DAILY UI CHALLENGE / 008

Muse Music Player

Deep UX/UI Case Study

An immersive mobile listening experience designed to keep the music at the center while making playback controls effortless to use.

Product Muse	**Platform** Mobile app
Canvas 390 × 844 px	**Direction** Immersive & modern

Portfolio case study · Concept project · October 2026

01. Project Overview

Muse is a concept music discovery and listening app focused on independent artists. The project explores how a mobile player can feel cinematic and expressive without sacrificing clarity, accessibility, or speed.

Field	Definition
Challenge	Design a music player for a mobile device, considering artwork, controls, information hierarchy, and device context.
Product concept	A listening and discovery experience that helps people enjoy tracks and explore independent musicians.
Primary screen	Now Playing, supported by queue, lyrics, discovery, and track actions.
Design output	Three wireframe directions, selected concept, high-fidelity interface direction, interaction and accessibility notes.
Scope note	This is a concept case study. User research, usability testing, and performance outcomes are proposed, not claimed as completed.

Design principle

> **“The interface should support the music, not compete with it.”**

The player gives the artwork and track identity emotional space, while keeping the most frequent action—play/pause—visually dominant.

02. Challenge & Problem Definition

Music players must balance emotional expression with practical control. Album art creates atmosphere, but users still need to identify the track, check progress, skip songs, and access secondary features.

Problem statement

> **Listeners need an immersive player that makes essential playback controls immediately understandable, without burying useful actions or overwhelming the screen.**

How might we question

How might we create a focused listening experience where the artwork feels immersive and core playback controls remain easy to find and operate one-handed?

Design challenges

- Establish a clear hierarchy between artwork, track metadata, progress, and controls.
- Make the primary playback action easy to recognize and reach.
- Keep secondary actions available without letting them dominate.
- Support paused, buffering, queue-open, and track-change states.
- Maintain readability across varied album artwork and dynamic backgrounds.

03. Target Audience & Proto-Persona

Proto-persona: Aarav, 24 — Music Explorer

Attribute	Details
Context	Listens while commuting, working, studying, and relaxing.
Motivation	Discover new artists and build playlists that match his mood.
Needs	Clear playback, quick track changes, visible progress, easy save/like, simple queue access.
Frustrations	Crowded controls, unclear icons, tiny touch targets, hard-to-read text over artwork.
Accessibility context	May use the app outdoors, with one hand, or while distracted.

Primary user goal

> **“I want to enjoy music and control playback quickly without hunting for the controls.”**

Research status

This persona is a design hypothesis created for the challenge, not a validated research finding. In a real project, it should be refined through interviews, listening-context observation, and usability testing.

04. UX Goals & Design Requirements

UX goal	Design response	How to evaluate
Fast playback control	Large, centered play/pause with previous and next nearby.	Observe whether users can pause or skip without assistance.
Clear song identity	Artwork, title, and artist grouped together.	Ask users to identify the current track and artist.
Visible progress	Progress bar plus elapsed and total time.	Check whether users can estimate remaining time and seek.
Low visual competition	Secondary controls use smaller scale and quieter styling.	Ask users to identify the primary action at a glance.
Quick access to extras	Lyrics, queue, device output, and share in a compact action row.	Test discoverability and navigation success.
Accessible feedback	Contrast, labels, touch targets, and clear state changes.	Accessibility audit plus screen-reader and touch testing.

Priority model

- **Must have:** track identity, progress, play/pause, previous/next.
- **Should have:** like, shuffle, repeat, queue, lyrics.
- **Could have:** download, share, device output, artist and album shortcuts.

05. Information Architecture

The player is organized around the current track first. Secondary destinations are available without interrupting the core listening task.

Area	Content	Reason
Now Playing	Artwork, title, artist, like/save	Establishes track identity and emotional focus.
Playback	Progress, elapsed/total time, previous, play/pause, next	Supports the most frequent listening actions.
Playback options	Shuffle, repeat, volume	Useful controls remain visually secondary.
Quick actions	Lyrics, queue, device output, share	Provides direct access to common supporting tasks.
Queue	Current track, upcoming tracks, reorder/remove	Helps users understand what plays next.
More options	Download, add to playlist, artist, album	Keeps less frequent actions out of the main hierarchy.

Navigation principle

Keep the Now Playing screen stable and predictable. Opening lyrics, queue, or more options should preserve the current track and playback state.

06. Primary User Flow

Step	User action	System response
1	Open Muse	Arrive at Home / Discover.
2	Choose a track	Select a song from a recommendation or playlist.
3	Enter Now Playing	See artwork, title, artist, progress, and controls.
4	Control playback	Play/pause, skip, or seek through the track.
5	Take a secondary action	Like the song, open lyrics, or view the queue.
6	Continue listening	Return to the player or select the next queued track.

Flow considerations

- Returning from lyrics or queue should not reset the current position.
- A liked song should receive visible confirmation and expose its saved state.
- Seeking should update the progress indicator and time labels.
- If offline or buffering, explain the state without making the player appear frozen.

07. Wireframe Exploration & Selection

Three structural directions were explored before selecting the immersive concept.

Direction	Strengths	Trade-offs
Variation 1 — Minimal & Focused	Low clutter; strong clarity; simple hierarchy.	Less expressive; secondary actions may be less discoverable.
Variation 2 — Feature Rich	Exposes volume, download, and additional destinations.	More controls compete for space and attention.
Variation 3 — Immersive & Modern (selected)	Artwork-led experience; strong emotional tone; large primary controls.	Requires careful contrast and restraint with overlays.

Why Variation 3 was selected

- It creates a distinctive, portfolio-ready visual identity.
- It preserves a clear control hierarchy: artwork → track information → progress → playback.
- It leaves secondary actions accessible in a compact bottom area.
- It supports a coherent dark theme with artwork-inspired color accents.

Choose the direction that best balances the core user task, visual expression, and interaction clarity—not the one with the most features.

08. High-Fidelity UI & Visual System

The high-fidelity direction uses a dark navy interface with purple accents and cinematic artwork. The visual system is intended to make the player feel atmospheric while keeping text and controls readable.

Token	Suggested value	Use
Background	#0B1020	Primary player canvas.
Surface	#171E32	Queue panels and secondary surfaces.
Primary accent	#8B6CFF	Progress fill, selected states, focus indicators.
Highlight	#F5F3FF	Primary control contrast and key text.
Secondary text	#B6BED3	Artist, timestamps, supporting labels.
Like accent	#FF6B9A	Liked state with icon and state feedback.

Typography & spacing

- Use a highly legible sans-serif such as Inter or SF Pro.
- Use larger type for the song title, medium weight for the artist, and smaller type for timestamps.
- Apply a consistent spacing scale (8, 12, 16, 24, 32 px) to group related controls.
- Keep the play/pause button visually dominant; secondary icons should be quieter.

Artwork behavior

Artwork can drive subtle ambient gradients, but text and controls should sit on stable contrast-safe surfaces when the image is bright, busy, or low contrast.

09. Interaction States & Feedback

State	Expected behavior	Feedback
Playing	Playback active; progress advances.	Pause icon and updated elapsed time.
Paused	Track position is preserved.	Play icon replaces pause; position remains visible.
Buffering	Playback is waiting for data.	Subtle loading indicator and concise status.
Track changed	Metadata, artwork, duration, and queue state update.	Smooth transition without losing control context.
Liked	Track is added to liked songs.	Heart changes state; accessible confirmation.
Downloaded	Track becomes available offline if supported.	Download status updates clearly.
Queue open	Upcoming tracks are shown and can be managed.	Current track remains identifiable; playback persists.
Lyrics open	Lyrics follow the current song when available.	Current line is highlighted; fallback if unavailable.

Error and empty states

- No lyrics available: explain briefly and provide a way back to Now Playing.
- Download failed: show the reason where possible and provide Retry.
- Network lost: distinguish offline playback from streaming failure.
- Queue empty: explain that the next track can be added from search or a playlist.

10. Device & Context Considerations

A mobile music player may be used in situations where attention is limited. The interface should remain understandable even when the user is not staring at the screen.

Context	Design implication
One-handed use	Place frequent actions within comfortable reach and avoid tiny controls.
Outdoor lighting	Maintain strong contrast; do not rely on subtle gradients for text legibility.
Background playback	Preserve playback when navigating away or locking the screen; coordinate with OS media controls.
Headphones / external output	Provide clear device-output status and avoid ambiguous connection states.
Low connectivity	Show buffering/offline states and preserve the user's place in the track.
Small screens	Keep essential controls visible and move less frequent actions into a secondary panel.

Scope boundary

This concept focuses on the mobile app. Lock-screen controls, notification controls, Bluetooth output behavior, and platform-specific media APIs would need separate implementation and testing.

11. Accessibility & Inclusive Design

- Maintain WCAG-informed contrast for text and controls, including over dynamic artwork.
- Use descriptive accessibility labels such as “Pause track” or “Skip to next track,” not only unlabeled icons.
- Ensure touch targets are comfortably sized; aim for around 44 × 44 pt where platform guidance supports it.
- Support screen readers and communicate toggle states for shuffle, repeat, and liked songs.
- Do not use pink or purple alone to communicate a state; combine color with icon changes or labels.
- Respect reduced-motion preferences and avoid unnecessary animation during track changes.
- Keep lyrics readable and ensure the highlighted line remains distinguishable without color alone.

Accessibility checklist

Before handoff, test contrast, text scaling, screen-reader order, touch-target spacing, focus visibility, and playback-state announcements on supported devices.

12. Usability Testing Plan

No usability study is claimed as completed for this concept. The following lightweight plan would validate the main assumptions before implementation.

Task	What to observe	Potential issue
Pause and resume a track	Time to locate and activate the main control.	Play/pause not visually dominant.
Skip to the next track	Success without accidental actions.	Controls too close together.
Seek to a specific time	Understanding of progress bar and timestamps.	Slider too small or hard to drag.
Like a track	Recognition of state change and confirmation.	State feedback is too subtle.
Open queue and return	Whether current playback is preserved.	Navigation disrupts listening.
Find lyrics	Discoverability and return path.	Secondary action is hidden or unclear.

Proposed success signals

- Participants complete core playback tasks without help.
- Users can identify the primary playback action at a glance.
- No critical confusion between play/pause, next, and queue actions.
- Users understand whether a track is playing, paused, buffering, or downloaded.

These are proposed evaluation criteria, not measured results.

13. Design Decisions & Trade-offs

Decision	Why	Trade-off / mitigation
Dark theme	Supports an immersive, low-distraction visual mood.	Check readability in bright environments.
Large artwork	Strengthens emotional connection to the song.	Keep core controls visible on smaller devices.
Central primary control	Makes play/pause easy to identify.	Do not make surrounding controls too small.
Compact secondary actions	Protects the primary listening hierarchy.	Use familiar icons and labels for discoverability.
Artwork-inspired gradient	Adds atmosphere and visual continuity.	Place text on contrast-safe surfaces.
Dedicated queue and lyrics views	Gives complex content enough space.	Preserve playback state when switching views.

Key trade-off

The design prioritizes focused listening over exposing every feature at once. Less frequent actions remain available through clear secondary destinations.

14. Outcome, Learnings & Next Steps

Concept outcome

The proposed direction creates a clear Now Playing hierarchy and a consistent visual language for discovery, queue, lyrics, and track actions. The design intent is to make listening feel immersive while keeping core controls predictable.

Key learnings

- Visual richness works best when the interaction hierarchy stays simple.
- Artwork must not compromise contrast or readability.
- The primary action deserves more emphasis than secondary controls.
- State feedback is essential: users should know whether a track is playing, paused, buffering, liked, or downloaded.
- A music player is not only a screen; background playback and OS media controls are part of the overall experience.

Recommended next steps

- Create an interactive prototype for playback, queue, lyrics, and track switching.
- Run usability tests with 5–7 target users and revise based on observed friction.
- Test accessibility with screen readers and larger text settings.
- Validate responsive behavior across smaller and larger mobile screens.
- Define developer handoff specs for audio states, offline behavior, and platform media controls.

15. Portfolio Presentation Notes

When presenting this case study in a portfolio, clearly distinguish design hypotheses from validated findings. A strong presentation can include:

- The original Daily UI prompt and the design challenge.
- A short problem statement and the primary user goal.
- The three wireframe variations and why Variation 3 was selected.
- The high-fidelity screen set: Now Playing, Queue, Lyrics, and More Options.
- Annotated interaction states and accessibility decisions.
- A prototype link, if one is created.
- Testing observations and iterations, once real testing is completed.

Project status: Concept UI/UX case study. Research and usability outcomes are proposed future work, not completed evidence.

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