



Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?

For some people, it all began with those words from *Bohemian Rhapsody*, in 1975. For others, the music video owes its origins to the Beatles, and the video clip entered history with *Can't Buy Me Love*. Actually, the music video dates back even further. Its history is tied to that of rock and roll and pop music, as well as that of television and new technologies. "Soundies" in the United States in the 1940s, and "Scopitones" in France in the 1960s, worked like jukeboxes and ran 16-mm short films featuring the stars of the day. Soundies were also used on television to fill in air time between shows. In the late 1950s, when a group could not appear live, a "promo," or short pseudo-documentary film of the group performing, was shown instead. Not to be outdone, the British displayed particular ingenuity in staging the idea behind a performance and adding a story to it: *A Hard Day's Night*, directed by Richard Lester in 1964, puts together a pastiche of a day in the life of the Beatles; then, starting in 1966, more "arty" and conceptual productions like *A Day in the Life*, *Penny Lane* or *Hey Jude* would offer the Beatles an alternative to touring. These films of the 1960s introduced the primary characteristics of the music video's visual vocabulary: stylized images, unusual points of view and editing in time to the music. < < <

Still, for many people the "first real video clip" is *Bohemian Rhapsody*, by Queen, directed by Bruce Gowers in 1975. With its a cappella section and its guitar solo, the song seemed unperformable on stage at the time. To allow the group to appear "live" on television, a video was made very quickly, in the space of four hours, during one of the group's rehearsals, with all the special effects created live, almost improvised. First broadcast on the BBC show *Top of the Pops*, the video propelled the song to the top of the British charts, where it stayed for nine weeks. The whole music industry began to realize that a video clip could not only support a group and illustrate a song, but could also turn a record into a hit! The group's breakthrough success, judged the best single of all time, *Bohemian Rhapsody* sparked a trend: all the record companies started making music videos, and the term "video clip" came to specifically designate a short, punchy video film using special effects and made to promote a song. < < <

The sector benefited from the outset from the considerable production resources of the recording industry. It was also always on the look-out for new, more interesting, not to mention more provocative, ideas to attract television viewers and hold their attention. With the stimulus and demand generated by the advent of specialty television channels such as MTV, established in 1981, production budgets quickly took on sizable proportions. In 1983, narrative videos like Michael Jackson's *Beat It*, directed by Bob Giraldi, soon followed by the 14-minute *Thriller*—virtually a short film—directed by John Landis, beat all records. < < <

Paradoxically, scarcely had the video clip been given a name and a definition as a promotional tool for launching songs than a reversal took place. Commercial pressures created a tremendous creative opportunity for the directors, who soon became masters of special effects and the relationship between image and sound. These creative artists handled both the real and the imaginary with ease and flair, and their work began to influence other media such as film and advertising. In 1984, the inaugural American Video Awards paid tribute to the innovation that had emerged from the music video sector and attested to the emergence of a new art form. In 1985, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, held an exhibition entitled *The Music Video: The Industry and Its Fringes*. Some forty titles, including *Penny Lane* and *Strawberry Fields Forever*, both made in 1967 by Peter Goldman, were added to MoMA's collection at that time. In 1987, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam organized *The Arts for Television*, which featured a major music video component with, among other works, *Imagine* by Zbigniew Rybczynski. The exhibition went on to a number of other museums, including the Tate Gallery in London, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. < < <

At the end of the "golden age" of the 1980s, just when we thought everything had already been said and done, along came directors like Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry and Chris Cunningham. Remarkably clever and inventive in their concepts and images, camera work and special effects, they belong to the first generation of video makers to have grown up with MTV, and the first to carve out a reputation as *auteurs*. Making music videos seems almost a game for them, and has certainly been

a springboard to feature films, as evidenced by *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002), directed by Spike Jonze, and *Human Nature* (2001) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), by Michel Gondry. Chris Cunningham, who probably created the most disturbing and provocative images in the entire history of the music video, has, for his part, been moving towards the contemporary art world and in 2001 participated in the 49th Venice Biennale with *Flex*, his first short film. In 2003, Jonze, Gondry and Cunningham founded the Directors Label, a DVD collection devoted to directors "who helped to re-define music video and film making."

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Working between music and film, television and advertising, music video directors have come up with new ways of doing things, and expanded the visual arts field as a whole. The selection of videos offered here opens with *Bohemian Rhapsody*, for another look at what started it all off, although this work reveals how quickly the past can begin to show its age. We have also included *Rockit*, by Godley & Creme, created entirely with puppets because black musicians were said to have difficulty making it onto MTV at the time; the cartoon-influenced *Take On Me*, by Steve Barron; the dazzling *Sledgehammer*, by Stephen R. Johnson; Mark Romanek's *Bedtime Story*, which takes its inspiration from Surrealist painting and transforms Madonna's face into a mask with three mouths; the imaginary worlds of Jonathan Glazer, in *Street Spirit*, Chris Cunningham, in *Only You*, and Martin de Thurah, in *What Else Is There*; the animation produced by Félix Lajeunesse and Paul Raphaël, in collaboration with Thien Vu Dang, for *Les Humains*; *Laika*, by Joshua Deu, who has worked closely with *Arcade Fire* since the very beginning; and, to conclude, Louis-Philippe Enos's fanciful concept seen in *Montréal -40°C*.

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Cover Louis-Philippe Eno, *Montréal -40°C*, Malajube, 2006. Courtesy NÚ Films

Design epicentre.qc.ca

Programme

- 1975 **Bruce Gowers**, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, Queen, 5 min 56 s
- 1983 **Godley & Creme**¹, *Rockit*, Herbie Hancock, 3 min 22 s
- 1984 **Zbigniew Rybczynski**, *Close to the Edit*, Art of Noise, 4 min 16 s
Zbigniew Rybczynski, *All That I Wanted*, Belfegore, 4 min 16 s
Jean Baptiste Mondino, *Boys of Summer*, Don Henley, 4 min 46 s
- 1985 **Steve Barron**, *Take On Me*, a-ha, 3 min 40 s
- 1986 **Stephen R. Johnson**, *Sledgehammer*, Peter Gabriel, 4 min 59 s
Zbigniew Rybczynski, *Imagine*, John Lennon, 3 min 15 s
- 1991 **Stéphane Sednaoui**, *Give It Away*, Red Hot Chili Peppers, 4 min 31 s
- 1995 **Mark Romanek**, *Bedtime Story*, Madonna, 4 min 24 s
- 1996 **Jonathan Glazer**, *Street Spirit*, Radiohead, 4 min 18 s
- 1997 **Chris Cunningham**, *Only You*, Portishead, 4 min 17 s
- 1998 **Chris Cunningham**, *All Is Full of Love*, Björk, 4 min 05 s
- 2001 **Spike Jonze**, *Weapon of Choice*, Fatboy Slim, 3 min 45 s
- 2002 **Pascal Grandmaison**, *Les yeux tout autour de la tête*, Jérôme Minière, 4 min 38 s
Michel Gondry, *Fell in Love with a Girl*, The White Stripes, 1 min 55 s
Michel Gondry, *Come to My World*, Kylie Minogue, 4 min 13 s
- 2003 **Alex & Martin**², *Seven Nation Army*, The White Stripes, 3 min 53 s
Floria Sigismondi, *In My Secret Life*, Leonard Cohen, 4 min 06 s
- 2004 **Maxime Giroux**, *Overrated*, Pilate, 3 min 16 s
Jonas Odell, *Take Me Out*, Franz Ferdinand, 3 min 58 s
- 2005 **Félix et Paul**³, *Les Humains*, Akido, 3 min 45 s
Micah Meisner, *Devil's Eyes*, Buck 65, 3 min 49 s
Joshua Deu, *Laika*, Arcade Fire, 3 min 30 s
Martin de Thurah, *What Else Is There?* Röyksopp, 3 min 31 s
- 2006 **Louis-Philippe Eno**, *Montréal -40°C*, Malajube, 3 min 17 s

1 Kevin Godley et Lol Creme ont travaillé ensemble jusqu'en 1989.

2 Alexandre Courtes et Martin Fougerol.

3 Félix Lajeunesse et Paul Raphaël souhaitent souligner la collaboration de Thien Vu Dang.