

Alf Björnerberg, "video" *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, OUP, 2007.

In connection with music, the term 'video' or 'music video' is used primarily to refer to a form of short film, whose soundtrack exclusively or predominantly consists of a popular song, and which is intended for television presentation with the purpose of promoting a recording of the song. Since the beginning of the 1980s, music video has been a regular component in the marketing procedures of popular music. Notwithstanding the designation, music videos or 'video clips' are often produced using traditional celluloid film technology and transformed to electronic media in the post-production process.

1. History.

The predecessors of music video in its modern form can be traced back to the experiments on the synchronization of film with recorded sound made since the earliest days of film. These experiments also included forms governed by the primary formal determinant serving to distinguish music video from film music: the use of the film medium for visual illustration of songs as opposed to the film music practice of providing music to accompany visual narration. Thus in the 1910s and 1920s silent 'song-plug' films were produced, intended for presentation accompanied by live performances of the songs that the films illustrated. Animated films with musical soundtracks were produced by the German Oskar von Fischinger from 1921 onwards, and this technique was popularized in Disney's series of *Silly Symphonies* short films (from 1929) and the full-length *Fantasia* (1940). In the 1930s and 40s a great number of musical short films were produced, each featuring one or two songs by a popular artist and intended as preludes to the main feature film in cinemas. In the 1940s 'visual jukebox' films under the designation Panoram Soundies were produced in the USA, followed in the 1960s by the French colour film jukebox Scopitone. Other predecessors of and possible influences on music video include such experimental films as Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique* (1924), with music by Georges Antheil; the conventions established within the Hollywood film musical from the 1930s onwards and in rock films from the 1950s onwards; the dramatization procedures used for popular songs in television shows such as the 1950s 'Your Hit Parade' (USA); and avant-garde art video from the 1970s onwards.

The expanding pop culture of the 1960s furthered the development of new conventions concerning the visualization of rock music, not least through the influence of the Beatles films directed by Richard Lester, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965). The Beatles, as well as other British groups, also produced early examples of 'promo films' promoting particular songs (e.g. 'Penny Lane' and 'Strawberry fields forever') intended for television presentation and featuring many of the formal characteristics typical of later videos; these, however, did not attract any wider attention or achieve tangible commercial effects. The first video alleged to have had a substantial influence on sales of a song was the clip produced by Jon Roseman and Bruce Gowers for Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* in 1975; for that reason, as well as for its then innovative use of visual special effects, this clip is often cited as 'the first music video'. Following this example, during the second half of the 1970s an increasing number of video clips were produced, notably by artists with a marked emphasis on visual image elements, such as David Bowie in the UK or the group Devo in the USA.

Music video proper, that is as a routine marketing technique for popular music, emerged in the early 1980s as the result of technological and demographic developments. Satellite and cable technology had enabled the establishment of specialized commercial television channels, aimed at particular segments of the audience ('narrowcasting'). This technology was used for the dissemination of music video to a pop and rock audience whose relationship with the television medium had grown less antagonistic than it had been in the earlier days of rock history. MTV, the first 24-hour music video cable channel, was launched in the USA on 1 August 1981. Its impact as a promotional tool was allegedly demonstrated by effects such as the success of British 'New Pop' in the USA. Music video was rapidly established as a regular element in the marketing of popular music. Production budgets and aesthetic ambitions soon increased, an illustrative example being the extravagant 13-minute video produced for Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1983). MTV was followed by other

cable and satellite video services, such as VH-1 (1985) in the USA and Music Box (1984), MTV Europe (1987) and The Power Station (1990) in Europe.

2. Structure.

Since the visual dimension of music video is created with the purpose of visualizing a popular song, its formal disposition tends to be determined by the structural aspects of song form (the sequence and layout of sections such as verse, chorus etc.) rather than by previously existing models of visual narrative. Visual narration is sometimes based on narrative elements in the words of the song, but generally any narration in a video tends to be rather fragmentary. A second important category of visual content is the one constituted by imagery of musical performance, which is often set in surroundings simulating the conventions of stage performance of rock and pop music. In addition to visual narrative and performance images, many videos feature a rapidly shifting montage of more or less coherent images not immediately relatable to the words of the song; this type of visual material ('dreamlike visuals') has come to be regarded as particularly typical. Animation and technical special effects are often used to create striking and unusual images. Visual thematics are often strongly influenced by conventional genre norms in different popular genres, such as the gothic horror imagery common in heavy metal videos, or the use of 'realistic' street images in videos featuring artists who aspire to established notions of rock authenticity. In addition, visual quotations from various areas of popular culture (film, television, advertising), as well as from high art, are common.