

Video influences the music market

by Dragos Ruiu

When I come home after classes, MuchMusic blares at me. My roommate is a big MuchMusic fan.

I remember when music videos were the furor of music news about three years ago. Journalists would go on a tirade about how videos would kill the music industry and make it a mere pawn of television. Others would laud the 'new' rock videos as an innovative new art-form that would blaze a new path into the future.

Well, the jury has been out all this time. What can we conclude about videos now that they are well established?

It is very obvious that the impact of videos has been widespread. No commercial group can ignore videos if they wish to be successful. These days we also see videos from 'alternative' music groups like The Pogues and Husker Du.

No band can pass up the opportunity to flash their product and name to their buying audience that video offers them. Some bands' popularity stems directly from video.

Take a-HA on, for instance (sorry about the pun). A clean-cut Norwegian syntho-pop group with looks that buckle girls' knees. Destined for success, right? They will start out slow, mainly in Europe. When Teen-Beat gets their picture, their albums will start selling in North America. That is the normal development curve.

But when this band came out with their first video entitled, "Take On Me", which used a stunning new rotoscoping and animation technique, their sales detonated. All because of one video.

Videos also bring a whole new dimension to the packaged image band. A record

company takes a bunch of basically talentless, stunningly unintelligent guys, and calls them Sique Sique Sputnik. You tell them what kind of music will be outrageous (and attract media attention), how to act and look outrageous. You make some slick videos, and you have instant mega-bucks, regardless of the music (or non-music, as the case may be).

Some bands these days are media creations. Sometimes that media isn't music, though.

The success of new commercial albums is dictated by the appeal of the videos from the album (there are still exceptions). The original critics were right. But so were the proponents. Videos have metamorphosed into a new art.

Video directors are beginning to become famous on their own. Music videos are the showcase for new video technology. Video budgets are skyrocketing. And as it becomes more commercial, the back-yard music video is also spreading.

The quality of videos these days well surpasses any other video medium, including commercials (the previous title holder). And video audiences are becoming jaded by this quality. If a video does not have a new effect or trail-blazing approach, it immediately becomes branded as 'boring' and you will see the sales plummet.

If you watch closely, most videos rely on an average of two or three major effects to shock the viewer and capture his attention. And it is now a necessity to provide a new effect to shock the viewer to simply survive the fan's finicky tastes.

Take for instance the Godley & Creme (belonging to the aforementioned famous

director category) video for Lou Reed. Lou didn't want to appear in it. It starts out with a tight shot of Lou singing, but something is not quite right. You can't really figure it out until the singer rips his own jaw off only to reveal that 'Lou' is actually a very complex plastic puppet.

All the sophistication in videos make older videos seem absolutely barbaric. Videos have a short shelf life. What will happen when the new effects become limited by the medium itself (the resolution, the audio quality of video)? Or will they continuously keep expanding to newer and better things?

So, what is the verdict? Undoubtedly, videos have changed the music industry, but is it for the worse? I don't know. They have helped some bands and hurt others. They certainly have succeeded in showcasing music, which was their original intention.

As far as videos in Canada go, it is quite amazing to find that we are actually trend-

setters. We are, on the average, a week to three days ahead of the U.S. as far as video trends go. Most of this is due to the excellent video network, MuchMusic, that we have up here.

Video networks in the States (MTV in particular) are afraid to go out on a limb and play something new, unlike MuchMusic. Rumour has it that American producers look to Canada as a test market for videos.

As far as broadcast TV goes, the number of video shows on the national networks seems to have finally stabilized from the explosion of two years ago and the purge of last year. They now offer the same sort of programming as the rest of television: pre-digested pap for the common idiot.

Videos are here to stay, and it seems that there is no black and white conclusion on whether they are evil or good. So we are relegated to take them at face value, entertainment.

WHAT·U·WEAR

by Jerome Ryckborst

I like wearing oversize clothes. **BIG** stuff: room to move, fit for two. But I have a beef. Hey folks, oversize has been here a while, so why-oh-why haven't stores in Edmonton taken note?

Let's not condemn everyone outright. My biggest complaint is with the old guard clothing retailer and with the department stores. Stop buying garments in the traditional **S-M-L** sizes with **XL** thrown in for good measure.

It's impossible to get a decent-priced item in a decent size, especially with tops — shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters. The larger sizes disappear as soon as they hit the racks, and the smaller sizes just hang around forever. I don't even stop to look at sales in department stores. I know they don't have my size.

The fashion retailers in town who cater to the younger crowd — us — do sell oversize clothes. Even here the frustration continues.

There is no hard and fast rule how **big** oversizes should be. One company's **L** (large) fits like another company's **XXL** (extra-extra-large). How many **X's** does it take before a sweatshirt is really, truly large?

Of course, when I do find something I both like and can afford, it is made entirely of cotton. My washer and dryer both take delight in shrinking everything I like. So my big sweaters all end up little.

It gets worse. Petite sizes come in oversizes now too. This means that an average person can buy an oversized petite dress which fits just right by last decade's standards. Smaller women can pick and choose from the elephant sizes that remain.

To sum this up: some average sized people buy all the large sizes in stores that do not stock oversizes. Other average sized people buy all the petite sizes in stores that do stock oversizes. What to do? (This is where I find out how many readers are average sized) — kill 'em! Or just tell the retailers what you think of their selection.

Retailers usually try to please their customers. A recent shopping innovation shows that someone out there has us in mind. Let's hear it for the stores that put highly visible and very clear **S-M-L-XL** stickers on the outside of their clothes. Now you can see at a glance that your size is sold out! That sure beats looking through piles of garments for one that might fit.

Fashion is an unpredictable business and most sales are impulsive. That means: see it, like it, buy it. It is in the retailer's favor to sell standard sizes which are visibly labelled. Make it easy for the customer to buy. It is also in the retailer's favor to put some pressure on manufacturers to adjust their sizing to fit the trends.

And that's about the size of **What-U-Wear** this week.



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