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Once enticing, MTV reduced to repetitive programming

In August of 1981, America was introduced to two pop cultural phenomena: MTV and music videos. Prior to that time, radios and turntables from coast to coast had been playing the music of another generation, the '60s, and many of the '70s bands that still were popular in 1981 were merely insipid imitations of '60s bands.

But MTV changed that.

The '70s had a few musicians and bands that were unique to the decade: David Bowie, Elton John, Queen and a handful of others. Overseas it was a different story. England had the Sex Pistols and a multitude of other new bands that never made it on these shores. They couldn't—American radio wouldn't give them airplay. We were all too busy listening to our big brothers' Led Zeppelin albums and hearing "Stairway to Heaven" on the radio umpteen times to know that there were alternatives.

MTV changed that, too.



Scott Harrah

Don't get me wrong. Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and the Doors were innovators in music. I'm just tired of them. By 1981, America was, too.

MTV, a cable television channel that plays music videos 24 hours a day, changed our tastes in music somewhat.

New bands from overseas and here at home got a chance to have videos of their music played on MTV. We all went wild because there were so many new, different bands that abounded with new sounds, looks and attitudes.

Soon we began to let upstart bands like Eurythmics, Men at Work, The Boomtown Rats and The Psychedelic Furs into our musical tastes just because MTV was kind enough to introduce us to them.

We let MTV launch the careers of some of these bands. Some groups like Duran Duran were actually able to make it here with vibrant videos on MTV even though they were less exciting when it came to something called music.

Eventually we all gave our big brothers' trashed and scratched Led Zeppelin albums a decent burial.

It is now four years later and the American music scene has hit a low point once again. We will never see or hear such an abysmal lack of new musical blood like we had in the late '70s, but things could be much better.

Turn on MTV nowadays and what do you see? ...Bruce Springsteen, Madonna and other well-established musicians. That's fine because those musicians are popular and people want to see and hear "Born in the USA" to the point of nausea. But as for new bands, one must wait hours before that sorority girl that never grew up, Martha Quinn, will play something new by an obscure young band.

This only proves that MTV, once known as the apex of avant-garde, has become repetitive and stodgy like American radio.

This is most unfortunate. We are living in a time when our technology is progressing rapidly. Our culture, however, doesn't wish to progress with our technology. Computer scientists who work with state-of-the-art 1985 equipment and live in a microcosm of 1945 attitudes seem to be the norm these days. It's irrational that people today will praise some ultra-modern computer and call themselves progressive, then turn around and only support old established bands.

MTV helps perpetuate this type of attitude today with rapid videos of established bands that don't need to be promoted.

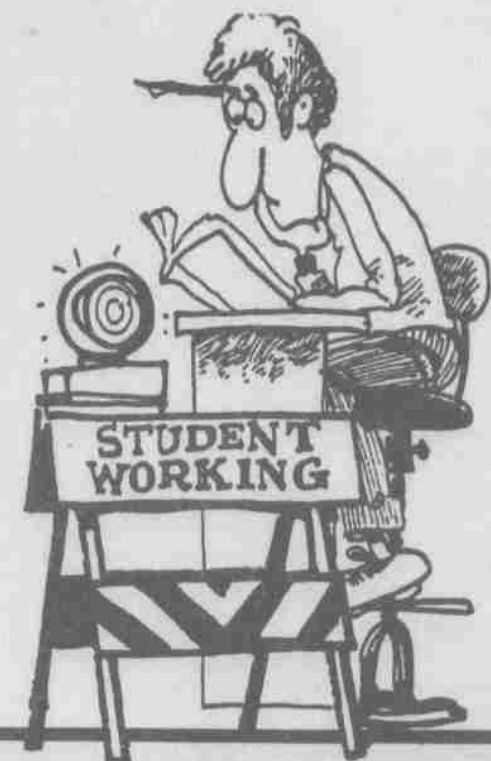
Many of these bands, like Journey, admit that they don't need to make videos. They just do them because they want to appear modern.

The videos of a few years ago were the perfect blend of art, science and technology. Videos could be the ultimate art form because they are part film, theater, fashion and music. But, alas, they never will fit the above description completely because MTV is too busy airing the sleep-inducing sagas of Springsteen's love traumas and Madonna's navel.

If MTV, the new "visual radio," is any indication of the future state of American music, I think we should dig those old Zeppelin albums out of the garbage. I'll endure another listen to "Stairway to Heaven" over a minute of MTV any day.

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