

July 11 – September 30, 2007

The number of music videos made around the world each year is difficult, if not impossible, to know. It is surely in the thousands. With YouTube and a host of other sites devoted to video, most of the productions that were intended exclusively for specialty television networks in the eighties and nineties are now available online. The music video that has been making the most news in the last few months is *Here It Goes Again*, by Chicago-based rock group OK Go, which was posted on YouTube on July 31, 2006. In the first six days, *HIGA* had been seen over a million times. By the beginning of July 2007, less than a year later, it had over nineteen million views, placing it sixth on YouTube's all-time favourites. < <

Here It Goes Again was shot with a stationary camera in one continuous, three-minute take, and shows the four members of the group performing a choreographed routine on eight treadmills. With its brilliant, low-budget concept, *HIGA* propelled OK Go onto the stage at the 2006 MTV Video Music Awards, and the work won the 2007 Grammy for Best Short Form Music Video as well as the 2006 YouTube Award for Most Creative Video. The choreography was created and directed by Trish Sie. She is the sister of the band's singer, Damien Kulash, who is not actually the one singing in the video. The virus-like spread of *Here It Goes Again* demonstrates the power of YouTube, and more. *HIGA* crystallizes something about the current trend; its ingenious idea stems from the meeting of two moments in changing time. While music videos in the eighties and nineties were created to meet the standards of the specialty channels, now YouTube has provided the do-it-yourself generation with a means of dissemination that puts imagination and inventiveness first. < <

Music videos capture images that reflect our societies' perceptible feelings. We are always in the middle of a time, caught in the tangled threads of the various trends that make up our era. The *HIGA*

phenomenon marks a turning point in the evolution of music videos and is perhaps the beginning of a new momentum, much like some of Spike Jonze and Roman Coppola's creations in the late nineties. Those years were the peak of big-budget productions full of technical feats and special effects, until Spike Jonze gave us *Praise You* by Fatboy Slim, a "low-budget" gem of a video. This unique dance routine was filmed in under ten minutes outside a movie theatre in Westwood Village, Los Angeles. We see Jonze and his troupe, the Torrance Community Dance Group, trying hard to perform a sequence of outdated moves in the midst of a crowd, where the cameramen, who are dressed as tourists, go unnoticed. It is a rare moment of authenticity with, as a bonus, an appearance by Norman Cook, a.k.a. Fat Boy Slim, at the end of the video. Spontaneity, real people and a certain fragility of the image break with the redundant reliance on the spectacular at the time. *Praise You* taught everyone a lesson, and from then on, many big-budget productions made an effort to not look the part. < According to director Mark Romanek, "Music video is like highlights in relief, like sculpting in time. The secret to a movie's success is its rhythm." Beyond having the right idea, beyond finding a balance between concept and treatment, between image and music, the success of a video depends on the quality of the energy it sustains from start to finish. And that energy often stems from the relationship between the director and the artist. Spike Jonze is quite categorical about it: "I felt like the videos that always came out the best were the ones for the artists that I loved." Tarsem, whose very fine *Losing My Religion* is presented here, has made very few music videos because, as he explains, "I can't do a [music video] unless it's absolutely the right song. ... I can even like a song very much, but if it doesn't relate to any ideas I have, I can't do it. *Losing My Religion* just happened to be one of the right songs." < <

The world of music video is as wide as it is varied. Each style of music calls for a certain visual aesthetic; from indie rock to sentimental ballads, from electro-pop to deejay remixes, you can find it all. There are still big-budget productions, just as there are still directors who, through sheer perseverance, procure the resources needed to give shape to their ideas. And, as we saw with *HIGA*, there are others whose ingenuity turns everything on its ear. Music video directors are remarkably inventive in their concepts and images, and never stop coming up with new ways of doing things. < <

This program is made up of twenty-two videos that were chosen without favouring any specific style or trend, although the focus is

more on productions from recent years. A few clips from the eighties and nineties give a certain historical perspective, hence the decision to show the works in chronological order. The directors represented come from various places: StyleWar is a Swedish collective, Martin de Thurah lives and works in Denmark, Aleksandra Domanovic is Slovenian (though she recently moved to Berlin), Shynola is a London-based collective, Michel Gondry is French, Spike Jonze is American, and Tarsem was born in the Punjab in India and now lives and works in London. The Montréal scene is represented by James Di Salvio, now based in California, with his 1991 video for Jean Leloup's *Isabelle*, and by Louis Philippe Éno, the Fluorescent Hill collective and Dave Pawsey, whose *Bridge to Nowhere*, by Sam Roberts, made with visual effects supervisor Jonathan Legris, won the 2007 Juno Award for Video of the Year and the MuchMusic Video Award for Best Post-Production. < <

The program begins with a huge David Bowie hit from 1980, *Ashes to Ashes*, directed by David Mallet and David Bowie. Starting in the seventies, Bowie enjoyed playing on fantasy and extravagance through Ziggy, his alter ego, and a whole cast of other characters. Here, he appears as both Major Tom, a nod to his song *Space Oddity* (1969), and Harlequin, the famous buffoon from Italian theatre. The video illustrates a crucial aspect of music videos: their use of role playing. Twenty-six years later, through the magic of an incredible montage, the clip for U2's *Window in the Skies* brings popular music's greatest legends together, from Elvis Presley to Bob Marley, Radiohead, Frank Sinatra and, in the version we are screening, the Beatles. U2 wanted to pay homage to the best, to their talent, to their passion. The group's members appear in the audience instead of on stage. Inspired by the Surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*, Gary Koepke had the idea of making a video, using stock shots, where U2 invites all the musicians who inspired the group to come back and sing with them. *Window in the Skies* is truly a miracle of synchronous images. "The whole idea would have fallen apart," says Koepke, "if it hadn't been such a great song." <

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The Mark Romanek quote is taken from *Thirty Frames Per Second: The Visionary Art of the Music Video*, p. 213; Spike Jonze is quoted from the booklet accompanying the DVD *The Work of Director Spike Jonze*; the Tarsem quote comes from *Rolling Stone* magazine, No. 667; and the Gary Koepke quote is translated from the U2France website.

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Cover Dave Pawsey, *Bridge to Nowhere*, Sam Roberts, 2006. Visual Effects Supervisor: Jonathan Legris

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