

# THE ART OF MAKING A MUSIC VIDEO

by **R (Michał Rutkowski)** 2011



## INTRODUCTION

This article was first published on the IndieFunda web-site in the year 2011. It soon gained really a lot popularity and positive response. Now, that the IndieFunda site does exist no more, it is given to you in form of a .pdf file by the author.

## THE ART OF MAKING A MUSIC VIDEO

by R (Michał Rutkowski) 2011

**Note:** I am not a professional film director. I wish to study film direction and have made my attempts in creating music videos. Therefore the vocabulary used in the article may differ from the language used by professionals in film industry. Being a sincere public in person, and someone who filmed a few music videos himself, I wish this article is nevertheless interesting to the reader.

### MAKING A MUSIC VIDEO/article/part 1

The making of a video is a kind of songwriting. We are writing a song not with the use of notes, but with the use of picture.

The color scheme used in the video is crucial to the effect of the atmosphere of the video. It is much the beat alike: it becomes the measure for what we put into the frames of the video after, and the design for the scenery, which makes it also the song's basic chord alike.

The band playing its arrangements is located upon this scene, which is the atmosphere of the video. To choose instruments, the band, we must measure the scene: in a 4 minutes video there is some 20 cuts, within which we must enclose all the ideas we want to picture. This is in fact a scene. We want choreography, so we must count how much of motion may fit into the frame of our scene.

Best cuts, mostly short in length, do repeat. It is the **chorus** of the video.

Coming onto the video making, we must first choose if we want a feature film, an illustration for the music, or an impression.

#### *Feature, Illustration, Impression*

The *feature* film is based upon long cuts. The *illustration* for the music must go along with the song. An *impression* is a free way of film making, but it appears the most difficult one, because here we work with feelings, and we are therefore to go deep into the atmosphere of the musical track we picture.

In a music video, there cannot be long cuts, but there can be exceptions. An exception is, if our video is meant to be a feature film. It is possible to make a video based on one long cut/scene, a one-act video. Starting at this point, we are choosing from two slightly different ways of film making. The feature must be interesting, the viewer cannot get bored, so the film scenery here is to be a place, where we can move with the camera in different directions, without framing the same landscape. A simple example for this is "Karma Police" video by Radiohead. The car is rolling, and we do see the same street, but there is motion. The use of a car's insides is very common in music video making, for there is one scenery (the inside of the car) then, but the surroundings do change. It is a trick: the viewer gets to focus on a changing scenery, but the whole is possible to be made with one long cut, without the necessity for changing the scene.

For an illustration, the simplest way to communicate with the song is to picture the band/performer playing. It is to show the *energy* of the song. This is the most common way to make music videos. Its goal is simple as the video: it is to advertise for a live performance. Advertise not because it is assembled out of live performance scenes, but because the factor crucial to the video is the energy of the music, which is most important in live experience. Example: “Beauty School” video by Deftones.

The impression is to go deep into the feelings of the song. Here we do work with the use of symbols, or act a painter alike. The use of symbols is more simple than painting artwork in the video. A symbol must not be a straight visualization for what is in the lyrics or musical feeling. It can be an impression for what we do hear in the song. Beautiful example for this are the videos from ‘Inverta’.

Painting artwork in the video is probably the most deep and difficult way to present the music with the use of motion picture. It is multi-dimensional. It is more an artist’s audio-visual artwork presented in an art gallery alike. It is to be arts, not craft. It is based upon the poetry of the picture. Great examples for this are the videos for “Come as you are” by Nirvana, and “Breaking the girl” by Red Hot Chilli Peppers. The director does act a painter alike: he/she is assembling the frame out of different pictures that come into his mind by feelings while listening to the music.

### *Arts and Craft*

A music video is based upon feelings in its very sense. It is impossible to make a good music video as a craftsman skilled in his work. The skills needed is the use of the camera, the knowledge of the metrics of the clip, the eye for a well composed frame, and the graphic designer’s skills for artistic remake of color schemes and effects while editing the video. This is needed for the *director’s vision*, which is basic before we begin with a music video.

A craftsman would measure the whole thing. He would count how many frames of this and that kind he must use to make the video interesting to the public, what kind of pictures, and so forth. This is, in my kind opinion, a failed way to make a music video.

An artist must be inside of the song/music. He must experience the music all around him, surrounding him, so that the pictures appear. Inside of the music he becomes 100% responsive to what is in the sound and lyrics. This response will turn out the pictures for the video.

A shaman alike, the director is to trade his *vision*.

### DIRECTOR’S VISION/ making a music video part 2

The director’s vision is the most simple part of the article to write and read, but it might be the most difficult point to start with if making a real music video.

Before starting with a music video the director’s vision must be complete. I personally do take my time after listening to the song and walk around watching places, things, colors to get ideas. The director must have a basis for all the scenes. To grasp this basis he is to find one basic scene, with which he will start.

Having the basic scene the director may build all the other scenes around this one. He is herewith to find a mode of filming, which all the other scenes would suit.

A very important thing is to find a way of filming. There shall be scenes with motion, and static scenes. This creates movement. The director is to find a way to frame the characters in the video, find a composition for the picture. Note the Quicksand "Omission" video: there is a perfect, artistic framing. The camera is static, but the motion is pictured perfectly.

What is interesting in a music video, are the dancing scenes, cities and landscapes, artistically furnished interior with poetically arranged scenery, toy molds with choreography, or any interesting ideas to make a video different.

The video shall be enriched with some extras, so the director is to figure out scenes of different picture perspectives, filmed in different places (scenery), with different motion schemes. It is important, that the video has not only the picture of the band performing, but also another scenes which illustrate the song. These extras can be poetic pictures. An extra is also a black and white or monochrome color scheme. The black and white and color scheme can be used along with each other. These extras is something the viewer will remember after having watched the video. Therefore all these extras shall be outlined in the video, shown clearly. An extra must differ from the rest of the video.

Other extras is for example the use of computer graphics. Modern videos do use 3-D computer graphic design programs. The scenery is drawn with the use of such a program as Maya or Blender. The characters singing and playing are placed within an unrealistic world.

The colors of the video may be fixed in Corel Photo-Paint.

As to the color scheme, the colors may be fixed after, it is important to have enough light while filming. A dark picture is difficult to be fixed. If filmed in the interior, the room must be well prepared. If outside, the scenery chosen carefully.

Getting onto the first picture of the video we must find a feeling with which we will be filming all the scenes. This feeling is to be deep inside the director and not be lost while filming. It makes the video a whole art piece.

The director may draw pictures of scenes he wants to appear in the video on paper. A piece of paper is also very useful for drawing the way we want to frame while filming – the perspective, etc.

## FILMING

When filming we must remember that we make enough film to assemble a video after. While filming we can't err, because it IS ALREADY the video making itself (the preparation is over). What we do fail while filming, is lost to the video after.

## GRAPHIC/ARTISTIC EFFECTS/EDITING of the music video/making of music videos part 3

I will describe the artistic effects as we can make it in Corel Photo-Paint. Corel P-P does support .avi film format. The editing of a music video in Corel P-P make take up to one, or even two weeks, but it gives us a freedom to do to the video almost whatever we want, and we do control every single pixel of the film we edit. Here we work frame after frame, still there are some effects that we may implement on the whole video at once, by one click.

### graphic/artistic effects

The video does appear first as we've already done the montage work on the takes. The first thing we've got to consider before filming the video is if we want short or long takes in the editing process. Short takes are easy to place in the video and to play with while editing, but the making of the video will in fact take longer if we assemble the clip of many cuts. If we make longer takes, we must pay attention that everything we film is exactly in time with the music, because otherwise we will have to repeat filming. The longer the takes, the more difficult it is to be in time with the music while making the montage of the clip.

If we happen not to be exactly in time while filming, it is possible to take out frames to make the picture go along with the music and lyrics, but it may create an unnatural flow of the picture on the screen, which will be noticed by the viewers' eyes.

If we have a complete vision on how the video shall look like when fully done with work, we can make all the effects on single takes and frames before we go on with the montage of the whole thing. If we need a visualization for what we have filmed to find the vision for the final look of the video, we need to assemble the clip before we start with effects. This will make the video look like a whole piece of art, for which we had figured out a complete idea.

I will describe how to make 4 most important effects on the video in Corel Photo-Paint: slow motion, transparency, division of the frame into parts and the changing of the color scheme of the picture.

### Slow-motion:

There is a frame speed for every film. Let's say we've got a speed of 2ms per frame. We convert the speed of the film into 3ms per frame.

It is the same if we would like to quicken the film. We convert the speed of the frame from (for example) 2ms to 1.24ms. Corel Photo-Paint has this option.

We can film in different frame speed than the editing program has it set. If the settings of the editing program is slower, we can choose frames that will appear in the video from what we filmed.

### Transparency:

In Corel Photo-Paint there is a good transparency effect, for which we can choose the strength of the transparency. The strength of transparency is valued 0-100. With the value 100 the picture disappears. If we want 2 films to appear simultaneously, it's good to have two different color schemes for the films. A brighter and a darker one. Then we choose the strength of the transparency

30-50 placing the brighter picture upon the darker one, or 60-80 with the darker one above. It is better to place the brighter picture upon the darker one (use *layers*).

If the films are of similar brightness, it's good to choose transparency in amount around 50-70. If we go for a plain 50, the picture might be blur, and details hard to glimpse while watching. There needs to be a slight difference. One of the films goes into foreground.

We can create an effect of the appearing and disappearing of the transparency by increasing and decreasing the transparency value given along with the run of frames. I suggest one makes it by carefully watching the changings of the film, not with mathematics on the transparency value. The mathematics may mislead here. If we watch a film, a very important factor is what is filmed, visually, and this is more important than the amount of the frames we edit, or the changes in transparency values we set for frames we edited before. One might be stunt – mathematical ideas may lead to a failed work here.

There are a few options of the transparency effect that we may choose, the best is *linear*, because it gives the editor the best control over the implementing of the effect on the picture. We might use it many times, repeating the effect given to the picture, set in different directions, working on different pieces of the frame one time after another to get the final effect we expect. This requires artistic skills. We must remember by the eye what we have implemented on the frames we did transform before, to make a flow in the picture appearing in the whole clip. The *flow* is very important in a music video. It makes it possible to the viewer to grasp the whole thing. A feature film is divided in parts. A music video also has its acts, but the music in the background is a whole piece, so the film shall not break it.

Screen division:

We can divide the screen in 2, 3 or more parts with the *mask* tool. We choose an area for a different film to appear. Then we place the frames of the other film with the use of *fill in* tool. We use the *bitmap* fill in here, then we choose *edit fill in*, and *load* picture. With the picture chosen, press ok, and use the fill in icon to fill the mask with a frame of the film.

Here we choose the picture we want to put into the edited frame, so we must repeat this action with every new edited frame. Finally a film appears.

The size of the frames of the film we place must be chosen carefully here, because we are not able to edit the size of the picture placed with the use of a fill in tool inside a mask on the screen.

There is a different possibility to create screen division in a video or film, and it's better, but acquires more work. We can use Corel Photo-Paint as a 2-D program designed to edit photographs. Here we take every frame separately, and divide it placing two or more film frames aside to each other as if we were editing a picture. Then we create the film anew, by placing the edited frames in an .avi film format file (*insert frame* option).

Colors:

With colors we do work same as with a photograph. There is a whole set of tools for hue, saturation, brightness, contrast. Using these tools to recolor frames, we can create artistic effects of changing

color schemes. If we use the same take twice or thrice in the video, we may recolor one of them, transform into a different color scheme, to make the video more interesting. The same take will appear as some other part of the film, and will not invest the viewer with the visual effect of repetition.

Editing many frames one after another we might need to repeat effects with the same settings. It's useless to type the same settings all the time, so coming onto a new frame we just press *ctrl-F*.

As my work with the article is finished here, I wish for all the musicians who want to present their work not only in sound, but also visually, that this little article may help to create own music videos. Good luck!

The end



(Michał Rutkowski) 2011