

## Thriller - The Most Important Music Video of All Time?

On Saturday, August 1, 1981 at 12:01 AM Eastern Time, a brand new cable television channel was launched. It was called MTV - Music Television. For eleven minutes, people watched footage of the countdown and take off of the space shuttles Columbia and Apollo 11. While watching retouched



footage of an astronaut plant an animated flag on the moon with the initials, MTV, the words, "Ladies and Gentlemen, let's rock and roll," rang out and a brand new genre of art was introduced to America.

The first music video shown on MTV was The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star," an appropriate choice to be sure. MTV's effect was immediate. Within two months, record stores in areas where MTV was available reported selling music that local radio stations were not playing - the only way so many people could have heard of these

bands from far away areas was by watching the national cable channel. MTV sparked the Second British Invasion, with British bands, who had been accustomed to using music videos for half a decade, featuring heavily on the channel.

Michael Jackson decided to use this new genre to showcase his many talents. Although famous from childhood, few people were aware of the singer's ability to dance. With the release of his second album, Jackson decided to truly expand the possibilities of "music video" as an art form. "I wanted something that would *glue* you to the set, something you'd want to watch over and over," Jackson wrote in his 1988 memoir *Moonwalk*. "I wanted to be a pioneer in this relatively new medium and make the best short music movies we could make."

Having seen John Landis' horror-comedy *An American Werewolf in London*, Michael believed the same creative team could help realize his vision for "Thriller." Director John Landis; producer George Folsey, Jr.; makeup artist Rick Baker (winner of the first Academy Award for Best Makeup on *An American Werewolf in London*) all contributed to Michael Jackson's "Thriller."



On December 2, 1983, Michael Jackson's Thriller music video premiered. It was the first video shown on the world premiere of MTV. The "Thriller" short film has been universally recognized as the most important music video of all time. The single immediately reached No. 1 in four countries in 1984, topping the U.S. *Billboard* Hot Dance Club Play chart.

Later that year, "Thriller" received three MTV Video Music Awards for Best Overall Performance in a Video, Best Choreography in a Video and Viewer's Choice, as well as a People's Choice Award for Favorite Video of the Year. The short film was inducted into the Music Video Producers' Hall of Fame in 1991, and in 2009 was selected for the Library of Congress National Film Registry—the first, and to date, only time a music video has received such an honor. In 1999, MTV ranked "Thriller" as the greatest music video of all time. In 2001, VH1 also named "Thriller" the greatest music video of all time.

The choreography of “Thriller,” created by Jackson and Michael Peters, continues to influence popular culture. In 2006, a Guinness World Record-setting event in Toronto, Ontario, Canada found 62 people re-enacting the classic Thriller dance; this inspired an annual event, Thrill the World, where thousands of dancers in hundreds of events around the world organize simultaneous “Thriller” performances. On Michael’s birthday in 2009, the largest Thrill the World even was held in Mexico City drawing a record setting 13,597 participants.

