

Music videos

Like most things to do with pop music, the video clip (arguably) begins with the Beatles. Tired of touring, the Fab Four came up with the brilliant idea of making short films to promote their new songs. Since then, the music video has become an art form in its own right. As we're all locked up again in front of our screens, we've put together a collection of some all-time greats suitable for sharing with students or cabin-bound children.

Get animated

Music and animation have been entwined since the early days of cinema – Disney's *Silly Symphonies* shorts often using an orchestra in place of a narrator (*The Old Mill* being a standout example). The Beatles' first forays into cinema (*A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*) set a template many bands would follow, but 1969's animated *Yellow Submarine* established the inventiveness and dream-logic that would characterise the genre. By the 1980s – a golden age for music videos as high revenues collided with an expanded cable TV market – artists were experimenting with a mix of animation and live action that would have astounded the early surrealists.

Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehammer* is a masterpiece of claymation, pixilation, and stop-motion animation. Painstakingly assembled by a team including future *Wallace and Gromit* creator Nick Park, the 1986 film was directed by

Stephen R. Johnson who had previously used stop-motion lip-synching on the Talking Heads video for *Road To Nowhere*. *Sledgehammer's* influence can be traced to the present day – notably in Gotye's 2011 clip for *Somebody That I Used To Know* and the Lego-built clip for *Fell In Love With A Girl* by The White Stripes.

Norwegian group A-Ha's 1985 hit *Take On Me* sports an equally impressive mix of live action and rotoscoped animation (a technique in which animators trace over movie footage, frame by frame). The comic book style drawings took four months to complete, but ensured the single became a worldwide smash – having failed to dent the charts when it was first released a year earlier. Paula Abdul's *Opposites Attract* – influenced in equal parts by *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and Gene Kelly's *Anchors Away* – took a slightly different approach to rotoscoping, with Disney animators drawing over dance moves performed in front of a blue screen.

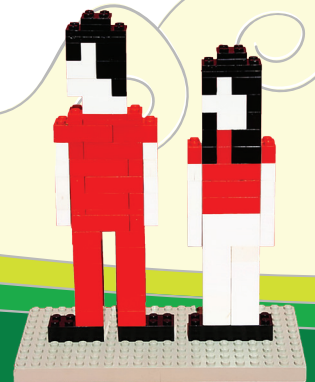
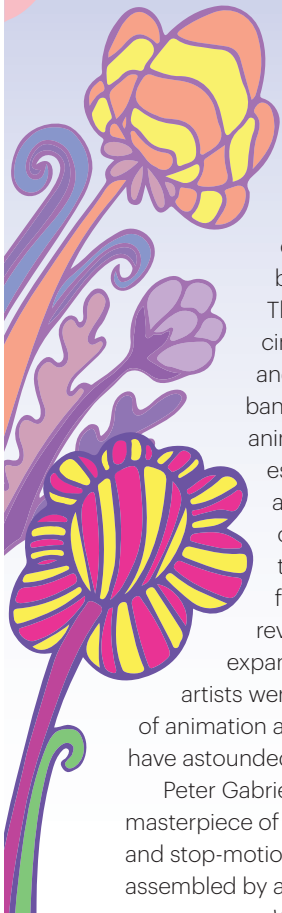
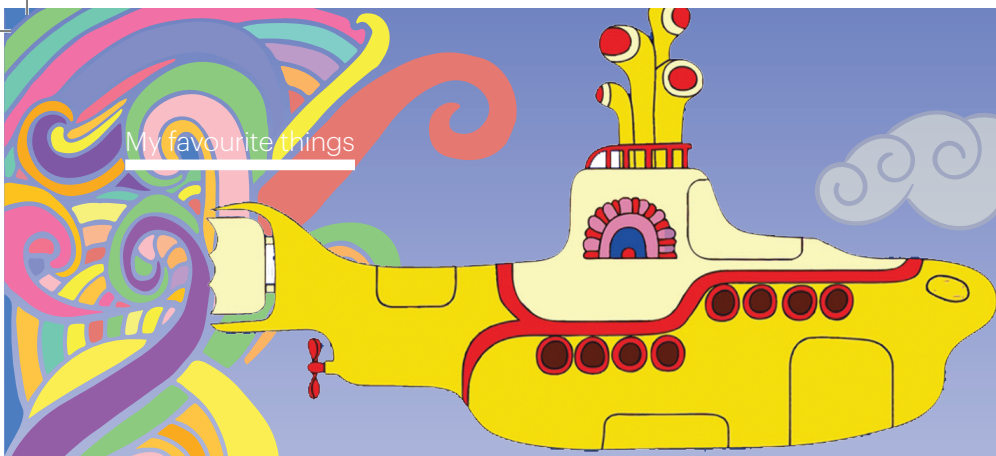
Groundbreaking

Music videos have consistently stolen from other art forms and influenced them in turn. Bob Dylan's simple *Subterranean Homesick Blues* has been

much plundered, but was informed by the ready availability of Super-8 film cameras, allowing ordinary folk to make their own short films for the first time.

Likewise, Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and David Bowie's *Ashes to Ashes* employed new video technology and effects to create colourful TV-sized spectacles – the latter remaining one of the most expensive video clips of all time, the former knocked off quickly in a trailer, mid-tour. A decade later, Weezer's *Buddy Holly* blended cutting-edge tech with nostalgia to put themselves inside 70s sitcom *Happy Days* – a feat so impressive that many assumed director Spike Jonze had used nascent computer trickery, rather than clever editing and body doubles.

Controversial pop king Michael Jackson had a long history of employing new technology and clever effects in his films – the 1991 clip for *Black and White* being one of the first to employ the digital morphing technique used in big screen blockbuster *Terminator 2* just a few months later. But it was his earlier clips, most notably *Thriller*, that left the greatest impact on the zeitgeist. His tongue-in-cheek zombie dance movie was such an event that it earned its own release for the fast-expanding video rental market.



Madonna's **Like A Prayer** employed a similar cinematic approach, with added Jesus-baiting controversy.

By 2006, small was big again. OK Go's **Here it Goes Again** was impressive for its low-budget aesthetic, reflecting the increasing popularity of YouTube and its homespun filmmaking (and plummeting music revenues). In a single take, the band perform an elaborately choreographed routine across several treadmills.

Storytelling

Given the constant exchange of ideas and inspiration, it's unsurprising that music videos often ape the narrative conventions of their cinematic counterparts by telling three-minute stories often tenuously connected to the song. On the more literal side, there's Taylor Swift's sweet tale of star-crossed lovers separated by a garden fence (and his more popular girlfriend) in **You Belong With Me**. At the other end of romance, Gwen Stefani's **Cool** takes an uber-glamorous approach to its tale of love lost and friendship won. Moving back a decade, Shakespears Sister's **Stay** offers a camp if spooky spin on the love triangle, as the duo (respectively dressed as mourning lover and Death herself) wrestle over the prone body of a hunk on life support. Tragic romance is also the story of U2's **All I Want Is You**, a moody sepia tale of unrequited love at the circus, owing more than a little to Wim Wenders' **Wings of Desire**.

The link between arthouse cinema and music video is a strong one. R.E.M.'s **Everybody Hurts**, which subtitles the innermost thoughts of drivers stuck in a traffic jam, feels equally inspired by Wenders' films and American indie directors such as Hal Hartley.

alt-J's narrative-in-reverse clip to jaunty **Breezblocks** borrows heavily from Christopher Nolan's **Memento**, while Childish Gambino's **Telegraph Ave ('Oakland' By Lloyd)** has a twist ending worthy of David Cronenberg (not suitable for younger kids). But the collision of arthouse and music video is probably best expressed by the films made for Radiohead – **Just**, **Karma Police** and **Paranoid Android** all have stories so strange or engrossing that it's easy to forget to listen to the music.

Dance to this

There's a fun little tale to Sophie Ellis-Bextor's **Murder on the Dancefloor**, but it's equally memorable for its footwork (Ellis-Bextor has been a lockdown star for kids with her weekly kitchen discos). Dancing is, unsurprisingly, a major feature of many a video – often inspiring copycat performances on the disco floor (Madonna's **Vogue** leaps to mind). While the pyrotechnic dancing of Beyoncé's extraordinary **Formation** or Christopher Walken in Fatboy Slim's **Weapon of Choice** might seem beyond the reach of mere mortals, there is something appealingly accessible about Robyn's **Call Your Girlfriend**, a one-take effort that feels all the more heartfelt for its rough, improvised aesthetic. The early promos for Kate Bush tracks **Wuthering Heights** and **Babooshka** have a similar, idiosyncratic quality, most notably the former, in which Bush flounces around a lonely field. Halfway between field flouncing and big-budget Beyoncé is Björk's iconic and colourful clip for **It's Oh So Quiet**, which fuses urban grime and Hollywood musical fantasy in a way that would make Jacques Demy proud.

And just for fun...

Queen – **I Want to Break Free**
OutKast – **Hey Ya**
The Avalanches – **Frontier Psychiatrist**
Spice Girls – **Wannabe**
Pulp – **Bad Cover Version**
Beastie Boys – **Sabotage**
Cyndi Lauper – **Girls Just Wanna Have Fun**
TLC – **Waterfalls**
Beyoncé – **Single Ladies**
Blur – **Coffee & TV**
B-52s – **Rock Lobster**

