



Emmy-winning Designer Chris Do Goes Steampunk for The Raveonettes

How Do Imagined the Band's "Heart of Stone"

By Melissa Tinklepaugh

September 21, 2010 Source: Film & Video

Asked to create a music-video companion to The Raveonettes song "Heart of Stone," designer Chris Do conceived a Victorian, steampunk-influenced world that could illustrate the lyrical idea. The resulting clip won Do, founder of motion graphics design studio Blind, a Creative Arts Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation last month.



"I think Sharin [Foo] of the The Raveonettes wanted us to create what she described as a great companion to the song," Do said. "And she didn't want to put any other parameters on it beside that. So that's a heavy kind of responsibility, to have someone trust you that much and tell you, 'Do what you do best.'"

Do, who is credited with multiple roles in directing, designing, composing and editing the video, worked with his team at Blind to tell a story about a man who ignores the pain caused by the end of his romantic relationship. Dressed in Victorian garb, he travels through a gloomy industrial world that mirrors his own serious, mechanical and emotionless behavior. The video cuts to the man's interior organs, which are steampunk pipes and valves. Pent-up emotions clog the cream-colored pipes and pollute the interior world, suffocating the woman caretaker who works to repair the man's deteriorating innards.

The company's name, Blind, relates to Do's personal design philosophy. "We look at each individual project as a unique set of problems and issues. We don't come to it with a predesigned aesthetic," he said. "We try to vary the looks as much as possible. Something could be very dark or sinister looking to something very neat and simple."

The team at Blind wrote three or four treatments and turned to The Raveonettes to pick a direction. “And it just took off from there,” Do said. “It was nice because I can create lots of different things. I needed some feedback from them because it could go down many different directions.”



Working with his team, Do dissected “Heart of Stone’s” lyrics. “I think in the lyrics, he or she is speaking out to their ex-lover, saying, you know, I have a heart of stone, it’s because of you. I started to think about how tragic that was.” Then Do asked his designers to find imagery that fit the concept. They came back with hundreds of images.

Intern Lynn Cho showed Do a series of images produced for the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, in which tiny musicians play instruments inside the human body -- a cellist bowing a human hair, a drummer beating on a human heart. “I was inspired by these images and wrote a story about a female character futilely trying to repair the emotional turmoil that the protagonist internalizes,” Do said.

Do responds to images “like that game you play as a kid when you look at a piece of art or a piece of photography, and you start to imagine the story, what the characters are doing the moment before and what they’re going to do after that,” he said. “By having all these visual images in front of me, I started to pare down and a story started evolving from that. It’s a very organic process, not one where you know how it begins and how it ends.”

Surrealism, Do’s favorite art genre, and the mechanical feel of steampunk inspired Do’s vision. “I’ve been heavily influenced by [Magritte’s] work and the idea of looking for your subconscious, tapping into ideas your subconscious isn’t even aware of, trying to speak the truth,” Do said. “And steampunk is a super-cool aesthetic that I just love.”



Do used matte paintings by LA-based artist Bruno Werneck to help create the video's look, Autodesk Maya for most of the modeling and animation, and Adobe After Effects for compositing. Blind's designers finished the video in 720p.

While trying to put as much artistry into the process as possible, Do found challenges in the time crunch and limited budget. "We knew that [in] certain scenes we couldn't afford, from a time point of view, to

texture-map and light everything and to detail every moment,” Do said. “Lawrence Wyatt, one of our 2D artists, figured out the process that we used to achieve the look that was mostly in shading and rendering, as opposed to heavy-duty compositing.”

The development of new software, Do believes, leads to the creation of new art, allowing designers to do new things. For “Heart of Stone,” Do turned to software that was new to him, Anzovin Studio’s The Face Machine and The Setup Machine, to rig characters. “We tried to do most of the rigging by hand. It just took way too long,” Do said. “One of my character animators tried to use a rigger program for the first time, and he told me it was superior to the rigger he built by hand.”

In spite of deadline pressure, Do prefers learning new ways to create and trying new things. Blind had previously created The Raveonettes’ “Black and White” video for a Gap campaign, bringing in shadow puppet animators, a first for Do.

Do’s own variety-seeking style meshed with The Raveonettes’ style of contrasting a sweet sound with sometimes violent lyrics. The Danish band plays with opposing themes, like light and dark or good and evil, in lyrics and melodies. Directing two Raveonette videos, Do sought ways to bring those forces together.

The band’s music is “kind of a juxtaposition of rock and roll, where on the surface you listen to the melody and riffs. It’s kind of very saccharine and has a certain politeness to it,” Do said. “If you peel back the layers to see what else is there to it, there’s a lot more beneath the surface. And I enjoy that.”

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