



## city breaks

*A revolution in video distribution has liberated a new generation of UK directors from the London stranglehold. Can they stand on their own two feet, asks David Knight*

Even a few years ago, if you wanted to make it in the big league of music video-making, you would probably be drawn to where the 'real' action was: in London if you were British, or in LA or New York if you were in the States. But more recently, although the hub of the action remains in the traditional production centres, things have changed. These days, it matters much less where a video gets made. In the UK, as elsewhere, YouTube and MySpace have triggered a wave of DIY directing from enthusiasts who simply want to make music videos made for their friends' bands, their own bands, or even as alternatives to existing tracks.

But there are also now pockets of organised music video production across

Lack of filmmaking infrastructure can be a problem for these directors. But you could argue that their work has a distinctive identity which comes from being outside the club-like environment of London promo production. Chris Hopewell and Ben Foley began Collision in 2002. They were both working at Bristol animation outfit Bolex Brothers as animators, and Collision became a channel for them to make music videos and embrace computer-based animation. They quickly had a huge break - and found themselves back using Bolex's traditional stop-frame animation methods - with the Radiohead video for There There, directed by Hopewell.

There There won several awards, including an MTV 'Moonman', and since

the UK, where great work is emerging: from Bristol and Brighton to Liverpool and Glasgow. In some cases they complement a vibrant local music scene, in other cases the outlook is global.

The new wave of UK directors includes Glasgow-based director Blair Young of The Forest Of Black (longtime collaborator with Belle & Sebastian), Chris Hopewell and Ben Foley of Bristol company Collision Films, Warp Films in Sheffield, Manchester's Soup Collective, which has worked extensively with Elbow, Steve Glashier of Brighton production company Nothing To See Here, Leeds-based Poison Pen Films and directing team Good Times from Liverpool.

A further wave of young filmmakers are being productive in the regions where budgets are normally low, like Woking-based Middlefield Pictures, home of director Blake Claridge.

(Above) Discopunk  
Electropunk, Tigerpicks.

(Right) Dance Me In,  
Sons and Daughters:  
Push the Ghosts,  
The Twang: Love You,  
Little Barrie





(Left) Mum Ra, Song B; Candie Payne, I Wish I Could Have Loved You More; Go Team, LadyMash.

(Below) Coral, In The Morning; The Research, Hard Times; Tokyo Police Club, Your English Is Good

then Collision has been on an equal footing with the London majors, while maintaining its own special character. This hive of animation and special effects activity is gaining momentum, and has tackled videos for bands such as Scissor Sisters, Young Knives and Soulsavers. Hopewell is also represented by Anonymous Content in the US.

"We've always had a very purposeful agenda - it has to have a certain amount of magic, and we like things to stick out like a sore thumb," says Hopewell. "I've lived in Bristol all my life, but we've always thought about Collision in a global way, and we pitch on stuff for US bands also."

The fact that Bristol already has a strong, internationally recognised filmmaking, animation (Aardman and Bolex Brothers) and wildlife programme-making, was significant for Collision. "The crew you get here is amazing," says Hopewell. "At any point there are about 300 unemployed stop-motion animators, and hundreds of model makers."

Another area that's well served in terms of film crews is Yorkshire. That's down to its traditional TV production base plus a burgeoning film scene, according to Paul Morricone of Poison Pen Films, the music video division of Leeds-based Mezzo Films - it launched last year and has produced clips for bands such as The Pigeon Detectives, The Holloways and Little Man Tate.

"All the DPs we've used on our videos have been northern-based and have a variety of experience, some on TV, some with film," says Morricone, "Sheffield has always been very strong for film." In particular, Sheffield is the home to Warp Films, the film company that emerged from dance label Warp Records, which as well as producing movies such as Shane Meadows' This Is England also works on music videos, most notably for the Arctic Monkeys. Filmmakers in other areas cannot always count on a local pool of talent at their disposal, but carry on regardless - or create their own filmmaking culture. That's arguably what Steve Glashier has done. Glashier is based in Brighton - not far from London, but he encapsulates the seaside town's individual, heady character through his work.

Before he picked up a camera, Glashier was a live music promoter and his considerable output since has reflected the town's vibrant music scene: over 30 videos in just over two years for the likes of Fatboy Slim, Blood Red Shoes, Goose and South Central, plus live work and graphic design projects. Glashier's instinctive feel for the medium - his domino-effect video for Fatboy Slim's Champion Sound was a YouTube smash last year - has made him a hot property among both London production companies and major labels. But he is determined to stay by the seaside and head his close-knit team at his own outfit Nothing To See Here.

"I'm more interested in keeping the team together and doing stuff that interests us," he says. "When you're offered the bigger budgets you can lose control and that's not overly fulfilling,"

Glashier is now making a music TV show, The Porter Report, and gaining TV commissions for Nothing To See Here's live music coverage, it's also

working on a documentary on poetry that, Glashier says, "will cross the line between music video and poetry."

Glashier is looking to apply the skills he learnt making music videos in other areas. And it's a similar story for the Liverpool-based directing team Goodtimes - but this collective intends to remain in the realm of promo's, and is extending its reach beyond the UK.

Goodtimes comprises James Slater and Kate Sellars, who have made a mark with their graphic, vfx-heavy work for Go Team, Sonny Jim, The Coral and others. To some extent it's what Slater calls the "hand-made aspect to our work" 

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(Left) The Was, Make Model; Cherry Lips, Archie Bronson;  
 (Below) Taste the Last Girl, Sons and Daughters; Isabella, Little Flames; Gilt Complex, Sons and Daughters

which makes it possible for Goodtimes to stay in Liverpool because, rather embarrassingly for the current European City of Culture, he says it's badly served for filmmaking resources. "There's a good arts community and music community, but film hasn't taken off here. That's a bit frustrating."

The wellspring of Goodtimes' work has been the local music scene. They started making live visuals for bands, then says Slater, "we worked our way towards The Coral and built up a relationship with [their label] Deltasonic. Everything springboarded from Liverpool, so it made sense to stick here." Declining budgets for music videos emphasised the lack of attraction of moving down south, but the other important factor in Goodtimes' success is that, unlike several other regional promo makers, it has representation. This is through Draw Pictures, a top London music video production outfit. Slater agrees it's helped their progress both with London labels and breaking the US, also it takes the edge off their outsider status.

In contrast, that is something Glasgow's Blair Young, without a London rep, feels keenly. "You do feel a bit removed, not part of things," says Young, who operates his own production outfit, The Forest Of Black. Having met Belle & Sebastian's Stuart Murdoch at a film workshop, which led to him making the band's DVD, Fans Only, Young has gone on to direct videos for Franz Ferdinand, Tokyo Police Club, Sons And Daughters and others - usually through word of mouth, but also picking up commissions from London labels. He's just directed two videos for new EMI signing Make Model.

But Young says that promo-making infrastructure is again an issue north of the border - and, again, this compounds the outsider mentality. "We're not lacking talent up here, but it doesn't have the same range. You look at showreels of DPs and they're usually doing television work." it doesn't help that with music video budgets plummeting across the board, Young suspects that major labels look at regional production outfits, with lower overheads than a London company, as a cheap option.

So is the rise of regional production essentially another way for record

companies to gain well-produced visual work for less money? Like an increasing number of London production outfits, Leeds' Poison Pen Films has its own post production facility. "It's cheaper of course, and it was a factor in us launching the promo division," says Paul Morricone. "But there's a lot of creative worth in that too. It means I can be involved from start to finish."

This creative activity, with hotspots flaring up in different areas, is obviously going to continue. But whether they will become well-established depends on whether the filmmaking infrastructure in that area is already strong, or if filmmakers have strong connections with a production hub like London. Even then, music video makers will have to diversify just to pay the bills.

Even die-hard music video makers like Chris Hopewell and Ben Foley at Collision are now negotiating their path into commercials. Having cracked the US with ads for the likes of Hershey's, they are now considering options for representation in the UK. But move to London? That's not an option:

*"I go down to London, and come back feeling enthusiastic. But I just don't fancy living there. It feels like a lot of hard work, to be honest, and you can sometimes forget that there's more to life."*

Collision has just moved, but it's to another location in Bristol.

Blair Young encapsulates the attitude of music video makers working outside London, and confirms that it's a lifestyle choice. "I go down to London, and come back enthusiastic," he says. "But I just don't fancy living there. It feels like a lot of hard work, to be honest, and you can forget that there's more to life."

James Slater of Goodtimes, just back from shooting the Bravery in the US, adds: "Liverpool allows you to find your feet, It gives you room, if I'd moved to London with all its financial implications, I don't think I'd be doing this at all." 📍

