

CHAPTER 9

MUSIC VIDEO PRODUCTION

It's easy to believe that the music video was created just for MTV in the '80s, but music videos have been around a lot longer than that. Even back in the '60s, it was not uncommon for an act with a hit to make a video to give to the various television dance shows popular at the time in just about every market (think *American Bandstand*). This was especially true if an act couldn't make a personal appearance but wanted to take advantage of the demand to see them. It was also another way to gain an international audience, and many acts from England sent their music videos over here during the British Invasion long before they set foot in this country, just the way American acts sent their videos to England. These music videos were rather primitive by today's standards, featuring a band either playing live or simply lip-syncing, but those videos were still a lot better than not seeing the acts at all.

Today's music videos range from having that early simplicity to having the sophistication of a minimovie, and no matter what form they take, there's a lot more going on than meets the eye.

TYPES OF MUSIC VIDEOS

If you examine a lot of music videos closely, you'll find they can't all be lumped into a single category. In fact, there are six distinct categories of videos, according to noted director/producer Nigel Dick. They include the following:

Performance video. Just about every act does one of these kinds of videos, from Metallica to Pearl Jam to the Dave Mathews Band, and on. I discuss this category in depth in chapter 8.

Concept video. This is a video built around a single theme or concept. The theme may or may not be tied to the lyrics of the song. Check out *Sabotage* by the Beastie Boys or view any Tool video for an example.

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Story video. This type of video builds the visuals around the lyrics of the song to tell a story. The best example of this is one of the greatest music videos ever created, Michael Jackson's *Thriller*—but you can throw *Beat It* in there, too.

Gag video. When you add some comedy or lightheartedness into your video, it then falls into this category. A gag video is a lot more difficult to achieve, since the gags have to be universal enough for everyone to understand; you have to be careful that the jokes aren't so "inside" that only the band gets them. Some good examples include the groundbreaking *Sledgehammer* by Peter Dinklage, *Clint Eastwood* by the Gorillaz, or anything by Weird Al Yankovic.

Film-clip video. Unless your music is being used as part of a movie, you won't be making this type of video for a while. The film-clip video is used to promote both the song and the movie by using film clips from the movie and the occasional few of the artist. A good example is *Hero* by Chad Kroeger for the movie *Spiderman*.

Dance video. A dance video's main component revolves around choreography, which in turn revolves around the music to make it happen, so this is the primary vehicle for dance music. It's basically nonstop dancing throughout. *Baby One More Time*, by Britney Spears, and *Praise You*, by Fatboy Slim are good examples of this type of video.

Here's a subcategory:

Hybrid video. When a video falls into two or more categories, it becomes a hybrid. A good example is *Seven Nation Army*, by White Stripes, where it mixes performance with a gag.

Types of Music Videos

- ▶ There are six basic types of music videos.
- ▶ Many are a combination of types.
- ▶ Most bands will do only a few types at most.

PURPOSE

You're making a music video for one reason only, and that's to promote one of your songs. You have four potential outcomes when you add picture to music:

- ▶ Your song may be so good that the video doesn't matter.
- ▶ Your video may be so unique and cool that the song doesn't matter (this one's unlikely).
- ▶ Both the video and the song are so good that they're irresistible.
- ▶ Neither the video nor the song is that interesting.

Since the main idea of the video is to market the song, it's best to put some real time and effort into it, since it can make the difference between a song that everyone becomes familiar with and one that no one remembers. While it's all right to make a statement, don't forget that a music video's primary job is to promote the song.

MUSIC VIDEO ELEMENTS

Although the elements of the music video shoot are similar to that of a performance video, the shoot is a lot more intense because you'll probably need multiple setups (as compared with a single one for a performance video), perhaps multiple locations, and maybe actors and extras. It's a minimovie, and so you have to treat it as such.

Conception

As stated in chapter 8, you need to have an idea in mind of the final product before you shoot. That will give you a better idea of exactly what you need to do to achieve the final video. Here are some questions to help you visualize your end product:

- ▶ Will the video focus on the personality of the band? If the personality of the members of the band or the artist is important, then you must plan to focus on them in some way. Are they comfortable in front of a camera? Do they have anything you want to avoid, like pockmarked skin or crooked teeth? Do they have a best look? Do they have any natural acting ability?

► Will the video tell the story of the song? If you want to tell the story of the song, you'll have to determine just what images are required to do that. Will you be taking the lyrics literally? Are there lyrics that you want to play up, or lyrics you want to avoid focusing on? Will you focus on an overall concept instead of the lyrics?

► Will the video be abstract? "Abstract" means that the visuals are not directly connected to the personalities of the band or the story of the song. If neither of these are important and you decide on an abstract version of the song, then the creativity of the director and editor become the most important elements. As I said in chapter 8, be sure to hire someone that really fits because you may not get what you need from someone who's used to cutting something other than music.

The Script

Because there's usually no dialog in a music video, the script describes the scenes and camera locations. The script helps not only the director when he or she is shooting the video but also the editor during postproduction, since it acts as a road map.

The script should describe the look, action, and camera position of every scene, and you shouldn't even consider shooting until you have one, since it will save you a lot of time (and maybe money) in the end.

Fig. 9.1 shows a sample of the script for Guns N' Roses, *Welcome to the Jungle*, written and directed by Nigel Dick.

GUNS N' ROSES: Welcome to the Jungle

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Guns N' Roses will perform the number onstage at the Whiskey. We will shoot the band's close-ups during the day, and then let in a regular audience that evening and shoot them during their live show. They will play the song perhaps two or three times during the show. There will probably be a need for some extra lighting for the stage show in addition to what they have at the Whiskey, but we are not talking about massive lighting rigs, etc. We would like to have access to a small crane.

THE CONCEPT (to be intercut with performance):

PART 1

Axl (the lead singer) steps off a Greyhound bus in Hollywood at night. He has just arrived in town, complete with case and guitar. (To be shot on location, day 2.)

PART 2

Axl walks up to a television store and looks in the window. (Night ext., day 2.)

PART 3

Axl's POV of the television store window. There are a number of TV sets all showing various scenes of violence, civil unrest, contemporary advertising, etc. These pieces of footage would need to be obtained from a library. The TV ads could be anything from the past five years, but does not need to show package shots or product names. All the TV sets should be different. I would suggest we build this window on a set. (To be shot in a studio, day 2.)

PART 4

Axl is in a seedy hotel bedroom with a girl. They are watching a number of TV sets. Once again, the screens are filled with violent images. Amongst these images, we must include Manson, the Nightstalker, and other "key" figures. I would suggest that this room be built on a set. (To be shot in a studio, day 2.)

PART 5

Axl is now strapped into a large chair in a clinical room. He wears a straitjacket and a head brace. He is forced to watch a bank of modern high-tech TV monitors. (These are not the monitors we have seen previously.) Once again, the images on the screen are of violence. Eventually Axl screams, terrified. I would suggest that this room be built on a set. (To be shot in a studio, day 2.)

PART 6

Reprise of part 3. We see Axl's screaming face on all the TV screens in the shop window. (NB—this is the first time that the TV screens are showing the same image as each other.)

PART 7

Reprise of part 2. Axl is standing in front of the window of the TV store. He sees himself screaming on the TV screens, shrugs his shoulders, and walks away.

THE END

Fig. 9.1:
Sample
script,
no. 1.

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Fig. 9.2 shows another example of one I worked on a while back. Notice the different layout and the extra detail.

Fig. 9.2:
Sample
script, no. 2.

Picture	Audio
Scene 4: Shot 8 INT.: WIDE-ANGLE SOUNDSTAGE LOOKING OUT THE DOOR TOWARD LIMO. CAMERA DOLLIES BACKWARDS AS KIRK WALKS TOWARD IT. Kirk begins singing verse as he walks through the door of the soundstage. Entourage follows behind him, people (secretaries, assistants, etc.) asking questions as he walks. Walks by grips setting up set as well as by band tuning up backstage.	(FIRST VOCAL VERSE) 16 SEC. I AM A CAMERA, A COLOR TV I HAVE A STYLE, I LIKE WHAT I SEE I BROADCAST MOVIES, REMEMBER SO WELL, IF I DON'T LIKE YOU, I'LL SAY IT WON'T SELL.
Scene 4: Shot 9 CAMERA ANGLE FROM BEHIND KIRK'S RIGHT SHOULDER INTO VIDEO MONITORS. Kirk is shaking his finger at video monitors, which contain Beth walking down the street. Monitors contain close-up of Beth with a sweet, innocent look on her face.	(FIRST VOCAL CHORUS) 16 SEC. YOU'RE ON MY VIDEO. YOU'RE ON.
Scene 5: Shot 10 C.U. ON KIRK. CAMERA LOOKING UPWARDS. Kirk shaking his finger into the camera as he sings.	YOU'RE ON.
Scene 5: Shot 11 SAME AS SHOT 9. Monitor contains a different, more sexy view of Beth. Monitor contains shot of band playing.	YOU'RE ON MY VIDEO. YOU'RE ON.
Scene 5: Shot 12 AS IN SHOT 10.	YOU'RE ON MY.
Scene 5: Shot 13 WIDE-ANGLE VIEW OF KIRK AGAINST SOUNDSTAGE. USE TELEPHOTO LENS FOR SOFT BACKGROUND. Kirk, still shaking his finger as he sings, with band and stagehands behind him going about their business; monitors are less important.	YOU'RE ON MY VIDEO.

Now, I agree that this script is kind of lame and clichéd, but you can almost see the end result in your head, because it's written in such detail. Whatever level of detail you choose, your script is the most important part of your shoot, and so make sure that you spend enough time thinking it through and writing it out.

The Storyboard

Unless you're shooting a straight concert video (as discussed in chapter 8), music videos are really minimovies and are subject to all the complexities that come with shooting a motion picture. A concert video is relatively easy because it occurs in only one location and so there's only one setup, two at the most. A music video that's telling the story of a song may be shot in several locations and have multiple setups, so to save time and money, having a storyboard becomes essential.

Once again, elaborate storyboards are not necessary. Simple stick figures will get the point across to a crew. If you're in the band, you may not be able to direct and perform at the same time, so having some indication of your vision of the shot is necessary. Each setup should have some sort of storyboard showing the location of the camera as well as the performers on the stage so that the cameraman knows what to shoot for.

The Shot List

Sometimes the script can act as your shot list if it's really detailed, but most of the time the shoot is a lot looser than that. In this case, I break it down by location and setup to make things easy, and provide a list of everything that's needed.

Here's an example of a simple shot list:

Warehouse Location

Setup 1: Loading Dock

Frontal shot of band jumping from dock

Frontal shot of individual members jumping
from dock

Side shot of band jumping from dock

Side shot of individual band members jumping
from dock

Setup 2: Office

Band sitting in office waiting room

Tony sitting behind a desk

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Jim dressed as a receptionist
Davey sitting in front of Jim

Setup 3: Stairwell

Individual band members going up the stairs
Individual band members coming down the stairs
Full band going up the stairs
Full band going down the stairs
Davey looking down over the railing

B-Roll

Warehouse parking lot
Warehouse inside
Empty loading dock
Empty warehouse
Empty office
Empty stairwell
CU of steps
CU of boxes
CU of packages on dock

House Location

Setup 1: Kitchen

Medium shot of Davey's mom making dinner
CU of Davey's mom making dinner
Wide shot of Davey's mom making dinner

Setup 2: Gym

Medium shot of Tony lifting weights
Medium shot of Jim on a treadmill
Two-shot of Tony and Jim

Setup 3: Driveway

Davey and Jim pulling up to the drive in a convertible
Medium shot of Jim getting out of the car
Medium shot of Davey getting out of the car
Overhead shot of Davey and Jim getting out of the car
Shot from behind Davey and Jim of them getting out of the car

B-Roll

House outside
Looking down the street

Looking down the street at the house
Cars passing by
Car in driveway
Empty driveway
Empty gym
Weights
Empty kitchen

You can see that now you can have a plan and order of which shots to get. You can even break it down further by knowing how long you have the crew for and putting times on each shot so you're sure that you get them all

The Elements

- ▶ Determine the focus of the video.
- ▶ Write a treatment, or script, so that everyone knows the concept.
- ▶ Be sure to have a shot list.

EXTRA EQUIPMENT NEEDED

The one thing people frequently overlook when making a music video is having a playback system for the audio. While you can usually get by with a large boombox (especially in small, confined locations), the larger the location and the more people involved, the larger the playback system requirements. Put some thought into this, since lacking this one element can be enough to sink a shoot under the right circumstances.

PRODUCTION CONCERNS

Just as with performance videos, story-driven music videos have their own set of challenges during production. But knowledge is power, and if you're aware that certain types of situations might happen, you can be prepared with a plan B if they occur.

Scout the Location

It's always a good idea to scout the location before you shoot. Each location has its advantages and disadvantages, and it's good to know what you're up against going in. Here are the questions to ask about any location:

- ▶ Will you need a permit? (This will be covered in depth at the end of this chapter.)
- ▶ Is there a place for the crew to load and unload?
- ▶ Are there steps or narrow doorways that might make it difficult to move equipment?
- ▶ Is there sufficient parking?
- ▶ Is there a place for the cast to dress?
- ▶ Is there anything else taking place at that location that day?
- ▶ Are waste disposal and recycle bins available?
- ▶ What kind of ambient light is available?
- ▶ What kind of power is available?
- ▶ Can any ceiling lights be easily turned off?
- ▶ If you're shooting outside, how will you deal with the sun and the shade?
- ▶ What are the acoustics like? Does the room have an echo, or is it dead?
- ▶ How noisy is it? Can things such as air-conditioning and machinery be turned off?
- ▶ Is it near a busy street with a lot of noise?
- ▶ What other outside noises do you hear? (Airplanes and helicopters are the worst!)

Staying on Schedule

Staying on schedule is one of the biggest challenges for any producer, especially for someone with little experience. It's very easy to fall behind schedule if you've gotten off to a late start because it took longer than you expected to get set up, an unexpected technical problem popped up, or a scene needed an extra setup because it didn't look the way you expected it to. That's why the shooting schedule is so important. If you have a list of priorities, you know what you can cut, what you can save, and where you can make up some time.

In order to stay on schedule, someone has to constantly monitor the time and compare it with the time allotted for the scene. As soon as you're getting behind, take a break and reevaluate your list of priorities. If you're feeling overwhelmed, take a deep breath and figure out a way to get the most done in the time you have left. If you

have to schedule another day to shoot, it may not be easy to schedule, but it can happen if you put your mind to it. Better to schedule another day of shooting than to become so flustered that you get nothing worth using. Relax and have fun. That's what this process is supposed to be about! It will get done when it gets done.

To Lip Sync, or Not?

I'm one of the people that hates lip-syncing. As a musician, the whole practice feels wrong to me. That being said, lip-syncing is a necessary evil when making music videos if the song you're trying to promote is the master you've spent so much time in the studio working on. The complications that arise from trying to do a live vocal to a backing track (or "TV track," which is a mix of a song minus the lead vocal), for instance, goes up exponentially. It's difficult enough to get a great video take, let alone one that also has a great vocal performance—and the post problems can become a nightmare. Is it doable? Sure it is, but it'll take a whole lot more time in production and post to make it work. Unless you have a big budget and a lot of time, you're better off staying with lip-syncing. Remember—*everybody* does it.

Camera Audio

Make sure that every camera is recording audio as you shoot, especially the sound of the song playing on the boombox or playback system. This is the primary way that the editor will keep the cameras and audio in sync during editing. Sure, it's possible to sync things up without any audio at all, but it's a snap when each camera records what comes out of the boombox.

B-Roll

Just as with a performance video, B-roll is essential to shoot. It's not that you'll know when you're going to use it, but you'll be happy you have it when you do. You just never know when that close-up of that hubcap might fit in just the right place.

The fast and easy way to get B-roll is to tell the cameramen that as soon as they're ready to shoot, get the B-roll shots first. If they have a shot list, they can pick up everything by the time the band members are dressed and made up. If they don't pick up everything in that time period, tell them that as soon you wrap shooting the band, they should immediately go back to shooting B-roll. That way you won't waste any time.

Get Establishing Shots

Even though your script might not call for them, make sure you shoot establishing shots of all your locations and setups. These work well as documentary footage later, and just like all B-roll (which an establishing shot technically is), you never know when you might use it, whether now or in the future.

Shoot More Than One Take

Just as with film, it's not uncommon to shoot a lot of takes on each scene. How many? Two or three might be enough or all you have time for, but it's not uncommon to shoot 25 or more. Why so many? Some of it is because the actor (or band member) makes a mistake or doesn't hit her mark, sometimes you want to shoot it from different angles, and sometimes you might want to use a different filter or lens. You're limited only by the time you have and the stamina of your actors, band members, and crew. Remember that artists and band members are not actors and they'll get tired or bored quickly, so you may reach the point of diminishing returns a lot sooner than you'd like. That's why it's best to make sure you have the shot you like before you move on to additional shots.

Using the Green/Blue Screen

Using a green or blue screen allows you to create an artificial background in post (see **Fig. 9.3**). If you want to sing in front of the Taj Mahal, you probably don't have the budget to fly to India, but with a blue screen that's shot well you can make your viewer think that you're already there. So how does it work?

When you shoot a singer in front of a green screen, in post you use a technique called "chroma keying," which removes all the green from the footage and allows you to replace it with either video or a still. The problem is that if the singer is wearing a green shirt, that would disappear in the background as well, so if green is the color he wants to wear, you'll have to replace the green background with a blue one instead, so it stands away from the background. If he wants to wear blue jeans, then a green screen would work better.

Green screens are usually used these days because there's less of a chance of a clash with either the subject's eyes or clothing, but a blue screen does the same thing. So if you're using a green screen, don't wear anything green. If you're using a blue screen, don't wear anything blue, and you'll be safe for singing in front of the Tower of London.



Fig. 9.3: A green screen

Production Concerns

- ▶ Scout the location and find its advantages and disadvantages.
- ▶ Stay on schedule if you can.
- ▶ If you fall behind, make sure you get your priority shots.
- ▶ Be sure that the camera records the song playing on the boombox or playback system.
- ▶ Remember to shoot B-roll and establishing shots.
- ▶ Musicians are not actors, and they can get tired or bored easily.
- ▶ Shoot more than one take.
- ▶ Relax and have fun!