

Handout 3 - The Rise of MTV

The MTV “Music Television” network launched on August 1, 1981. It was the first cable station dedicated entirely to music videos, supplemented only by brief news bits and introductions by its VJs (video jockeys).

Music had always been on television. There were variety shows with dedicated portions for live performances, programs such as the 1950s *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* that featured Ricky Nelson singing, and the 1960s show *The Monkees*, the lead characters of which were a Beatles-like Rock and Roll band. Occasionally there were music “specials” such as the USA Network’s “Video Concert Hall,” which showed music videos for an hour or more. However, MTV’s 24-hour-a-day “music television” model was something new, creating a heightened demand for the production of music videos.



In the network’s earliest years, MTV played almost anything they received. Many videos were low-budget and hastily made representations of a band’s live performance. However, the marketing power of MTV’s “visual radio” concept was quickly embraced by artists and the music industry as a whole. The music video became a platform for creativity as well as a powerful promotional tool. Throughout the 1980s and into the mid-1990s--all before the Internet--MTV was the most influential music outlet worldwide.

The four images below are taken from the first thirty videos shown on MTV. Look at each slide with your partner and prepare to discuss the following questions with your class:

- In what ways do these slides seem similar?
- What are all of the people you see on the rock video stage doing?
- What angle are these photographs taken from? Who would see the band from this angle?
- How might you compare these to the early music videos you viewed at the beginning of this lesson? Do you think the concept for these videos is more closely related to “St. Louis Blues” or “Caldonia”? Why?



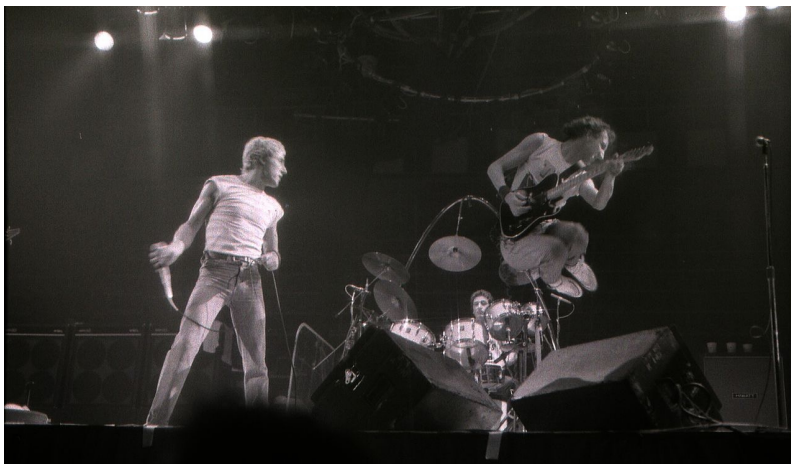
The Pretenders



Iron Maiden



Rod Stewart



The Who