Unit1 raises $20m for avatar concerts

LEVEL B1


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I. WARM-UP

1. Have you ever watched a virtual or streamed concert?
2. Which old concert would you like to see again, and why?
3. How would you feel about a show with digital performers?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

startup
A new business created to develop an idea or product.

investor
A person or company that gives money to a business to help it grow.

avatar
A digital version of a person used on screen or online.

motion capture
Technology that records body movement to create digital images.

venue
A place where events like concerts are held.

pilot
A small test project to try an idea before a full launch.

estate
The people who control a dead person's rights and property.

illusion
Something that looks real but is created by special effects.

III. READING

UK music tech startup Unit1 has raised $20m (about £15m) to build concerts using “hyper-realistic” digital avatars. The company was set up last year by Barney Wragg, former head of Andrew Lloyd Webber's entertainment group.

Backers include investor Balderton Capital, via partner Daniel Waterhouse, known for early Spotify funding. Unit1 says it will offer lower-cost shows without a special venue.

In tests, Scottish musician KT Tunstall filmed a pilot in a London studio, using motion capture to recreate a two-decade-old TV slot, updated to how she looks now. The idea follows the success of Abba Voyage, a 2022 avatar show in a purpose-built space in east London.

The new funds will go into research and development and licensing with artists and their estates. At shows, live musicians will be playing on stage while avatars appear on a high-definition screen, with lights and props creating the illusion of a fully human act.

Some fans worry about recreating dead stars, but Unit1 says it will work carefully with families. It also says a show could tour in several countries at the same time.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: “UK startup snares $20m to recreate gigs...”. Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How much money did Unit1 raise?
2. Who founded Unit1?
3. Where did KT Tunstall film the pilot?
4. Which earlier avatar show was a success?
5. What concern do some fans have about the technology?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Would you pay to see an avatar show? Why or why not?
2. Which artist's past concert should be recreated, if any?
3. Is it respectful to use a dead star's image on stage?
4. How could this tech change touring in your country?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Future continuous

Use will be + -ing for an action that will be in progress at a specific time in the future. Use a time phrase (e.g. this time next month, at 9pm) to show when.

"At shows, live musicians **will be playing** *on stage."*

"Tomorrow evening, I **will be dancing** *at an avatar show."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence using the future continuous (will be + -ing).

1. This time next month, engineers (test) ___ the avatar software. _____
2. At 9pm next Friday, fans (watch) ___ the concert online. _____
3. During the tour next year, shows (run) ___ in several cities. _____
4. At 10pm tonight, we (sing) ___ along with the avatars. _____
5. In an hour, technicians (check) ___ the lights and props. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach the idea of digital avatars and motion capture; check students know venue, investor, estate.
- Run a jigsaw reading: half the class focuses on funding and partners; half on the show design and concerns, then share. Sensitivity: the story involves recreating dead performers, so start discussion in pairs and allow students to speak about general policies, not personal losses.
- Differentiate by product: stronger students predict what parts of a live show will be easiest or hardest to digitise and justify their view; others list pros and cons with examples from the text.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Take a quick poll, then ask for one reason and one example from each side.
2. Have students name one artist and one specific concert year, then justify the choice.
3. If views clash, move to pairs first; keep the focus on public shows, not private grief.
4. Elicit two concrete changes (touring costs, access). Push for one benefit and one risk.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In two teams, prepare and deliver 2-minute arguments for or against avatar shows.

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word venue pitch inviting Unit1 to bring a show to your city.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Future continuous

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How much money did Unit1 raise?
   $20m, about £15m.
2. Who founded Unit1?
   Barney Wragg.
3. Where did KT Tunstall film the pilot?
   In a London studio.
4. Which earlier avatar show was a success?
   Abba Voyage, a 2022 avatar show in east London.
5. What concern do some fans have about the technology?
   Recreating dead stars as digital performers.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use will be + -ing for an action that will be in progress at a specific time in the future. Use a time phrase (e.g. this time next month, at 9pm) to show when. (Example 2 constructed.)

"At shows, live musicians **will be playing** *on stage."*

"Tomorrow evening, I **will be dancing** *at an avatar show."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence using the future continuous (will be + -ing).

1. This time next month, engineers ___ the avatar software. **will be testing**
2. At 9pm next Friday, fans ___ the concert online. **will be watching**
3. During the tour next year, shows ___ in several cities. **will be running**
4. At 10pm tonight, we ___ along with the avatars. **will be singing**
5. In an hour, technicians ___ the lights and props. **will be checking**