15 I Want My MTV

"Increasingly, and perhaps irreversibly, audiences for American mainstream music will depend, even insist, on each song being a full audiovisual confrontation," observed *Time* in 1983. "Why should sound alone be enough when sight is only as far away as the TV set or the video machine?" Concluded the magazine: "Video will be the way to keep time with the future."

MTV, a music television channel established only two years earlier, was the subject of this *Time* article. During the early 1980s, music stations like MTV and MuchMusic began to replace radio among a generation of teens born during the 1960s, who had no personal recollection of Elvis, the Beatles, or Vietnam and who sought their own musical identity. These stations helped create the visual rock of Duran Duran and pop metal and played a major role in the mania over Michael Jackson. During the 1980s, MTV designed and delivered rock to the TV generation.

MTV and the Video Age

In the 1980s, North Americans became obsessed with a video technology that had first been introduced to the mass market with the television set. By the end of the decade, 98.2 percent of all American households watched television, most had at least two sets, and 85 percent owned a colour TV. Americans also purchased videocassette recorder-players, first mass marketed in 1976 by the Victor Co. of Japan (JVC). In 1981, Americans purchased 1.3 million units, a 69 percent increase from the previous year, and spent $9.2 billion on video products. Four years later, they purchased more than $15 billion in video hardware and accessories. By the end of the decade, more than ninety-seven million Americans owned VCRs and bought more than 480 million pre-recorded and blank videocassettes for their machines. American consumers had become part of an expanding video culture.

North American teenagers who had been raised on television embraced the video craze. The youths, on average, watched television from three to four hours a day.

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 265 11/18/13 7:38 PM

By high school graduation, they had spent more time watching television than sitting in the classroom. In a 1981 survey of eighth graders, the teens named TV personalities as their Top-Ten role models. They even stared at television sets in their schools that had become increasingly equipped with instructional TV.

Accustomed to the television screen at home and at school, North American teens became entranced by video games. They first began to play Space Invaders at the turn of the decade. By 1981, the TV generation dropped more than twenty-five billion quarters into video game machines at local arcades, which grossed more than the combined television revenues of baseball, football, and basketball, or the combined income of all of the casinos in the United States. Teens, mostly male, spent an average of $4.30 per week on coin-operated video games, and in 1981 spent the equivalent of 75 000 years playing Pac-Man, Asteroids, Space Invaders, and other video games.

By the early 1980s, teens also began to play video games at home. In 1982, the Atari Corporation, owned by Warner Communications, grossed approximately $1.3 billion in home video game console and cartridge sales. By the end of that year, more than 8 percent of all households owned home video games.

Warner Communications applied video technology to rock-and-roll. Aided by the advent of stereo TV and the deregulation of the airwaves, which encouraged the growth of cable television, Warner and American Express invested $20 million to launch Music Television (MTV) on August 1, 1981. They broadcast a non-stop format of three-minute video clips, focusing primarily on Warner artists, which initially appeared on 300 cable outlets in 2.5 million homes.

Music Television, headed by twenty-eight-year-old Robert Pittman, targeted its programming to young people under twenty-five years old, who had been neglected by radio. "Where is the Woodstock generation? They're all old and bald," reasoned Pittman. Recycling the 1960s' ad campaign for the once-popular breakfast cereal Maypo into "I Want My MTV," he stalked the "TV babies," who seldom read newspapers, books, or even the rock press.

The New Romantics

MTV attracted the TV generation with young, visually exciting bands from the dance clubs of England. Opened as a reaction to the austerity of punk, English dance clubs like the Blitz in Covent Garden provided working-class youths with escapist entertainment. "Most kids who actually live there are sick of the street," contended Gary Kemp, the founder and guitarist of Spandau Ballet, a prominent dance-club band who played at the Blitz. "They want to be in a club with great lights, and look really good and pick up girls." The Blitz, explained Martin Rushent who produced the records of some of the English dance bands, "became just the hippest place on earth."

As with its North American counterpart, English disco focused on a fashion-conscious audience. "Discos are always parties because you have to make your own visual entertainment," commented Kemp. "The most important thing in a club is the people, not the music they listen to. You become the most important person. You become the visual aspect of the evening, rather than the band." Discos, he continued,

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 266 11/18/13 7:38 PM

appealed to "people who like being looked at—that's why dancing is so important, and why people try and beat each other at dancing. It's also why clothes are so important."

Gary Kemp linked the excessive concern over fashion to British culture. "The attitude behind it has always been there; Mods, skinheads, and the soul kids—just kids who want to dress smart and enjoy themselves. My dad was a Teddy Boy and my older cousin was a Mod. I guess it's hereditary."

The music played at the clubs, a combination of a steady disco beat and the atmospheric sounds of the electronic synthesizer, originated with such groups as Roxy Music. Formed in early 1971 by singer Brian Ferry and named after the popular chain of Roxy cinemas in England, the band wore stylish, sometimes flamboyant, futuristic costumes designed by Anthony Price. A reporter from the *Music Scene* spotted Brian Eno, a member of the group, "traveling the Underground wearing heavily applied brown eye shadow, thick mascara, lipstick, black glitter beads, pearly nail varnish, and violent purple streaks in his blonde hair."

Unlike most glam rockers of the 1970s who delivered hard rock, Roxy Music featured the synthesizer, which in the hands of Eno added an almost ethereal element to the music. In 1972, the band released its debut, self-named album, which reached the Top Ten in Britain. The next year, Roxy Music refined its distinctive style with the synthesizer-drenched *For Your Pleasure*, which reached the British Top Five, and the next year topped the British chart with *Stranded*.

Brian Eno, who shaped the unique Roxy sound, left the group in 1973 to, in his words, "pursue a partially defined direction—probably involving further investigations into bioelectronics, snake guitar, the human voice, and lizard girls." The band replaced him with the teenage multi-instrumentalist Eddie Jobson and began to deliver a quieter, smoother sound that showcased Brian Ferry's vocals. By 1976, a year after the band scored its first U.S. hit single, "Love Is the Drug," Roxy Music disbanded.

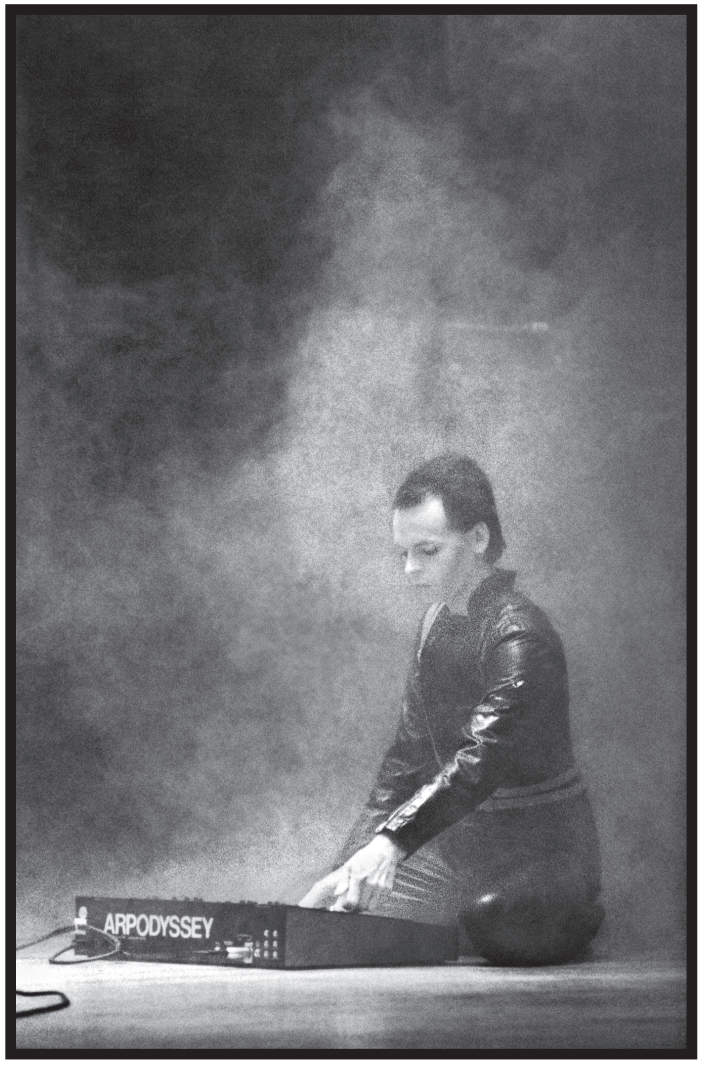
Ultravox continued the tradition of Roxy Music and became the direct precursor of the New Romantic movement. Brought together in 1976 by John Foxx (b. Dennis Leigh), who had dabbled in tapes and synthesizers while in school, the extravagantly bedecked band recorded two albums of electronica, punctuated by the violin and keyboards of Billy Currie. In 1978, the band enlisted the help of producer Conny Plank, who had worked with experimental electronic groups such as Can and Kraftwerk to release *Systems of Romance*, which offered listeners a sparse, crystalline, electronic sound that defined the electro-pop of the New Romantics.

In early 1979, keyboardist Billy Currie joined fashion-conscious Steve Strange, synthesizer player Midge Ure, and some members of the group Magazine to form a side project, which they called Visage. As with Ultravox, the band emphasized outrageous fashion. "Fashion," commented Steve Strange, "has been missing from the scene since the early seventies with Bowie and Roxy, so what we're part of is just an upsurge in fashion."

Visage expanded the Ultravox sound, featuring two synthesizers and guitars supported by a heavy, repetitious drumbeat. "We were trying to get away from the obvious disco sound," explained Strange. "I messed around with synthesizers and found sounds which were really different from the traditional guitar and bass. We wanted to create a danceable beat. I know you can do that with drums and a bass, but it was a new sound that we wanted to use."

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 267 11/18/13 7:38 PM

Gary Numan popularized the sound of electro-pop that Ultravox and Visage had developed. Born Gary Webb in 1958 and taking his pseudonym from the *Yellow Pages*, Numan first played in the punk-influenced Tubeway Army. He soon abandoned the guitar for the synthesizer, donned futuristic outfits, and on May 4, 1979, released the synthesizer dance number "Are 'Friends' Electric?" Two weeks later, Numan and his band, which included Billy Currie, appeared on the British television show *Top of the Pops*, and by the end of July, the single and the album *Replicas* hit the top of the British chart. "Gary Numan just released "Are 'Friends' Electric?" when everyone thought synthesizer bands were just junk or something or that anyone who used a synthesizer was just a bit of a joke," remembered Midge Ure. "At the time it



Gary Numan with synthesizer. *Permission by Cam Garrett, Photographer.*

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 268 11/18/13 7:38 PM

was very unfashionable, but six months later because of Gary Numan it became very fashionable to be a synthesizer band."

The ease of mastering the synthesizer contributed to its popularity. "In some ways it's quite strange that synthesizers were so hated in the punk era," remarked Andy McClusky of the successful electro-pop band Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, which formed in 1978. "They're the ideal punk instrument if you believe in the ethic of 'anybody can do it.' Someone who's been playing synth for ten minutes can easily sound as good as someone who's been playing for years, provided the ideas are there." Andy Fletcher confessed in 1982, two years after his all-synthesizer band, Depeche Mode, was formed, "We couldn't hardly play at all then; we can't play very well now. In pop music nowadays you don't need technical ability, you need ideas and the ability to write songs."

By the beginning of the 1980s, portable synthesizers had become relatively inexpensive. Unlike the cumbersome, sometimes stationary Moog models of the previous decade, easy-to-handle portables could be purchased for as little as $100 to $300. "Synthesizers suddenly got cheaper," explained Phil Oakley of the Human League about his band's switch to the electronic keyboard.

The electro-pop sound of the synthesizer, easily attainable and affordable, embodied the digital, push-button 1980s. "Not a day goes by when you don't press a button, whether it's for a cup of coffee or to turn on the stereo or video," observed David Ball of the two-man synthesizer group Soft Cell. "People are so surrounded now by electronics, of course there's electronic music."

MTV Goes Electro-Pop

MTV, searching for videos of new bands to air on its twenty-four-hour-a-day format, promoted the electro-pop of fashion-obsessed New Romantics such as Duran Duran. Begun in 1978 as a duo and named after a character in the science fiction movie *Barbarella*, within two years the group had become a quintet that featured an airy-sounding synthesizer, the insistent drumbeat of disco, and a pop sensibility for what keyboard player Nick Rhodes dubbed "entertainment music." In 1981, the group released its first, self-named effort but first hit the Top Ten when their follow-up *Rio* (1982) received heavy MTV airplay. "The band was a natural for music television," noted *Rolling Stone* magazine. "They may be the first rock group to ride in on a video wave." The group promptly re-released their first album to rave reviews and became teenage heartthrobs on both sides of the Atlantic with the Top-Ten album *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* (1983). "Videos are incredibly important for us," asserted Rhodes. "It's a way of expressing a song in visuals. It gives another dimension." He added that "MTV was instrumental in breaking us in America." Norman Sammick, senior vice-president of Warner Communications, put it more succinctly: "I think Duran Duran owes its life to MTV."

The music channel helped other electro-pop bands such as the Human League reach the record-buying American public. The group, formed in Sheffield in 1977, first produced icy, dense electronic music modelled after European outfits such as Kraftwerk. In 1980, vocalist and synthesizer wiz Philip Oakley disbanded the Human

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 269 11/18/13 7:38 PM

League because of its reliance on taped music during concerts, and with Adrian Wright and four new members reformed the band. The next year, the revamped group hired producer Martin Rushent, who infused the band's synthesizer-based music with a toe-tapping, pop sensibility. "I wanted to make a pop electronic album," remembered Rushent. "Not a DAF or a Kraftwerk, but something that was accessible to everybody. The Human League just walked through the door at the right time." The producer replaced the traditional keyboard synthesizer with a Roland Microcomposer sequencer, added the flawless beat of a drum machine, and in 1981 produced *Dare*, which included the single "Don't You Want Me" that immediately topped the British chart. After MTV placed "Don't You Want Me" in heavy rotation in 1982, the song became a number-one single, and the album hit the number-three position in the United States.

MTV lifted other wildly garbed, British electro-pop bands up the American charts. Through repeated showings of selected videos, it successfully promoted the London quintet Spandau Ballet, which hit the Top Five with "True" (1983). Soft Cell scored with a remake of the obscure soul song "Tainted Love" (1982), which stayed on the chart for forty-three weeks, and A Flock of Seagulls reached the number-three slot with "I Ran (So Far Away)" (1982). MTV also marketed the Thompson Twins' club hit "In the Name of Love" (1982) and Depeche Mode (translated: "fast fashion"), which had the dance smash "People Are People" (1985).

MTV refurbished the career of David Bowie, the 1970s' icon who had helped lay the groundwork for electro-pop. Bowie, the king of glitter rock who served as a model of fashion for the foppish New Romantics, began to abandon a hard, guitar-based rock sound for the synthesizer around 1976, when he released a collection of techno-pop songs, *Station to Station*. The next year he began a three-album collaboration with synthesizer wunderkind Brian Eno, who produced a sometimes-fragile, sometimes-dense synthesizer sound that he had pioneered as a member of Roxy Music. In 1983, at the height of New Romantic success, the ever-visual Bowie recorded *Let's Dance*, which, with the help of MTV and a world tour, neared the top of the American chart.

By 1983, the electro-pop sound, largely introduced to America by videos on MTV, had swept across the United States. It dominated the charts, filtered into mainstream pop, and captivated the TV generation. Pursuing this new sound, devotees bought an unprecedented number of synthesizers in place of guitars, which declined in sales by 37 percent in one year. MTV, created in the decade of technology, sold a visually interesting, electro-pop dance music to a generation raised on glitter rock, disco, and television.

MTV measured its success by a meteoric increase in viewers. Initially broadcast to 2.5 million households in late 1981, within two years the music channel reached more than 17 million homes on 2000 cable affiliates. The average MTV viewer was less than twenty-three years old and watched the network for one hour a day on weekdays and ninety minutes on weekends. "They're watching it," said MTV vice president Les Garland in early 1983, "not in front of their homework, not as background. They're watching it."

Attracting the under-twenty-three-year-old bracket, MTV appealed to many corporate sponsors that manufactured products for the youth market. "MTV is very

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 270 11/18/13 7:38 PM

attractive," asserted Joseph Ostrow, executive vice-president of the ad agency Young & Rubicam. "It allows you to target very discreetly to a particular segment of the population. For youth-oriented companies, that's terrific." During its first year of operation, MTV convinced more than 100 companies to spend $1500 for a 30-second spot and grossed $20 million. By 1984, revenues had jumped to $73 million.

Music Television provided a much-needed boost to a formerly radio-dependent U.S. record industry that in 1978 had peaked with roughly $4 billion in gross revenues before declining sharply the next year. The network created a style of music for youth that radio had neglected. "Groups are chalking up huge sales on songs [through MTV] that have never been played on radio," boasted Les Garland. In 1983, *Billboard* estimated that exposure of mostly new bands on MTV resulted in sales increases of 15 to 20 percent. "We were there for the industry," explained John Lack, executive vice president of Warner. "We found we could help a business in trouble and it's worked, and they've responded. Ask anyone at CBS or RCA or Arista."

MTV and Michaelmania

MTV continued to support the U.S. recording industry by promoting a Motown-style revival, which followed naturally from electro-pop. Though using synthesizers, the New Romantics created a disco-like dance music that had its foundation in the slick, fashionable Motown. As a youth, Steve Strange of Visage "used to go to these northern soul clubs," which featured Motown-type bands. "Our direction came from the soul/disco/dance side, not rock," agreed Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet.

As the synthesizer craze began to fade in 1982, MTV capitalized on the renewed interest in Motown by airing videos of former Motown star Michael Jackson. Growing up in Gary, Indiana, during the 1960s, Jackson and his siblings Tito, Jermaine, Jackie, and Marlon practised songs and dance steps at home. "When I found out that my kids were interested in becoming entertainers, I really went to work with them," recalled father Joe Jackson. "I rehearsed them about three years before I turned them loose. That's practically every day for at least two or three hours. When the other kids would be out on the street playing games, my boys were in the house working—trying to learn how to be something in life." Under the strict and sometimes harsh tutelage of Joe Jackson, the boys entered and won talent contests in Indiana and Illinois and played at Chicago clubs. "This was on weekends," remembered the elder Jackson. "I had a Volkswagen bus and I bought a big luggage rack and put it on the top and had everybody on the inside of the bus."

Joe Jackson approached Motown about his family musical act. In 1967, he "sent Berry Gordy a tape. They kept it about three months and then sent it back." The persistent father continued working with the Jackson 5, who had impressed Gladys Knight when she performed on the same bill as the boys in 1967 at a civic Soul Weekend in Gary. Motown act Bobby Taylor and the Vancouvers were also impressed by the Jackson 5; instrumental to the group's discovery, they recommended the boys to Berry Gordy, who then signed them in 1969.

Berry Gordy, following his formula for success, began to groom the boys. "We provide total guidance," a Motown vice president explained. "We provide their

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 271 11/18/13 7:38 PM

material, set their basic sound, and work out the choreographic routines." The company gave special attention to the ten-year-old Michael, who was taught to mimic James Brown's frenzied dancing and the romantic pleadings of Smokey Robinson. In late 1969, Motown featured Michael on the first Jackson 5 release, "I Want You Back," which by January 1970 hit the number-one slot on the singles chart and sold more than two million copies. "We're labeling it soul-bubblegum," declared Berry Gordy.

The Jackson 5 became the last major recording act signed by Motown. They followed their first hit with thirteen consecutive Top-Twenty singles, including the number-one hits "ABC," "The Love You Save," and "I'll Be There." By March 1976, when they left Motown, the Jackson 5 had received a commendation from Congress for their "contribution to American youth," inspired a Saturday morning network television cartoon show, and become the most successful African-American pop vocal group, selling more than 100 million records worldwide.

The Jackson 5, Gordy's crossover dream, appealed to all races, genders, and ages. "The Jacksons' music," stated Joe Jackson, "is a type of music that the young kids like, and as you know, the older people like, too. It's music to send a message to all the people whether they're black or white. It's music for rejoicing, whether you're black or white. It's music for the whole world."

When the Jackson 5 signed with Epic Records, the group changed their name to the Jacksons and continued to churn out hits. Using the songwriting team of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, they scored with the Top-Ten "Enjoy Yourself" and then began charting with their own material.

Michael Jackson enjoyed a successful solo career as well. In 1971 and 1972 he hit the chart with the Top-Ten singles "Got to Be There," a reworking of "Rockin' Robin," and the number-one "Ben." In 1978, he played the scarecrow in the movie *The Wiz*, an all-African-American version of *The Wizard of Oz*, starring Diana Ross. While filming the movie, Jackson met producer Quincy Jones, who arranged the music for the soundtrack. The next year, assisted by Jones, Jackson recorded *Off the Wall*, which sold eight million copies and included the hit singles "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," "Rock with You," "Off the Wall," and "She's Out of My Life."

In 1982, Jackson again teamed with Quincy Jones on *Thriller*. Trying to appeal to both African-American and white audiences, he chose as the first single "The Girl Is Mine," a duet with former Beatle Paul McCartney, a choice that ensured a wide audience. He then released "Beat It," which included an Eddie Van Halen guitar solo that assured play on rock radio stations. To further market his product, Jackson filmed slick videos of several songs on the album.

Video provided an ideal medium for Jackson, who had been trained at the Motown school. "Rock videos have transformed the music industry, providing a showcase for Jackson in much the same way as musical comedy did for Fred Astaire in the 1930s," *Maclean's*, the Canadian counterpart to *Time* magazine, told its readers in 1984. "Videos have revived the demand for old-fashioned entertainment skills, an ideal situation for Jackson, who has been perfecting his act from the age of five."

First encouraged by Motown, the singer perfected dazzling choreography unlike most other rock acts. Gene Kelly, the popular dancer of the 1940s, raved about Jackson's "native histrionic wit. He knows when to stop and then flash out like a bolt

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 272 11/18/13 7:38 PM

of lightning." "I think he's terrific," enthused Bob Fosse, the director-choreographer who became known for his work on the movie *Cabaret* and the Broadway smash *Pippin*. "Clean, neat, fast with a sensuality that comes through…. It's the style. That's what Michael Jackson has." Even Fred Astaire, probably the best-known dancer in American history, complimented Jackson: "My Lord, he is a wonderful mover."

MTV, criticized for only airing videos of white artists, played the visually stunning, expertly choreographed Jackson videos and helped create Michaelmania. Though Jackson's records had always sold well, *Thriller* began to sell at an amazing rate after it was promoted on MTV. At the height of the mania, it sold one million copies every four days. It stayed on the Japanese album chart for sixty-five weeks, sold on the black market in the Soviet Union, and even topped the chart in South Africa. "Jackson, you might say, bridges the apartheid gap," observed one record executive.

Crazed fans around the globe began to snap up Michael Jackson paraphernalia. They bought posters, buttons, and T-shirts, which most rock acts sold by the 1980s. Michael Jackson fanatics also purchased *Thriller* caps, key chains, duffel bags, bubblegum cards, an 28-centimetre Michael Jackson doll that could be twisted into various dance poses, and replicas of the single, white sequined glove that Jackson wore onstage. They even bought a video that chronicled the making of the video for the song "Thriller."

When the mania subsided in early 1985, Jackson had achieved singular success. He had released seven of the ten songs on the album as singles that reached the Top Ten. The twenty-five-year-old singer had sold forty million copies of *Thriller* worldwide, topped the U.S. charts in both 1983 and 1984, and won 150 gold and platinum awards as well as a record-breaking eight Grammy awards. "Jackson," asserted *Time* in March 1984, "is the biggest thing since the Beatles. He is the hottest single phenomenon since Elvis Presley."

Michael Jackson, the most important rock star of the early 1980s, ostensibly epitomized the growing conservatism in America. He did not smoke, drink, or take drugs. He even refused to utter the word *funky*, preferring *jelly* instead. A devout adherent to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the singer attended meetings at a Kingdom Hall



Michael Jackson in action, 1988. *Permission by Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy.*

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 273 11/18/13 7:38 PM

four times a week and regularly fasted on weekends. "Such pop superstars as Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan or the Beatles have traditionally posed a sexual or political challenge to the status quo," contended *Maclean's* magazine, "but Michael Jackson is by contrast an establishment figure, perfectly in tune with the conservative America of Ronald Reagan." In 1984, Jackson received a public-service award from the president, a former 1940s' actor, who himself had become one of the most popular U.S. presidents through his use of video.

Jackson amassed a fortune from his success. By the end of 1984, he had earned more than $30 million from the sales of *Thriller* and had grossed another $50 million from the burgeoning industry of Michael Jackson products. The singer increased his personal net worth to $75 million in 1985, becoming one of the richest men in America. As jazz great and *Thriller* producer Quincy Jones observed, "MTV and Michael rode each other to stardom."

The Jackson Legacy

The success of Michael Jackson paved the way for other soul-pop artists, including British band Culture Club, who merged the English concern for fashion with a Motown-influenced sound to climb the charts. Formed in 1981 by singer Boy George (b. George O'Dowd), the group dressed in outlandish costumes. "I used to dress up from the age of thirteen or fourteen, and George is the same," related the group's guitarist Mikey Craig. "Dressing up in different styles and going to the clubs is a big thrill for kids. You follow the fashion changes and get caught up in it."

The extravagantly bedecked, video-ready Culture Club played, in the words of Boy George, "imitation soul." In 1982, they released the soul-pop album *Kissing to Be Clever*, which included the warm, bouncy, Top-Ten "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me" and "I'll Tumble 4 Ya." Scaling the charts on the coattails of Jackson's *Thriller* the next year, the group produced the number-two *Colour by Numbers*, which employed signature Motown riffs. "'Plagiarism' is one of my favorite words," admitted Boy George. "Culture Club is the most sincere form of plagiarism in modern music—we just do it better than most."

The Eurythmics also scored with an updated Motown sound. Formed in 1980 by Dave Stewart and the photogenic, classically trained Annie Lennox, the duo first recorded electronic experimental music that failed to chart. Amid Michaelmania in 1983, the twosome earned international acclaim for *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*, which featured the sultry, Motown-influenced vocals of Lennox over the insistent beat of a drum machine. "I identify my vocal style very much with black soul music," explained Lennox at the time. "Not with blues, but with 1960s soul. It really struck a chord in me, and I can't get away from that." Stewart agreed, "What she really loved was Tamla/Motown material." During the next two years, the duo followed with two Top-Ten, soul-tinged albums.

Wham!, another sharply dressed duo from Britain, hit the charts with African American–inspired dance music. Wham!'s Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael (b. Georgios Panayiotou) met as young teens and frequented local clubs, dancing to the soundtrack of *Saturday Night Fever*. "There was disco before *Saturday Night*

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 274 11/18/13 7:38 PM

Fever but after that it all caught fire," George Michael wrote in his autobiography. "It revolutionized dance music. And us."

In 1982, the two friends formed Wham! and released several successful singles. In late 1984, amid the furor over Michael Jackson, Michael and Ridgeley released a second album, *Make It Big*, which, after being promoted through videos aired on MTV, yielded three number-one singles on both sides of the Atlantic, including "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go." When Wham! disbanded in 1986, George Michael continued to offer spunky dance hits on the chart-topping *Faith* (1987), which yielded four number-one singles.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Madonna combined a decadent sex appeal with African-American dance rhythms to attain stardom. Born of Italian-American parents in Detroit in 1959, Madonna Louise Ciccone bonded with the Motown sound at an early age. "Motown was everywhere," she remembered about her neighbourhood. "Stevie Wonder and Diana Ross and the Jackson 5, that's what I grew up on."

Madonna won a dance scholarship to the University of Michigan but, after her first year, she left school to pursue a career as a dancer in New York City. She briefly studied at the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater and moved to Paris, where she began to dance with the revue of disco star Patrick Hernandez. In 1979, Madonna formed a band with drummer Steve Bray, and the next year she gave a tape of the band to Mark Kamins, a disco disc jockey who helped Madonna land a record contract with Sire.

In 1983, Madonna released her first record, which presented the singer's breathy vocals over a disco beat. Propelled by videos of songs on the album that accentuated her sexually aggressive, Marilyn Monroe–like image, including her trademark attire of lace wear, she hit the Top Ten. The next year Madonna attained national stardom with the number-one dance album that included the hook-laden singles "Material Girl" and "Like a Virgin," and on its cover pictured Madonna in a flimsy lace bodice cinched by a belt that carried the inscription "Boy Toy." By 1986, Madonna had sold more than nine million copies of her first two albums, had hit the top of the chart a second time with *True Blue*, and, based upon her initial exposure through MTV, had snagged a leading role in the feature-length movie *Desperately Seeking Susan*.

The success of Michael Jackson's brand of Motown dance music also helped the careers of African-American soul-pop performers. "It inspired black artists not to look at themselves in a limited way," noted producer Quincy Jones. "Before Michael, those kinds of sales had never happened for a black artist. Michael did it. He did it for the first time."

Motown artist Lionel Richie followed Jackson to the top of the charts. In 1968, Richie joined with five other freshmen at the African-American Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, to form the Commodores, a name randomly picked from the dictionary. Three years later, the band signed with Motown and for two years served as the opening act for the Jackson 5. In 1974, the Commodores recorded their first album, *Machine Gun*, characterized by a raw, sharp-edged sound. After two more albums, Lionel Richie convinced the group to record his softer, soul-pop ballads such as "Three Times a Lady" and "Sail On," which hit the top of the singles chart. In 1982, the Motown performer released his first solo album, which contained the chart-topping single "Truly." In the midst of Michaelmania the next year, he recorded

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 275 11/18/13 7:38 PM

Can't Slow Down, which, with the help of MTV, hit the top of the chart and transformed Lionel Richie into *Billboard*'s Top Artist of 1984.

MTV also helped the youngest member of the Jackson family. In the early 1980s, before the success of *Thriller*, Janet Jackson had released two commercially unsuccessful albums. In 1986, promoted by a series of videos and amid the Motown-influenced craze that had been created by her brother, Janet Jackson hit the top of the chart with *Control* and three years later duplicated her feat with *Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814*. "Janet's a video artist," reasoned Roger Davies, who managed the singer.

Whitney Houston achieved similar success through video. The daughter of Cissy Houston, who had anchored the Aretha Franklin backup group the Sweet Inspirations, Whitney began performing in a gospel choir at age eight. She continued her singing career, backing dozens of artists in the studio, including Jermaine Jackson on "Take Good Care of My Heart," and appeared as a model in fashion magazines like *Glamour, Cosmopolitan*, and *Seventeen*. In 1983, Houston signed with Arista Records, which, as Motown had done with its young talent, groomed the young singer.

In 1985, Houston released her first, self-named album, which featured upbeat ballads in the Motown tradition. As the first two singles from the LP climbed the chart, she filmed a video of "How Will I Know," which, according to Peter Baron, Arista's associate director of video production and promotion, "helped build her image. She's become a superstar in a year." The singer had three consecutive number-one singles and sold fourteen million copies of the album, the biggest-selling debut in history. In 1987, Houston recorded a follow-up, *Whitney*, which shot to the number-one spot and yielded four chart-topping singles.

Prince grafted rock guitars and overtly sexual lyrics onto a soul-pop sound for an innovative hybrid of the Michael Jackson formula for success. Born in Minneapolis to a bandleader father, Prince Rogers Nelson taught himself piano, guitar, and drums by age fourteen and began to play a mixture of rock, funk, and soul. "I never grew up in one particular culture," Prince related. "I'm not a punk, but I'm not an R&B artist either—because I'm a middle-class kid from Minnesota, which is very much white America."

In 1976, Prince met Minneapolis sound engineer Chris Moon, who suggested sexually explicit lyrics. "It was amazing to see," recalled Moon. "Here was this very quiet kid, but once he'd discovered the notion of sex as a vehicle for his writing, it was as if a door unlocked for him." Within a year, Prince signed with Warner Brothers and recorded four only moderately successful albums

In 1982, Prince released *1999* and filmed a video of the song "Little Red Corvette," one of the first clips by an African-American artist aired on the music channel, which slowly lifted the single to the Top Ten. Through constant promotion by MTV, Prince sold fourteen million copies of *Purple Rain* (1984), the soundtrack for the movie of the same name, which won an Oscar and a Grammy award. In 1985, Prince followed with the number-one *Around the World in a Day*. As with other African-American and white soul-pop artists in the wake of the mania over Michael Jackson, Prince had attained international stardom through video.

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 276 11/18/13 7:38 PM

Pop Goes the Metal

MTV ensured its pre-eminent place among the cable networks during the decade by creating a craze for pop metal bands. As it had done with electro-pop and soul-pop, the music channel delivered a visually exciting, largely inoffensive heavy metal to the post–baby boomers.

Van Halen served as the archetype for the metal bands of the 1980s. The sons of a jazz musician, Alex and Eddie Van Halen grew up in the Netherlands, where they received extensive classical music training. In 1965, they moved with their family to Pasadena, California, where they discovered and began to play rock-and-roll. By 1974, the Van Halen brothers joined with bassist Michael Anthony and singer David Lee Roth to form a band, which for three years performed at Los Angeles bars such as Gazzarri's on Sunset Strip in West Hollywood.

The members of Van Halen each contributed a different element to their unique sound. "I think the only true rocker of the bunch is Al," related guitarist Eddie Van Halen. "He's the only one who listens to AC/DC and all that kind of stuff. Dave will walk in with a disco tape, and I'll walk in with my progressive tapes, and Mike walks in with his Disneyland stuff." At home, Eddie preferred the "progressive stuff" and "a lot of Chopin, piano. Very little rock-and-roll."

Unlike the blues-rooted heavy-metal artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the eclectic Van Halen presented a more polished, smooth sound. The band favoured a variety of tempos; rapid-fire, arpeggio guitar solos much shorter than the extended guitar breaks of the original heavy-metal groups; fast-paced, light bass lines; and periodic harmonies that reinforced the hooks in the songs. In addition, Van Halen featured frequent falsetto screams by the photogenic, acrobatic David Lee Roth, who added a wry sense of humour to the lyrics. "Van Halen is entertainment," contended singer Roth. "Van Halen is entertainment delivered at maximum impact, but it's entertainment."

In 1976, the band recorded a demo tape financed by Gene Simmons of Kiss, who spotted them at the Starwood club in Los Angeles. A year later, they signed a contract with Warner Brothers and in early 1978 released their first album, which hit the Top Twenty and sold more than two million copies. Van Halen followed with four Top-Ten albums. After Eddie Van Halen received mass notoriety for his guitar work on Michael Jackson's "Beat It," the band neared the top of the chart with *1984*, receiving constant support from MTV.

Def Leppard perfected the pop metal that Van Halen had originated. Raised in the factory town of Sheffield in the midlands of England, Joe Elliott, guitarists Steve Clark and Pete Willis, and bass player Rick Savage worked in blue-collar jobs before founding the band. They drew their inspiration from a combination of heavy metal and pop. "We always loved the heavy bands of the early seventies, obviously Zeppelin, Uriah Heep, Deep Purple even, but other than that we also were very influenced by what was happening in the pop charts," related bassist Rick Savage. "I suppose if you analyzed it, it was some sort of cross between the two forms." He added, "We always want to have that commercial aspect that's pleasing on the ear, while the seventeen-year-olds can still get off on the power of it."

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 277 11/18/13 7:38 PM

In 1981, after two commercially unsuccessful releases, the band joined with producer Robert ("Mutt") Lange, who began to help Def Leppard refine their pop-metal sound. "I heard those vocal harmonies and thought, 'Wow, an English band doing that stuff,'" remembered Lange. "Since they had the looks and they had the riffs I knew that with me as an extra member, so to speak, we could pull the songs together."

By 1983, after Phil Collen replaced guitarist Willis, Def Leppard had perfected its sound. The group featured tight vocal harmonies and dramatic guitar work accentuated by Lange's production. Joe Elliott called the sound "nice, youthful, melodic rock-'n'-roll."

The band members penned catchy, unobtrusive lyrics. "Because the whole idea of Def Leppard is escapism," asserted Rick Savage, "we hate singing about unemployment and such, and we hate bands that do sing about it. Everybody knows it's tough. A band can't change anything. Who wants to go to one of our shows to hear how bad life is?" Joe Elliott echoed, "It's all wine, women and song. Nothing annoys me more than records about politics this, Greenpeace that. Someone has to be the opposite, and that's us. All we are is total escapism."

MTV promoted the photogenic, escapist pop metal of Def Leppard through performance videos. Offering heavy rotation to clips of such songs as "Photograph," the music channel broadcast the band to its young viewers. Coupled with constant touring, the band successfully marketed *Pyromania* (1983), which sold more than nine million copies. "1983 was our year," enthused Cliff Burnstein, comanager of the group.

The music channel also contributed to the success of other pop-metal bands, some of which favoured the outlandish costumes, puffy hair, and antics of 1970s' glam rockers. In 1981, Mötley Crüe played a West Coast version of video-ready glam rock. Nikki Sixx (b. Frank Ferranna, Jr.) on bass, vocalist Vince Neil, guitarist Mick Mars (b. Bob Deal), and drummer Tommy Lee (b. Tommy Lee Bass) began performing together around Los Angeles. Setting fire to their extravagant clothing and chainsawing mannequins on stage, the band gained a loyal following for their theatrical heavy metal.

The band identified Kiss as its major influence. "When I first saw Kiss I stood in line for six hours at the Paramount Theater in Seattle, Washington," recalled Nikki Sixx. "I was sitting in the front row, and when they took the stage I knew then that I wanted to have a band that was nothing less than what I saw. The theater bug bit me. Rock-'n'-roll from then on had to have an element of theater to excite me."

In May 1983, after an unsuccessful debut, Mötley Crüe signed to Elektra Records. Five months later, they released *Shout at the Devil*, which through heavy rotation on MTV entered the Top Twenty. By the end of 1984, the readers of *Hit Parader* and *Circus* magazines voted the band Rock Act of the Year. The glam rockers followed with the Top-Ten *Theater of Pain* (1985).

MTV also began to show clips of Bon Jovi. Formed in 1983 by singer Jon Bon Jovi (b. John Bongiovi) and quickly signed to Mercury Records, the pop-metal band toured extensively to promote its first two LPs, which both failed to crack the U.S. Top Thirty. Three years later, the group released *Slippery When Wet* and filmed matching videos, which MTV aired ceaselessly. By late 1987, Bon Jovi had sold more than

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 278 11/18/13 7:38 PM

twelve million copies of its chart-topping album. They followed with the number-one *New Jersey* (1988). "The success of such current hot groups as Bon Jovi," observed *Time*, "is largely traceable to the saturation airplay given their videos on MTV."

The MTV-based success of acts such as Bon Jovi opened the doors for a pop-metal explosion during the late 1980s. "The majors are now going nuts. Everyone's out there trying to sign up a metal band," reported Bob Chiappardi, co-owner of the metal-oriented Concrete Marketing. The major labels signed such acts as the United States' Poison, Kix, and Kingdom Come and Canada's Helix, Platinum Blonde, and Glass Tiger. Established pop-metal acts continued to sell. In 1986, Van Halen topped the chart with *5150* and followed with the number-one *OU812* (1988), both of which benefited from videos that received continual play on MTV. After a four-year hiatus, Def Leppard topped the charts with *Hysteria*, which sold more than five million copies. In 1989, Mötley Crüe topped the chart with *Dr. Feelgood* (1989).

The success of pop-metal and electro-pop bands and the unparalleled achievements of Michael Jackson indicated the importance of MTV. "At any one time, 130 000 homes are watching MTV, according to Nielsen," observed Len Epand of Polygram Records. "If the video is in power rotation—fifteen or sixteen plays a week—and that audience tunes in ten times, that's 1.3 million people hearing the record and deciding whether they like it or not. If they like it, they'll buy it." Director of marketing for RCA video productions, Laura Foti added, "There isn't a national radio station. That's where MTV comes in. That's where they have their power: immediately showing everyone in the country this new band." Joe Jackson, the new-wave singer who hit the chart in 1979 with *Look Sharp*, complained about the dominance of MTV: "Things which used to count, such as being a good composer, player, or singer, are getting lost in the desperate rush to visualize everything. It is now possible to be all of the above and still get nowhere simply by not looking good in a video, or worse still, not making one."

The marketing clout of MTV translated into profits. In the first half of 1984, after the *Thriller* hysteria had started to abate, MTV registered $8.1 million in profits from sales of $30.3 million. In 1986, after Viacom International purchased the network from Warner Amex, it grossed $111 million and turned a profit of $47 million. Though its ratings began to decline in the late 1980s, MTV tied with the USA Network and the Cable News Network for first place among the cable channels.

MuchMusic: "The Nation's Music Station"

Inspired by the success of the music television station in the United States, Canada's response to MTV was MuchMusic. In May of 1983, the CRTC released a notice requesting applications for new specialty television licences; as outlined by the CRTC, the prospective programs should be "designed to reflect the particular interests and needs of different age, language, cultural, geographic, or other groups."[1] Included in the CRTC's appeal was a music video program format that "could include productions of recording artists in concert, video adaptations of studio recording sessions or experimental music video recordings."[2] This call put out by the CRTC led to five candidates contending for the specialty television licence, with MuchMusic coming out on top.

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 279 11/18/13 7:38 PM

"The nation's music station," as MuchMusic has been dubbed, was granted its licence in April of 1984 and first hit the airwaves on August 31 of that same year, first as a pay-TV channel and later in the decade as a cable TV channel in Canada. The station launched with Rush's "The Enemy Within," followed by an interview with the band's singer Geddy Lee. Given that MuchMusic was created to "assure a marked increase in the production of Canadian music videos and the exposure of Canadian talent"[3] and was governed by the Canadian Content regulations, the station enlightened and unified the country by exposing its citizens to domestic artists. Denise Donlon, director of music programming for MuchMusic, asserted that "[b]eing able to take regional artists and regional music—everything from the Rankin Family to Susan Aglukark—and show them to the entire nation, celebrates our differences and serves to remind us that so many of us are similar."[4] Ultimately, the music station "allowed Canadian youth to see reflections of themselves in their compatriot musicians, which did a lot to increase the importance of Canadian celebrity. Videos made Canadian musicians look much more interesting than they were previously perceived to be."[5]

"We've become the key to modern Canadian popular music, an indispensable mythmaker and marketing instrument, the country's only real source of new music, a deliberate nation builder in picture and sound," said MuchMusic mogul Moses Znaimer.[6] Although MuchMusic was not the maker or breaker of success for all bands, it was in fact the key facilitator for the success of many who obviously benefited from being on heavy rotation. Bands like Toronto's Rough Trade, Platinum Blonde, and the Pursuit of Happiness achieved chart success because of their frequent airplay on the music station.

Jim Cuddy of Blue Rodeo recalled that "[t]here really was an explosion of Canadian music culture (when Much launched)" and that "[t]here just was all of a sudden this meeting of audiences desiring to see more homegrown products, and those homegrown products being exposed by MuchMusic."[7] Because of the accomplishments of MuchMusic, several spinoff stations were created, the first of which was MusiquePlus, the French-language version of MuchMusic. MusiquePlus was the first of many affiliates launched to satisfy music listeners—or viewers—in Canada and around the world.

Music stations MTV and MuchMusic had helped define 1980s' rock-and-roll. To a large extent, the music networks had replaced radio as the pre-eminent trendsetter in rock. As a result, the music video altered the music industry and changed the way people listened to, and looked at, music. Because MTV and MuchMusic were the two North American pioneers in this regard, they are often subject to comparison. Green Day's Tré Cool confided that he "would watch MuchMusic because it was cooler than MTV"[8] and *Billboard* magazine's Larry LeBlanc asserted that "Much is a lot more substantial, a lot feistier than MTV."[9] However, no one can deny that MTV spearheaded a North American revolution. As *Billboard* noted in its wrap-up of the decade, "MTV is singularly responsible for one of the most basic changes in the current music fan's vocabulary: Where somebody might have said ten years ago, 'Yeah, I've heard that song,' that same person now might likely say, 'Yeah, I saw that video,' or, even more revealing, 'Yeah, I saw that song.'" During the 1980s, music stations like MTV had packaged and delivered rock-and-roll to the TV generation.

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 280 11/18/13 7:38 PM

Notes

1. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). (1983, May 4). Public Notice 1983–93. Call for new specialty programming services. *The Canada Gazette* (Part 1, pp. 4444-4449. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply Services. p. 4444.
2. Ibid, p. 4445.
3. Ira Wagman. "Rock the Nation: MuchMusic, Cultural Policy and the Development of English-Canadian Music-Video Programming, 1979–1984," *Canadian Journal of Communication,* 26(4) (2001).
4. Antonia Zerbisias. "MuchMusic Sets Pop Culture Standards: Channel Unifying Country for 10 Years Now." *Kingston Whig – Standard,* Aug 31, 1994, p. 15. *Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies.* Web. Aug. 16, 2012.
5. Michael Barclay, Ian A.D. Jack, and Jason Schneider. *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance.* Toronto: ECW Press, 2001. pp. 55–56.
6. Antonia Zerbisias. "MuchMusic Sets Pop Culture Standards: Channel Unifying Country for 10 Years Now." *Kingston Whig – Standard,* Aug 31, 1994, p. 15. *Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies.* Web. Aug. 16, 2012.
7. www.ctvnews.ca/muchmusic-vets-look-back-on-25-years-of-music-tv-1.428175. Accessed August 16, 2012.
8. Ibid.
9. Peter Cheney, "MuchMusic Rockin' TV's Socks Off." *Toronto Star,* Nov. 23, 1991, F1. *Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies; CBCA Complete.* Web. Aug. 16, 2012.

MySearchLab®

MySearchLab® with eText offers you access to an online interactive version of the text, self-quizzing, glossary flashcards, and links to audio resources, extensive help with your writing and research projects, and provides round-the-clock access to credible and reliable source material.

M15_SZAT5427_01_SE_C15.indd 281 11/18/13 7:38 PM