

FADER



the bright lights

Now that MTV has almost entirely relinquished its own monopoly as a source for music videos (peace)—and as countless outlets on the Internet continue to pick up the slack (peace)—the medium has become a profitable playground for everyone from art stars to underground vets to no-name budget-reliable directors. In what's become a FADER film tradition, we picked a handful of our favorite videos and talked to the directors about how they turned simple ideas into three-minute scorepieces with little more than a song, a camera and some (BAM) real bright ideas.

Brooklyn's Empire Skate Center, where the Rapture's "Get Myself Into It" was filmed.



Ben Dickinson

The Rapture, "Get Myself Into It"

In his videos for the Juan Maclean and Supersystem, Brooklyn resident and NYU film grad **Ben Dickinson** used male prostitutes and clubgoers spewing pöxiated Tron vomit to paint a cleverly impressionistic view of city living, at turns seedy, thrilling and absurd. His clip for the Rapture's "Get Myself Into It" keeps that aesthetic but gives it a bigger, more crowd-pleasing feel—urban angst reimagined as throwback teen comedy on rollerskates, complete with prom tuxedos and bassist Mattie Safer looking more Ferris Bueller-y than ever.

For the Rapture video, were you just imagining a general "roller rink" concept, or did you know you wanted to use the Empire Skate Center in Brooklyn? I had been to Empire several times and I love that place, it's just a great vibe. I couldn't believe this little subculture was tucked away in the middle of nowhere in Prospect Heights. After I went the first time I was going back once a week, just because I was really into it. I had already written a couple of treatments for the Rapture, but then I was like, How great would it be to do a roller skating video, but really good—to show roller skating as I'd seen at Empire, which is not some sort of silly '70s thing. Starting out we had like a hundred people outside, a good amount of them were Rapture fans and various hipsters that came from Williamsburg and stuff like that, and the other half were regulars from Empire or they came out from Skate 22 in Jersey.

How detailed do your treatments tend to be for each video? I wrote the Juan Maclean video almost like a short story, kind of in the voice of [Kurt Vonnegut's] *Gilgore Trout*. I had pretty elaborate visual references—Juan sent out this email that was really brief and written in a colloquial style with all kinds of photos. He had Kraftwerk and Frankie Goes to Hollywood, some bizarre gay porn stuff. He already had an image system in his mind, it almost felt like I was sort of refining that. With the Rapture, I was already friendly with them. I think I wrote the "Get Myself Into It" treatment when I was drunk, actually.

Did you have a particular look in mind for "Get Myself Into It" as far as the film stock and visuals? We had a prismatic lens that was near the floor for some of the shots where the floor is kind of in the frame. The director of photography also used these slower lenses that hadn't been used in probably 25 years, which is why you have those circular auras in some of the shots, the halos. It was a great solution—when you go to Empire it's really, really dark, and I didn't know how I would capture the feeling of the darkness. It's way too dark, but I wanted it to be dark. I really wanted to get a lot of nice reflective light off of the dark skin, too. Matt [Safer] and I were watching *City of God* for some references, and some independent films from the Caribbean and Jamaica where they are always shooting with fluorescent lights. Hype Williams did this movie called *Bally* that I really love. So much of that film is just dark, especially the first half. I thought he just had such big balls, how dark he was willing to make it. I'm not really comparing myself to Hype Williams though.



PROMO

The Rapture/Supersystem ON THIS MONTH'S DVD

Two takes on nostalgia

**Gotta Get Myself Into It (Mercury)/
White Light/White Light (Touch &
Go)**

Director: Ben Dickinson

The Rapture's Gotta Get Myself Into It is undoubtedly one of the standout records of the year, and the excellent video by Ben Dickinson is getting well deserved heavy music TV coverage. With a healthy disregard for "cool", it is set in a roller disco, where in a performance plus-story, one Rapture bandmember becomes smitten by one of the girl skaters, then challenges her boyfriend to a Saturday Night Fever-style roller-skate face-off.

Dickinson - a member of the affiliated band of directors known as Waverly Films, which also includes Jon Watts - shot it at the Empire Roller Rink in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, a place with a built-in retro quality that he exploits superbly for the benefit of the song.

"A good number of the skaters have been there since the Seventies or earlier - it's part of

their daily lives - and the younger generation takes it just as seriously," he explains. "In that sense the video isn't retro. I didn't have to work to make it authentic because it already was." Dickinson went to Empire three times a week for three weeks getting to know the regulars, scouting the best skaters and casting them. "What you see on film is them expressing themselves honestly. I just filmed it."

The big challenge was to shoot the video in a single day. "Apart from the band performance and the narrative beats," admits Dickinson, "I couldn't direct the skaters to be better than they already are, so my job was to make them feel comfortable and get out of the way. It was difficult, but it was the right thing to do."

And this methodology has also extended to the director's new video. Like Gotta Get Myself Into It, Supersystem's White Light/White Light taps into the nostalgic side of popular culture, and then makes it work for the



Nostalgia: The Rapture (left) visit the roller disco, while Supersystem (right) take inspiration from Space Invaders imagery

modern age. It's an unusual video game fantasy, and once more Dickinson shows you do not actually need glossy production values to create an engrossing, action-packed story.

"The concept didn't really evolve so much as it announced itself to me the minute I heard the track," he says. "The lyrics made me think of physics, how everything is made of energy. Time lapse photography and light trails seemed a good way to visually explore that, and I thought of vector graphics as an electronic extension of light and energy."

Consequently White Light/White Light is a fast-paced stream of scenes that show the band in a subway, on streets, and

in a club, besieged by various light forms, coming from their eyes, falling from the atmosphere, and outlining their instruments. With every action infused with luminous emissions and contours there is a throwback to early computer game Space Invaders, as the familiar missile and spaceship shapes fill the screen.

"I guess the song sort of sounded like a video game soundtrack to me," says Dickinson, "and it sounded sort of paranoid. I thought what if you re-imagined parrying as a game? That's what it is really, hipsters playing a game with their bodies rather than a joystick. So I mixed all those elements up in a bucket."



The vector graphics and the "Space Invaders" images (called fireflies) were created by Ron Winter, who designed and animated all of the clip.

The post production was hardly a cakewalk, but where there's a will there's a way - and Ben Dickinson is on a roll. "The last eight days of the post process was three of us sitting in his tiny room in Williamsburg during the hottest week of the summer with a tiny air conditioning unit and four computers running. I was editing, Ian was rotoscoping, and Ron was designing. During most of that week we were just sitting there sweating profusely, chain smoking, drinking coffee, and laughing a lot. It was great, actually." **Sharon Steinbach**