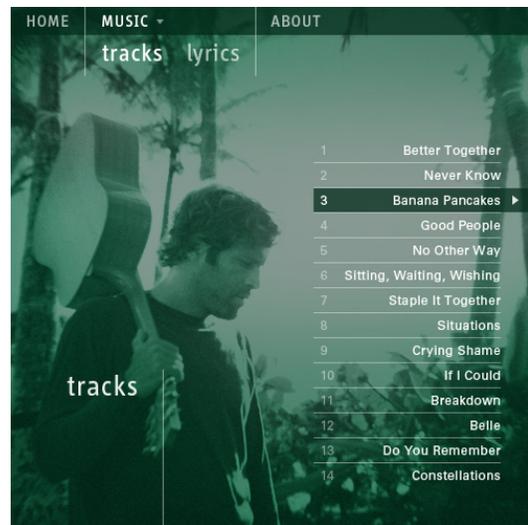
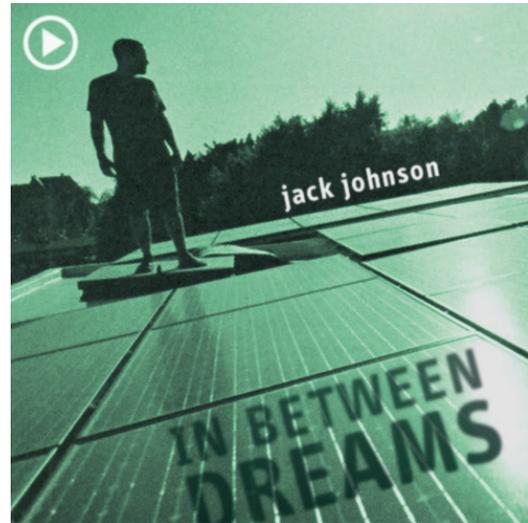
Visual Exploration: Direction B

The second concept moves away from the unnecessarily dark (almost brooding) aesthetic of the first, while maintaining a kind of calm appropriate for the album. Typographic elements are downplayed (through size and opacity) to bring focus to the photographic backgrounds that serve to characterize the album as well as the artist. An early grid system was developed for aligning the type and other small elements. Small floating labels provide the user with some context for each of the album's states.

Top: Home screen

Middle: Track list

Bottom: Lyrics



Visual Exploration: Direction C

In contrast to the first and second album concepts, the third approaches a louder, more energetic aesthetic in which type and image are more strictly balanced. More attention was given to the artist and album title across each of the album's screens.

Top: Track list



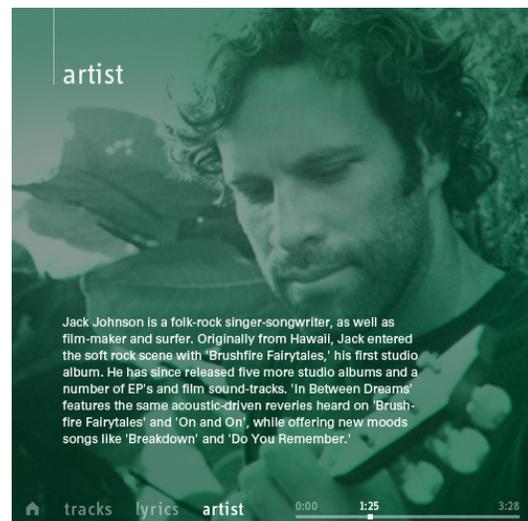
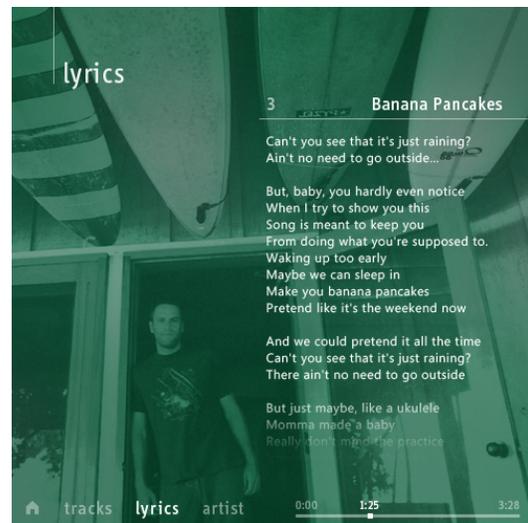
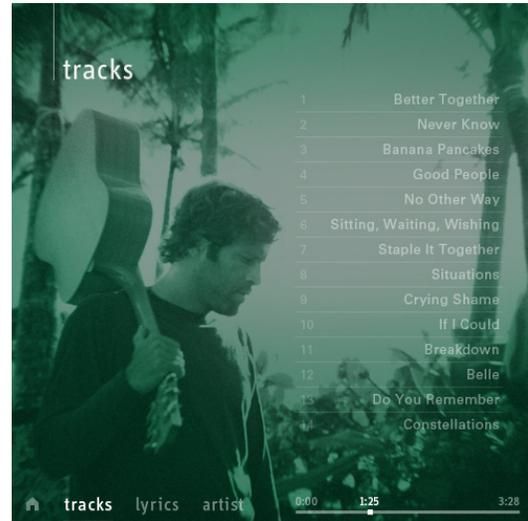
Revised Album Sequence

After choosing to further develop my second album direction, a number of revisions (based on peer and instructor feedback) were done more closely match the album's sound. Type was further downsized, and the main menu was moved to sit below the content, allowing for a less claustrophobic feel. I began to play with small iconography in the menu, and introduced a minimal playback bar to the right of the menu. Additional photography was selected and manipulated to match the existing treatment.

Top: Track list

Middle: Lyrics

Bottom: Biography

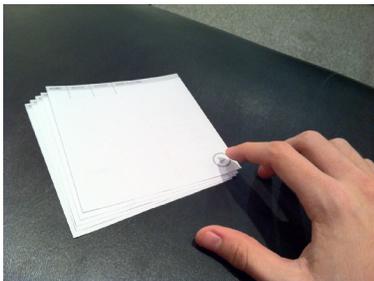


Paper Prototyping

Paper prototyping can provide helpful insight into the existing design of an interactive piece without relying on time-intensive application construction or coding. It exists as an inexpensive way to quickly test features and navigational structure, as well as gauge the intuitiveness of the interface. The paper tests I conducted using simplified greyscale layouts led to several discoveries about the design I had created, including the following:

- The start button on the home/start screen was not only vague, but introduced redundancy, as new content was already accessible from the main (top) menu
- The 'Music' item in the main menu is non-specific, and leads to an unnecessary nesting of 'Tracks' and 'Lyrics' (both of which should be immediately accessible from any screen) beneath it
- A lack of visual cues (i.e. – scrollbar) on the 'Lyrics' screen makes it unclear whether the content is in fact scrollable

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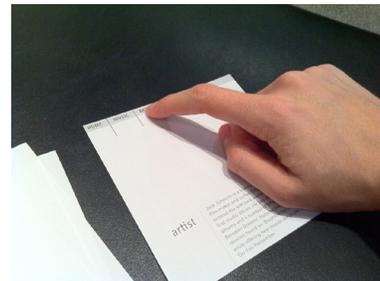
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1 Entering from the start screen

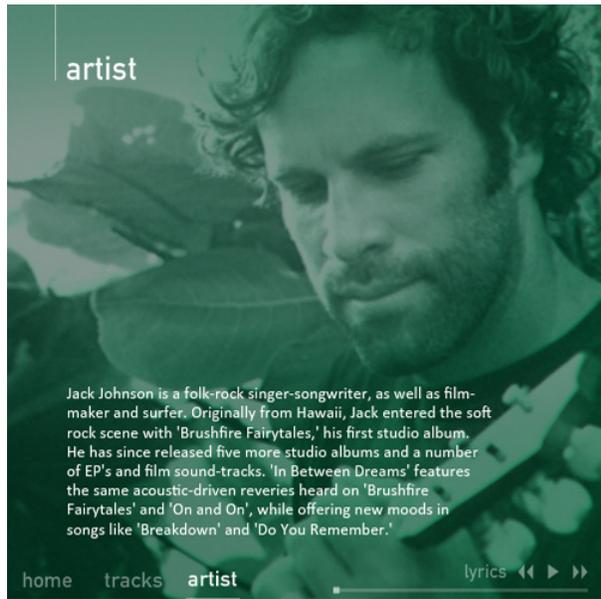
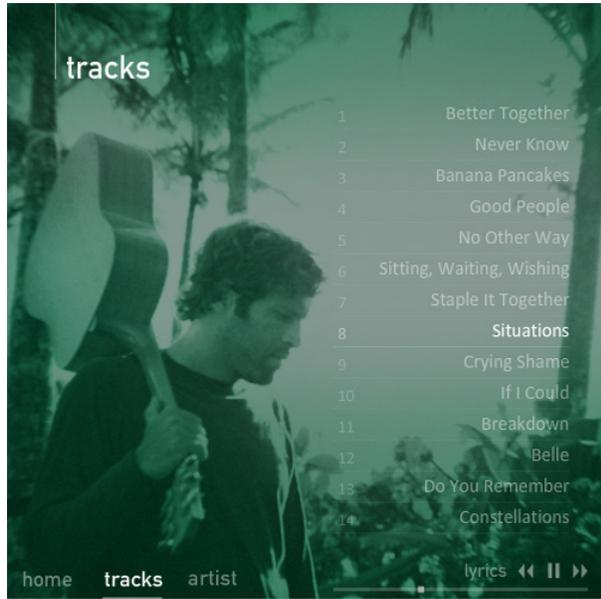
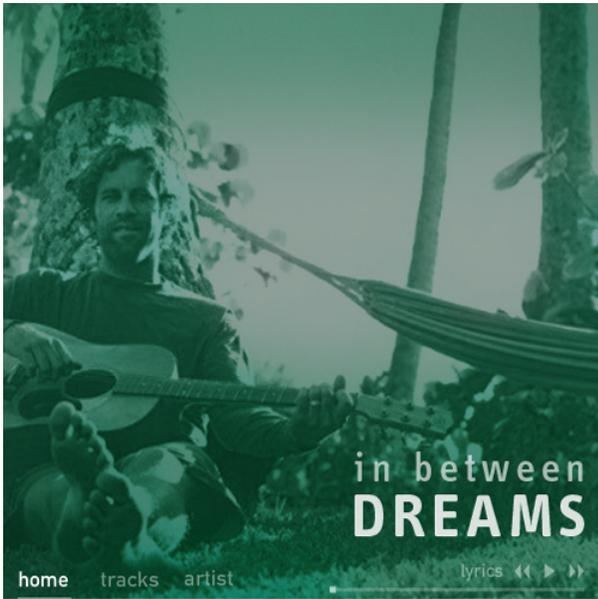
2 Selecting the track list

3,4 Selecting a track to play

5 Viewing the current song's lyrics

6 Navigating to the artist bio

Final Application Visuals



Top Left: Home screen

Top Right: Track list

Bottom Left: Lyrics

Bottom Right: Biography

User Testing

After receiving personal feedback from a few students, there were a number of considerations and changes that were made to the unfinished project. While not every concern was addressed in the final application, some of these changes included:

- The geometric 'home' icon that I had been using for much of the development cycle was deemed too generic and impersonal. However, while suggestions for a replacement button included a 'surf shack'-esque home button, I found that the scale of the menu did not support stylized graphic icons very well, and so the button was changed back to its original text form ("home")
- One interesting behavior of my application that I had not noticed until it was pointed out by others was an inconsistency with my background animations when changing album states. As the user explored new content, it was likely that the sliding visual indicator directly below the menu would be moving to the right; while the sliding background followed in the same direction, it caused the user's view to appear to move left, in the opposite direction. This mistake was corrected for the final
- Some testers were concerned that the readability of the biography text was slightly too low, being directly on top of a photograph
- Some users found that, on occasion, the 'current track' in the track list would become unsynchronized with the actual playing track

Reflection and Analysis

1. Given your results and experience, what do you think is particularly successful?

I believe the album achieves some success in matching the tone and personality of the music featured on the album. The piece is mainly characterized by the photography, which appear both unified and appropriate through the use of equal toning and a receding color treatment. This photography is supported by small overlaid typographic elements. The layouts were designed to avoid clutter or compression while at the same time reserving a majority of the pixel area for photography.

An important step to achieving the correct 'feel' of the album was picking appropriate animation and transitions for hiding and revealing content. This animation mainly consists of smooth translations and fades that overlap in time. I believe that this simple approach works well with Jack's simple music.

2. What do you think needs improvement (in both concept and execution)?

It is possible that the background imagery featured in the application does not have to be so artist-centric, and instead could distinguish the album through location or other subjects. I think that the home screen, while quiet, could further engage the user before introducing additional content. From my own experience using the application, I found it a little too difficult to grab the scrolling handles on both the playback bar and the lyrics scrollbar. Secondly, the scrolling lyrics content would benefit from trackpad or mouse-wheel scrolling support.

3. What individual parts of the process did you find most beneficial?

Mainly I enjoyed the early motion prototypes (hiding and revealing content), experimenting digitally with our metaphors, and creating a working desktop application with ActionScript. Focused Flash prototypes allowed us to experiment with and refine specific features while benefiting from a "clean" work environment, free of side-effects, and with significantly less code to scroll through compared to a full application.

4. Overall, from this project and the class, what did you learn?

I appreciated the top-down, multi-step approach to the project, and the initial focus on research and content (as opposed to jumping directly into Photoshop comps). I believe this approach encouraged sufficient thought and planning, as well as exploration of multiple design directions. The album also marked my first attempt at class-based AS3, which will serve as valuable experience for future Flash projects.