

SON GOKU, MADONNA Y BETTY BOOP

By Tite Barbuzza



Animated cartoons are not just for kids. The success of films like Toy Story and adult TV series like Beavis and Butthead, The Simpsons or South Park prove. The development of this kind of animation would have been unthinkable using traditional means.

Japanese animation is one of the most noticeable trends in the dizzying world of the image applied to music. Somehow, in sync with the cyclical nature of our visual history, the rediscovery of the Far East, which has nurtured all forms of popular culture for more than a decade (fashion, graphic design, web sites, technology...) has found a fitting channel of expression in music and its audio-visual manifestation: pop videos and visuals applied to live shows. Madonna, specialist in foreseeing what's going to be the next big thing, chose four animation classics projected onto a huge screen as the visuals for her latest Drowned World Tour. Those chosen were the apocalyptic MD Geist, the android legend Humanoid, Satoshi Kon's Perfect Blue (which analyses the phenomenon of the pop icon), and the erotic horror flic Legend of the Overfiend (the cornerstone of the 'erotic-grotesque' area of the genre) from Toshio Maeda, one of the most influential manga artists in Japan.

In The first video from Music, directed by the Swede Jonas Akerlund, an impressive 70's style video was use, with Madonna as the main character, a super-heroine one moment, a frenetic, six-armed DJ the next. The studio Filmtecknarma, also from Sweden, was responsible for the animation. It was made using software like Toonz or Softimage 3D.

As for the French duo Daft Punk-always sporting a groundbreaking graphic image- they have been making use of a Japanese animated space saga to promote their Discovery album. Once all the singles have been released, with their accompanying videos, a full-length one will be issued. The director is none other than Leiji Matsumoto (over 60 years old), a wellknown talent in the manga world and the creator of references like Galaxy Express 999, Captain Harlock or Queen Millennia. For Daft Punk he has designed the characters and taken charge of the animation, executed in a pure and simple way in the old style. The story is equally simple and direct: some invaders from outer space burst into an electronic pop gig one by one kidnapping the musicians from the band. Telling a story via the tracks on an LP is undoubtedly something new in the world of pop videos. Japanese animation and French electronic: could it be more 'pop'?

One step further on we find the hip hop virtual supergroup Gorillaz, with Clint Eastwood, 19-2000 and Tomorrow Comes Today. Featuring a Western-style, computer- generated look and Japanese inspiration, the Gorillaz' videos-directed by the mastermind behind Tank Girl, Jamie Hewlett, add a touch of originality and modernity by using British Fashion magazine style illustrations, even though the scenes are full of eastern references and one of the characters is yellow, has slanted eyes and is called Noodle. This work, made using Lightwave, Messiah and Maya software, corresponds to the British studio Passion Pictures, known in the world of animated production for their work on the Robbie Williams video Let Love Be Your Energy. Passion Pictures learnt their trade during the production of Who Framed Roger Rabbit? And their style is perhaps the most in tune with the times we live in: purified, clean, full of cultural references and with characters impossible not to like as with the classics, Bugs Bunny, Coyote or, earliest of all, the ingenuous Betty Boop.