



EVENTS

# BUG Special: Video Nasties

Welcome to a very special edition of BUG, the BFI's regular strand for all things music video-related, with a show designed to send a shiver down the spine, chill the blood, and even leave you screaming in sheer terror...

Well, perhaps we won't be going that far. But this is certainly Video Nasties, a celebration of some of the best music videos that embrace the concept of Horror in various forms. This show has been curated as part of *In Dreams Are Monsters* – a season of horror masterpieces running this month at BFI Southbank, reflecting the broad-church interpretation of what can be included in the genre. Following that lead, our show delivers chills and shocks and a few laughs too, from a mix of the less-familiar with well-known classics – and many monsters, in a wide variety of forms. Above all, lots of sheer originality from some extraordinarily talented directors working in the music video medium – and Adam Buxton will be holding it all together with some classic gems of his own.

We begin with a video from the most appropriately named band of the night, by the only director with more than one video in our show. Chris Cunningham was at the height of his fame and powers in 2006 when he collaborated with The Horrors on the short sharp shock that is *Sheena Is a Parasite*, casting a young actor named Samantha Morton to play the eponymous Sheena, whose viscera-spattering transformations echo reality – the true horror of epileptic seizures.

Our next monster is rather more benign, being the creation of Californian-based painter, sculptor and animator Allison Schulnik, for her short film *Forest* – which became the video for Grizzly Bear's *Ready Able* in 2009. Bringing to life the haunting creatures that populate her artworks, Schulnik employed a more sophisticated form of what is popularly known as 'Claymation', to create an amorphous creature of the forest, separated from its partner, amid strange manifestations of plant and animal life – all made possible by Schulnik's bold and visceral use of plasticine and oil paint.

One of the most chilling works being shown tonight is the video for *Cut the World* for the artist then known as Antony & Johnsons (and now Anohni), directed by American director Nabil Elderkin, who developed the idea with the artist. This also has top acting talent in situ – Willem Dafoe and Carice van Houten as a corporate CEO and his PA respectively, plus a momentary appearance by artist Marina Abramovic – in a scenario that initially appears

utterly serene, but then shattered by explosive violence (that might be regarded as a revolutionary act).

In 2015, the British directing duo of Alex Mavor and Ed Kaye – aka The Sacred Egg – were inspired by the stately and orchestral sound of ex-Air member Nicolas Godin's *Widerstehe Doch der Sünde* (which translates as 'Stay Away from Sin') to bring a horror trope to the beach and create... zombie surfers. Filmed on the coast of Cape Town, Mavor and Kaye created some delicious imagery, with the help of DoP Ben Todd – surfing action with an ingenious visual twist, indulging us to enjoy the convincing evidence of our own eyes – that zombies really can surf.

Back in the late Noughties a series of videos by the Belgian commercials director Joe Vanhoutteghem were released for the Antwerp alt-rock band The Hickey Underworld that mined a very particular strain of the bizarre. None more so than the extraordinary video for *Blonde Fire*, in which Vanhoutteghem riffs upon the Frankenstein story and other tales of reanimation, but also takes the idea of recycling of rubbish and organic matter down a wormhole of Hell. Brilliantly shot by cinematographer Nicolas Karakatsanis, the video was filmed close to an abattoir – for reasons that will become obvious.

Having made a succession of classic music videos in the 1990s, for the likes of the Beastie Boys, Bjork, Weezer and Fatboy Slim, and then heading for Hollywood to direct *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*, Spike Jonze returned to music videos in 2004 with the strange and unsettling video for then-girlfriend Karen O's band The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, in which the band perform their song *Y Control* in a dank basement among a gang of creepy, possibly undead children. Jonze creates a lurking sense of foreboding horror with the video's distinctive murky look, but this is leavened by his quirky, anarchic humour. In fact, Jonze insisted after the video was released that he was aiming for comedy, but a level of spontaneity on the shoot ended up contributing to the shock value.

More recently the British director Matilda Finn has become renowned for a directing style that puts a contemporary twist on the classic Gothic sensibility – most recently for the visual campaign accompanying The Weeknd's new album *Dawn FM*. Before that she turned the dancefloor into a crucible of terror for French DJ Brodinski's *Master Section*, featuring the outlandish vocals of Zelooperz. In the video, inspired by the nightclub scenes in Hype Williams debut feature *Belly*, with a twist of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, a tweaked-out, earphone-wearing Mr Big descends from the VIP section to join the party, stop everyone in his tracks, and command his security to bring him a terrified partner to indulge his gruesome predilection.

It's customary for a BUG show to have a contribution from Radiohead, or another musical project featuring Thom Yorke, and Video Nasties is no exception. In this case, the video for Radiohead's *There There*, from 2003, the monster is Yorke himself, who enters a forest populated by animated

woodland creatures, with evil intent. This was the first video by Bristol-based stop-motion animator Chris Hopewell, who was influenced by the work of Victorian photography of anthropomorphised furry animals, Czech animator Jan Svankmajer, and classic 70s children's TV show *Bagpuss*, to create a memorably gripping version of a Grimm fairy tale. Hopewell has gone on to work with the band more recently, putting *The Wicker Man* through the lens of classic kids TV for *Burn The Witch*.

Arguably our most ludicrous monster of this evening's presentation pops up in French director Emile Sornin's video for The Shoes' *1960s Horror*, featuring Dominic Lord – a 100ft tall chicken, who flattens a major metropolis in the time-honoured fashion of a well-known Japanese radioactive dinosaur. The rampant Chicken-zilla is actually taking sweet revenge upon Mankind with good reason – the creature is the result of the ever-more industrialised and corrupted food processing of poultry. The real grisly horror here is what happens before we get to the fun stuff with Chicken-zilla.

Philadelphia rapper Tierra Whack has become renowned for her idiosyncratic take on the world – certainly in 2018's *Whack's World*, a collection of one-minute songs accompanied by an eccentric short film. She followed that with a distinctive comic horror for *Unemployed*, directed by Cat Solen, in which she plays a hard-pressed chef, striking terror into the potato community. But it turns out that the real monsters are Tierra's employers...

Finally, our second Chris Cunningham video of the evening is a bona fide classic. In fact it is the video that brought Cunningham out of relative obscurity and began a period of extraordinarily prolific creativity, a canon of work including some of the best music videos ever made. It's also where his collaboration started with Richard E James, aka Aphex Twin. We are talking about *Come to Daddy* of course – here being shown in the full Director's Cut version. It is worth mentioning that before this, Cunningham had made several videos; but apart from his first for Autechre (made on spec) in 1995, none had really drawn heavily upon his background as both comic book artist and creature FX maker – he had worked on the original *Judge Dredd* movie, and for Stanley Kubrick, in the development of the movie *A.I.* But the impact of *Come to Daddy* – made in 1997 on a budget of around £20,000 – came from its incredibly powerful set-pieces, achieved primarily through a combination of excellent casting with brilliantly effective prosthetics. Cunningham has also asserted that *Come to Daddy* is essentially a comedy – with a happy ending, as a whole family of monsters gather together. Ultimately it is pretty much perfect.

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**BUG title sequence**

*Director:* Miland Suman

**The Horrors – Sheena Is a Parasite**

*Dir:* Chris Cunningham

*Prod co:* Black Dog Films

*Rec co:* Polydor

UK 2006

**Grizzly Bear – Ready Able**

*Dir:* Allison Schulnik

*Prod co:* n/a

*Rec co:* Warp

US 2009

**Antony & The Johnsons – Cut the World**

*Dir:* Nabil Elderkin

*Prod co:* Academy Films

*Rec co:* Secretly Canadian, Rebis Music

US/UK 2012

**Nicolas Godin – Widerstehe Doch der Sünde**

*Dir:* The Sacred Egg

*Prod co:* Riff Raff Films

*Rec co:* Because

UK/France 2015

**The Hickey Underworld – Blonde Fire**

*Dir:* Joe Vanhoutteghem

*Prod co:* Czar Film

Belgium 2009

**The Yeah Yeah Yeahs – Y Control**

*Dir:* Spike Jonze

*Prod co:* Satellite Films

*Rec co:* RCA Records

US 2004

**Brodinski ft Zelooperz – Master Section**

*Dir:* Matilda Finn

*Prod co:* Stink Films

*Rec co:* Parlophone, Owsla

UK/France 2020

**Radiohead – There There**

*Dir:* Chris Hopewell

*Prod co:* Collision Films

*Rec co:* Parlophone

UK 2003

**The Shoes ft Dominic Lord – 1960s Horror**

*Dir:* Emile Sornin

*Prod co:* Division

*Rec co:* Labelgum

France 2016

**Tierra Whack – Unemployed**

*Dir:* Cat Solen

*Prod co:* Artery Industries

*Rec co:* Interscope

US 2019

**Aphex Twin – Come to Daddy**

*Dir:* Chris Cunningham

*Prod co:* Black Dog Films

*Rec co:* Warp

UK 1997



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