



# Money for Nothing: A History of the Music Video from the Beatles to the White Stripes

*Saul Austerlitz*

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Picture yourself in a darkened movie theater, or soothed by the pleasing glow of a television screen. You are watching as a history of the moving image unfolds onscreen, but this history will not take note of D.W. Griffith or Jean Renoir, nor will *King Kong* or *Jaws* make an appearance. As the images flicker past - of four ebullient Britishmen turning cartwheels in an open field, a man tap-dancing on an urban sidewalk, a wedding party in a rainstorm, a tragedy in a school classroom - they wax more familiar, the theme growing more coherent, more stable. They keep coming, though, quickly, relentlessly, constantly changing form, changing style, shapeshifting. The parade of images appears to possess a logic of its own, a guiding hand to steer its ship. Finally, as the last picture fills the screen - it happens to be of a shooting on a Brooklyn street - a light bulb goes off: these are all images from music videos, the short films that once ruled the airwaves, and still possess a significant hold on the generations raised by MTV. "I wonder what those were all about," you say...

The music video is a medium that appears to have run its course, or at least hit a substantial rut in its evolution. MTV and VH1 have morphed into lifestyle channels, the musical component of their programming reduced to a mere blip on their schedule. BET, CMT, and other music channels still maintain their dedication to showing music videos regularly, but their narrower audiences render them distinctly niche channels. And yet the video's shining moment as part disposable crap, part momentary, fleeting genius (the exact cinematic/televisual equivalent of the pop song, of course) renders it a subject worthy of some serious attention. Saul Austerlitz's fascinating book tells the history of the music video, delving into its origins, function, stars, motifs, genres, conventions, and masterpieces.

Austerlitz sees the music video as a fascinating oddity, capable of packing great wit, emotion, and insight into its brief span. A compelling marker of cultural history, the video emerged onto television screens nationwide and shone gloriously for a brief moment before disappearing into the remembrance of television past. Informed, opinionated, and always entertaining, *Money for Nothing* goes a long way toward retrieving the memory of this fleeting, evanescent art-form.

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