

PRODUCTION JOURNAL FOR: CUSTOM MADE - ROYAL COUNCIL (TRAILER)

DIR. BY AARON UMANOFF FOR CUSTOM MADE RECORDINGS

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The concept behind this trailer is straightforward. Custom Made, a critically acclaimed hip-hop group from Los Angeles, is known for their hardcore, reality-based music. Every artistic choice they make reflects their real lives. In the early 2000s underground hip-hop scene, they had a solid run, leading to signings with well-known NYC hip-hop labels: Babygrande Records in 2006 and later Rawkus Records in 2007. By 2010, they released their last official LP as a group and shifted focus to solo careers. Unfortunately, many members ended up incarcerated for crimes ranging from wire fraud to drug sales, trafficking, weapon possession, and even murder. Fast-forward to today, and they've reunited to release their first group album in fifteen years.

Custom Made's essence lies in authenticity. They dub their music "REALITY RAP" because every lyric reflects truth. Their art revolves around staying true to values and beliefs, presenting unfiltered, raw life experiences—even when painful or bleak. The video's goal is to convey this authenticity to viewers, emphasizing that everything depicted is 100% true and genuine. Rather than using the typical "BASED ON A TRUE STORY," we opted to put "THIS TRUE STORY" to let the viewers understand the reality behind the music.

Coming from a film background and having been involved in over 100 films and music videos since 2002, I decided to explore the world of AI-generated visuals. While I'd seen numerous AI-generated videos in the past year, this project marked my first time directing, producing, and participating in content created by artificial intelligence. The video I worked on was a documentary-style piece about Custom Made. Crafting a storyboard and defining the visual theme for this project wasn't challenging. When you're dealing with art inspired by or centered around real-life individuals, the concept becomes more straightforward—you're essentially telling their truth. Facts take precedence over fictional narratives. Simultaneously, it was crucial to portray Custom Made not only as artists but also as genuine human beings. Storytelling is universal, but effective conveyance requires finesse. As the director and cinematographer, I believe I successfully captured what Custom Made truly represents for the viewer.

The biggest challenges and obstacles I encountered during the creation of this video stemmed from my lack of prior experience in AI art. I wasn't entirely sure about the process, which apps to use, or the necessary steps to bring my vision to life. Our decision to create an AI video was primarily driven by the size of Custom Made—a fairly large group. With four main members based in Los Angeles and a host of extended affiliates in NYC, physically gathering everyone for a traditional shoot was impractical. Given this reality, we opted for an AI video, allowing us to

involve all participants, regardless of their location—whether they were in Los Angeles, New York City, or anywhere else in the world.

I was already in possession of over 200 hours of actual film footage that we had documented over the years, so I decided to use that as my foundation. Additionally, I filmed more footage using a Blackmagic Design Pocket Cinema 4K and an Arri Alexa Mini LF to capture any thoughts, concepts, and ideas I felt were missing. Now armed with about 350+ hours of actual film, I embarked on my AI experiment. The goal was authenticity and realism—from the artists in the video down to the original filming locations. Little did I know that this task would prove more challenging than I initially imagined. Anyone can create extremely creative, eye-popping AI footage. All you need is a basic understanding of composition and imagination. However, when it comes to crafting a piece of non-fiction art, the process can be painstaking. Every detail—from the artist's individual appearance to their body movements—must be meticulously considered.

The initial challenge I faced was finding the right AI apps that would align with my creative vision. In total, I experimented with about 25 different AI applications before settling on LEONARDO.AI and RUNWAY. While some of the other apps provided decent results, they didn't match the creative and quality standards set by LEONARDO and RUNWAY. These two apps were essential in shaping the final video. Although I could have potentially used other apps, I firmly believe that the end product wouldn't have been nearly as impressive.

Once I had chosen the AI apps for this project, my next hurdle was ensuring they could faithfully recreate the scenes I envisioned. Interestingly, the challenge wasn't about learning how to prompt—I meticulously crafted my prompts to be exceptionally detailed. Rather than using generic language, I approached each prompt cinematically. For every scene, I described every imaginable detail: character expressions, movements, camera angles, camera motion, atmosphere, mood, color palette, and even set specifics. It dawned on me that the key to achieving cinematic AI videos lies in prompting like a seasoned cinematographer.

When delving into AI filmmaking, one must grapple with a fundamental truth: no matter how precisely you follow the same prompt, the outcomes will never be identical. Occasionally, there might be subtle similarities between generations, but each AI iteration remains inherently unique. In the early stages of my project, I often found myself iterating 10 to 15 times before achieving the precise result I envisioned. This process could be frustrating, especially when contrasted with traditional live footage, where you have direct control and can manipulate scenes more swiftly. One intriguing observation pertains to the AI's grasp of human anatomy. These apps sometimes lack an understanding of the physics governing how our bodies operate and move. Consequently, generated assets occasionally lack the soul and emotional depth inherent in performances by real human actors. Furthermore, despite providing detailed prompts, the AI occasionally veers off course, producing entirely different outcomes. Initially, this divergence proved irksome, but as I invested more hours in using these tools, I discovered a

rhythm. By the midpoint of my video creation process, I had honed my approach: rather than attempting 10 times, I now needed only 2 to 3 attempts to achieve the perfect generation.

With that being said, I definitely think AI technology will continue to play a major role in all aspects of daily life. However, it will undoubtedly be a significant factor in the art world, particularly when it comes to filmmaking. Overall, the entire process—from compiling the original source footage, running it through AI apps, and then editing everything—took me exactly one month to finish. As a first-time explorer in the realm of AI filmmaking, I was genuinely impressed with the capabilities of these apps. We're still in the infancy of much of this technology, so I'm eagerly looking forward to the advancements that await us.