

keith schofield

From viral skirmishes with 80s porn to the

random surrealism of his latest video for Charlotte Gainsbourg, Keith Schofield,

the man behind some of the most talked-about promos and

virals of recent years, is no stranger to controversy.

But don't let anyone say

he hasn't paid his dues, he tells David Knight.





Axion: Flatheads



School, and began making videos for New York-area bands in 2000 and 2001. "I wasn't into cool music then," he claims. "It was all a leftover from watching MTV when Spike Jonze and Gondry were on all the time." But after relocating to Los Angeles following graduation he began to get noticed. With his video for The Notwist's *One With the Freaks* - the story of an adventurous jellyfish who floats around LA - Schofield picked up a *New Directors* feature in this very publication.

That was in 2004, and shortly afterwards he met video director Ruben Fleischer (more recently director of hit movie *Zombieland*). "I edited one of Ruben's low-budget videos, and then he threw my first two real gigs my way." One of those was for LA hip-hop outfit *One Block Radius*, an on-street performance transformed by a back-and-forward scratching effect - an early example of his knack of capturing that ineffable 'why did no one think of that before?' quality.

Other low-budget videos followed, for the likes of DJ Format and Death Cab For Cutie, while he launched a parallel commercials career with the American offshoot of Belgian production company Caviar Films - and was successfully sold back to the Belgian market on the back of his low-budget videos. Since his first ad for Belgian bank Axion, Schofield has periodically returned to Belgium to direct more spots, but it was the controversial 2007 video for Wintergreen's *Can't Sit Still* that gave critical impetus to his video directing career. The video was a science lesson on DIY drug-making, in which the band extract the chemicals from household items to create (and imbibe) 'Egyptian meth', 'Hillbilly Quaaludes' and hallucinogens. "It led to a screening at [London music video creativity night] BUG, which led to

me doing the Supergrass video," he summarises.

For Supergrass' *Bad Blood* the camera locks on specific points during the band's performance in a pub - from the spool of a reel-to-reel tape to Gaz Coombes' hand on a guitar fretboard, a trick achieved by shooting on 35mm and transferring to HD, then tracking the action in post. The video ended up winning best rock video at the 2008 UK Music Video Awards, but Schofield says, "It wasn't until Supergrass that I started having a competitive [promo directing] career."

But then things took off. He signed to Streetgang Films for videos in the US and UK, and made his instantly-acclaimed monster viral hit for The BPA's *Toe Jam*, not long followed by his Diesel viral *SFW XXX* - made with The Viral Factory in London. Schofield reveals that *Toe Jam* was the first time he was inspired by a photo from his folder of funny found photos, and *SFW XXX* was inspired by the web-trend of porn images being painted over to make them 'Safe for Work'.

That was the breakthrough, but it was followed by a slight backlash. Following the *Toe Jam* video, Schofield made three more in very quick succession, for CSS, Ladyhawke and The Ting Tings. "I was almost getting single-bid," he recalls, "but I should've had a higher level of quality control. I did way too much stuff."

In fact, the CSS video for *Move* is a highly entertaining riff on false perspective photography. The Ting Tings video for *Be the One*, involving the band merging into and emerging from rear screen projections, is also engaging, but it required reshoots due to the technical problems it posed - and his Ladyhawke video never saw the light of day. ↻



Charlotte Gainsbourg and Beck: Heaven Can Wait



Fruit Roll Ups: Nature



The BPA ft David Byrne and Dizzee Rascal: Toe Jam



"Every scene looks like it's taken from another video — so you can't fast-forward through it."

keith Schofield is really going places - if the furore surrounding his new video for Charlotte Gainsbourg is anything to go by.

The clip for Gainsbourg's *Heaven Can Wait* - also featuring Beck - is a gobsmacking array of weird non-sequiturs: a have-a-go hero in an attempted mugging, Goth youngsters running on a beach, a man in a *SpongeBob* costume being tackled by police, a man chased by a flying axe, a skateboard propped up on hamburgers. These vignettes - and many more - could have been taken from completely different videos or movies.

Heaven Can Wait was inspired by Schofield's archive of 'found photos' - randomly discovered amateur photographs that have odd, unexplainable features and no context. There are websites dedicated to them but it turns out that a couple of the 'found photos' re-created for the video were actually original works by a professional artist.

This led to the kind of web-based vitriol that can occur when a video director is considered important enough to be brought down a peg or two. Amid much positive comment, Schofield came under sustained fire on music video industry-favoured blog videos.antville.org for his alleged plagiarism - and was roundly characterised as the 'big shot' director, riding roughshod over the 'little guys'. Which, all in all, seems a little unfair on the guy.

It is true that Schofield's work over the past couple of years has been synonymous with comic originality, in the grand tradition of the big names of music video creativity - the likes of Jonze, Gondry and Dougal Wilson. Schofield's work radiates a visual wit that incorporates strong technical

ideas and entertaining concepts. These include a couple of works known far and wide: his acclaimed video for The BPA's *Toe Jam*, where young people happily disrobe in a 70s-ish setting and make patterns with the black bars that appear to cover their modesty; and his Diesel viral *SFW XXX*, which transforms 80s pornography by painting more innocent activities over it.

"I'd like to think that every ad person saw those videos," he says, on the phone from Los Angeles. "And I also want to point out that there's more than porn on the reel." Indeed. There is also his award-winning, technically ingenious video for Supergrass' *Bad Blood*; his controversial drug-making video for US indie band Wintergreen; and another recent work for the Justice remix of Lenny Kravitz's *Let Love Rule*, which beautifully re-imagines the end-credit sequence of an 80s movie and adds a unique comic twist. Schofield's video treatments, available to view on his website, reveal an excellent and enthusiastic communicator of often complicated ideas. But for all that, his progress could hardly be described as either smooth or meteoric. He is an American director who got his first proper break in Europe and arguably enjoys a higher profile in Belgium than in the US. Someone of his talent probably deserves rather greater success than he has enjoyed thus far. As he says: "When I visualize the characterisation [of a 'big' director] I imagine myself sitting at a big desk with a cigar, wielding power over all the music video world. But that's not quite how it is."

He grew up in the Chicago suburb of Northbrook - the spiritual home of the 80s teen movie. "I went to the same high school that [writer-director] John Hughes went to and filmed a lot of scenes at," he explains. Having made films on Video 8 all through high school he progressed to NYU Film



Diesel: *SFW XXX*



Supergrass: *Bad Blood*



"The internet can be a critical place, but the worst thing that can happen to a video is that nobody talks about it."

"After that, everything cooled off and went back to normal," he says. Indeed 2009 was largely about busily advancing his commercials career. He has now directed spots for McDonald's, Virgin Mobile, and, most distinctively, off-the-wall comedic ads for Jennie-O frozen turkeys and basketball franchise the Minnesota Timberwolves. He has also worked with The Viral Factory in London again, on spots for Skype and Samsung. When shots talks to him, Schofield is just about to shoot an ad for a new Sony camera phone, and he reveals that this was an example of a straight conflict between doing an ad or a music video - and choosing the ad. "The video was going to be too challenging - and I've made that mistake before." But this music video fan is not about to give up on them, when clearly he has a lot more to give. "If I'm not working on a cool ad it's imperative that I get writing a good video idea," he insists. So after making a video for New York rapper Mims early in the year he has ended 2009 with those two new videos for Justice and Lenny Kravitz, and Charlotte Gainsbourg.

He says the concept for the 'end credits' in Let Love Rule, where we witness the final seconds of an 80s movie with a very Michael J Fox-type lead realising he's sharing screen time with an endless scroll of credits, was something he has wanted to do for a while. "And my first thought when I heard the song was that it sounded like the title song at the end of some cheesy 80s movie," he says.

When the location for the video changed from Paris to LA that sealed it, and Schofield's only regret was that he could not secure a star name for the lead role. "Elijah Wood really wanted to do it, and it was almost going to happen. The lead guy was great at doing the clichéd stuff and physical comedy -

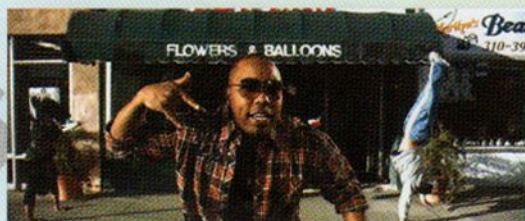
but Elijah Wood would have given us a genuine pop culture moment." For the Charlotte Gainsbourg video he has created yet another 'how was that not done before?' idea. "It's a video where nothing is repeated, where every scene looks like it's taken from another video - so you can't fast-forward through it!" He shot the video over three days at a mansion in Granada Hills in LA, in order to get 50 random scenes, and he says, "I hope no one thinks it's pretentious." He also defended himself over the online controversy that brewed around his inspiration for the video. "The bottom line is I assumed that the work I was referencing was not the work of an artist - and I never checked," he tells shots. "I've since reached out to him - William Hundley - and have included his name in the credits."

In fact, Schofield is more concerned by the fact that the record company did their own edit of the video, undermining the concept. "The idea is that scenes are never repeated, and they have thrown that idea out of the window. It's random - OK you can say that about my version, but at least that was deliberate!"

But as for the web criticism, he can put that into perspective: it's all part of the business, and ultimately, it all helps. "The internet can be a critical place, but the worst thing that can happen to a video is that nobody talks about it. And in fact, I'm happy how it turned out, and the positive response has been overwhelming. I'm in no way an overnight sensation of any sort," he finishes, "it's been a long, slow build up - about five, six years in the making. So whatever one thinks of where I'm at now, no one can complain that I didn't put in the time to get here." ☺



Lenny Kravitz (Justice Remix): Let Love Rule



Mims: Move (If You Wanna)

KEITH SCHOFIELD

REPRESENTED BY:

Music videos streetgangfilms.com

Commercials caviarcontent.com

KEY WORK:

- Diesel: SFW XXX
- Supergrass: Bad Blood
- The BPA ft David Byrne and Dizze Rascal: Toe Jam
- Lenny Kravitz (Justice Remix): Let Love Rule
- Charlotte Gainsbourg & Beck: Heaven Can Wait

View on shots 119 online and on DVD

- The Notwit: One with the Freaks (shots 83)
- Goose: British Made (shots 98)

View on shots.net



is Uriah, Saxon's kid brother, nineteen. The Amazon parrot is perched on the padded shoulder of his thrift-store sport coat. The bird seems fixated on grooming the boy's ears with his beak.

"I'm sorry, I cannot," Saxon says. He seems to be playing the role of a genius with no sense of humor, who is expected to participate in a joke. "I've already told him differently. I've already contradicted that story."

"It has been published in other areas that Mangello Tipperary was a local leader who was like a second father to all of us," Rabinovitch points out, sounding a bit like Leonard Nimoy as Spock. Working on the outdoor kitchen today, he had about him the green-branch will of a pioneer as we mixed mud and manure (from a neighbor's stallion) and wood chips to construct a beehive-shaped, wood-burning clay oven. (When the first fire is lit, the internal wood chips will incinerate, leaving chambers that enhance insulation.) You'd want these guys with you if you were ever on *Lost*. Faced with the scary, hell-in-a-handbasket world as envisioned by the likes of Osama and Al Gore, their perspective seems to be something like: Let the oldsters sweat the apocalypse. We can take care of ourselves.

"Yes, Mangello Tipperary fathered us all," deadpans Saxon.

"Isaiah!" This is Meara O'Reilly, twenty-seven. Sturdy and natural with a musical laugh, her silky double braids tied up like Princess Leia's, she is new to Trout Gulch—Saxon may or may not have stalked her at a show like an infatuated groupie when she was singing with the now-defunct band Feathers. O'Reilly studied psychoacoustics at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. She performs with a large square piece of fabricated metal (called a Chladni plate) and a box of salt. When she sings different notes, the amplified sound waves cause the salt to form patterns on the metal. It's really pretty cool. On the *EMAX* project, she will be working with sonification issues.

"You have to watch out what you tell the [continued on page 172]"

KEITH SCHOFIELD DIRECTOR

THE MOST TRANSGRESSIVE VIDEO MAKER WORKING TODAY HAS A MESSAGE: COVER UP YOUR PRIVATES AND PASS THE PENTOCYCLINE

WE'RE IN ONE of those Persian-nightmare minimansions in the Valley. The gorilla in the bathtub and the cardboard robot on the stairs are getting ready while a dozen extras curl up in sleeping bags on a king-sized bed. French songstress Charlotte Gainsbourg strikes a languorous pose on the bed and practices her lip sync. Sitting in a nearby chaise, Beck—lighter than air and translucent, as if composed of scattered hydrogen atoms—rehearses the playback on a cowboy guitar. "The concept for the video is maximum disorder," says director Keith Schofield, stopping by the pool to instruct a few of the extras on the art of the dead man's float, which doesn't come easily to Marlboro-lunged hipsters.

In his short career, Schofield—thirty, thinning hair, a veganesque physique, wearing black-framed glasses and a plaid cowboy shirt—has emerged as a grand master of Webby viral edge, a mocking virtuoso of anything you might dare call a moral sensibility. His videos are kinsmen of "The Aristocrats" joke, which is to say, they have a creosote-black humor about them—so transgressive, they're funny.

For Diesel's "SFW XXX," in honor of the company's thirtieth anniversary, Schofield overlaid vintage hardcore-porn scenes with Hanna-Barbera-like animation of

harmonicas, bananas, and maracas, which turned the most banal sex shots into something truly obscene. In Wintergreen's "Can't Sit Still," the band gleefully cooks up trash-can drugs like meth and pentocyclene (aka "hill-billy quaaludes") as detailed instructions flash across the screen: "Get a bag of Fresh Step kitty litter... separate the blue tablets... add 25 drops of iodine..."

The videos—and now a growing number of commercials for companies like Target, McDonald's, and Virgin Mobile—all share a must-see, must-share, digitally manipulated contagiousness that Schofield thinks of as the "visual hook." Break-dancers fly in slow motion, cell-phone photos come to life, the ground literally shifts in acts of video fluxes. The only constant is their disorientation, their indeterminacy, and, most of all, their screw-you-if-you-can't-take-a-joke humor.

Back at the mansion, Schofield is ready for the cameras to roll, but Beck needs a pick so he can play a guitar that no one will hear. The gorilla happens to have one.

—DAN NEIL

Schofield, master of transgressive nonsense, with Beck. "If people see a meaning in the video, begin to read a narrative, I'll have to go back and recut."





Beck and Charlotte Gainsbourg in Schofield's video for "Heaven Can Wait"

IMAGES FOR THE POST-VIDEO AGE

DIRECTOR KEITH SCHOFIELD MAKES VIRAL VIDEO STARS

BY DREW TEWKSBURY

The shoot is like any other. The craft-services table offers stale bread, a plastic knife juts out from an open peanut butter jar, and the red light of a coffee machine glows. More than 100 extras sit on foldout chairs in the parking lot, all clad in athletic gear from this morning's K-Swiss commercial shoot. Earlier they had run a minimarathon down Hollywood Boulevard past Mann's Chinese Theatre. Now they wait. The 5:30 a.m. call time ensured the streets would be as vacant as the extras' bored stares. One man hangs his head and sighs, "What's the director's deal?"

A few blocks away, that director, Keith Schofield, looks at a monitor, and politely asks the runners to assemble in front of the camera. There's not much to see, but a mother and her adolescent son, lost tourists from Florida, stand behind Schofield and watch anyway.

Then through the crowd of extras — some checking their iPhones and others flirting — something happens. "Oh, my gosh, look at that!" the mom exclaims, as a man wearing purple tights and a silver cape strolls through the extras; then a masked Mexican wrestler, a *luchador* naked at the waist with action figure-size muscles, follows him. The kid's mouth is open, the mom is smiling.

"Wait 'til later," Schofield says nonchalantly. "That's when the tricycles, scooters and fireworks come out."

It's not all tricycles and fireworks for the 30-year-old director, but when it comes to non sequiturs, WTFs and moments of wonder, few

filmmakers do it better than Schofield. He has directed commercials for A-list clients like McDonald's, Virgin Mobile and, most infamously, Diesel, for whom he created the successful viral video "SFW XXX" in 2008, featuring comically amateurish animations obfuscating the nasty action of vintage porn. Think ice cream cones, horseback rides and pinball machines drawn with MS Paintbrush over videos suitable only for late-night Dutch television.

His commercial success, he says, comes from his music-video background. Although music is heard through video games and commercials, interactive iPhone apps and ringtones, the music video has returned as a powerful medium in the post-MTV media climate. And Schofield's videos are tailored to the ADD, concept-starved audience of the Internet era.

His roster is a litany of established and rising artists: the Ting Tings, Death Cab for Cutie, Fatboy Slim, Justice, Beck and Charlotte Gainsbourg, CSS, Mims and Supergrass. In 2008, he won best rock video at the *U.K. Music Video Awards*, for his guitar-smashing, gravity-defying treatment for Supergrass' "Bad Blood." Schofield was chosen to speak at the Flux Screening Series at the Hammer Museum in 2008, where he presented a naked-dance-party video (censored with creatively placed black boxes) for Fatboy Slim's Brighton Port Authority, featuring Dizzy Rascal and David Byrne. He led a PowerPoint presentation of weird Internet photos. His dry sense of humor and simple commentary confused some of the audience as he displayed an astronaut with pancakes for a head, and a skateboard resting on cheeseburgers. A year later, Schofield returned to the Hammer's film series to debut his Gainsbourg video for the Beck-produced "Heaven Can Wait," featuring

more than 50 live-action reenactments of his bizarre image collection, pancake head and all. He was joined by the visionary director Michel Gondry.

But before Schofield's awards, speeches and magazine covers, there was *120 Minutes*. As a kid in Chicago, he used to tape his favorite video off the MTV alt-rock video show. Schofield grew up in the Golden Age of videos: the 1990s, when video budgets were fat and the spots were more than merely a commercial for a band, or an album. These videos were in fact a short film, a visual poem. It could cover up an unremarkable band or highlight an underrated one.

"I still remember that Spike Jonze video for Wax, the one with the guy running in on fire in slow motion," Schofield says, "and it was totally unforgettable, even though the band was. But then there's Weezer, who before that Buddy Holly video, they were just the guys with the 'Sweater Song.'"

In the works of Jonze and Gondry, Schofield recognized the freedom that comes with collaborations. Videos were the haiku of film;

FOR WINTERGREEN'S SECOND VIDEO, "CAN'T SIT STILL," SCHOFIELD PUSHED THE DRUG THEME BEYOND ITS LIMIT, FEATURING A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR MAKING CRYSTAL METH, WHICH THE BAND CONCOCTS AND INGESTS.

they were stripped-down, three-minute bursts of strong concepts. At NYU Film School at the turn of the millennium, he began directing music videos on the cheap; when he moved to L.A., his reputation for microbudget, lo-fi videos with high concepts helped him to connect with other artists.

But midway through the 2000s, the music video died as its main avenue, MTV, shifted from clips into scripted and reality shows. Some cable channels attempted to pick up

the slack, but few would ever have the cultural clout MTV had wielded in the 1990s. Internet video was shoddy at best, and any videos worth watching were diminished by slow connections. But as high-speed Internet became nearly ubiquitous on college campuses, the viral video was born. And Schofield was at its forefront.

In 2006, L.A. band Wintergreen approached him for a video — but they had no budget. Schofield's solution? He recalls thinking, "We're not going to be on MTV, we don't have any money, so let's do a video that will appeal to video-game nerds online." He capitalized on an Internet urban legend about Atari's 1982 *E.T.* video-game flop, and a New Mexico landfill where unused cartridges were buried. With a simple story of Wintergreen setting out on a quest for the cartridges, Schofield released the video on his Web site, presenting a DIY, nerdy narrative that earned him nearly a million online hits, before YouTube was even launched.

Appealing to Web audiences gave Schofield a new philosophy for creating videos in the post-video age. "I wanted to make videos that could never be shown on MTV, using nudity, brand names, drugs, whatever."

For Wintergreen's second video, "Can't Sit Still," Schofield pushed the drug theme beyond its limit, featuring a how-to guide for making crystal meth, which the band concocts and ingests. The recipes, made from kitty litter, bleach and other household ingredients, were entirely fictional, but the video stirred up serious controversy.

"We didn't get much reaction at first when we put it on YouTube, but when we titled it 'How to Make Meth,' the reaction was crazy. It was featured on a newscast about online meth recipes — even though it was fake."

Wintergreen singer/guitarist Drew Mottinger witnessed the effects immediately. "Some fans loved it. Some fans hated it. Most people believed it. Some parent coalition started a blog trying to get it banned. My parents definitely hated it. I still get e-mails from kids claiming they made the drugs and that they worked."

Now, as countless video sites populate the Internet, the computer is the main dispensary of music, and of the images that go along with it. Schofield helped to resuscitate music videos and adapt their content for an increasingly digital age. But for Schofield, it was no big deal.

"I'd hate for people to pretentiously think that there's some meaning behind it. I mean, it's not rocket science." ■

The Approval Matrix: Week of December 7, 2009

Our deliberately oversimplified guide to who falls where on our taste hierarchies.

Published Nov 29, 2009

Add a Comment

HIGHBROW

Atlantic Yards opponents lose lawsuit as court rules that **buildings at the intersection of three thriving neighborhoods are "blighted" and can be demolished.**



Kepler, Philip Glass's new opera at BAM, actually contains less information about Johannes Kepler than Kepler's Wikipedia page.

Natural light in the renovated Columbus Circle subway station.



Down-and-out-in-L.A. realism classic *The Exiles* (1961) is now out on DVD.



From a *Wall Street Journal* article on **French fast food**: "Chefs say their use of fresh, local ingredients and attention to detail sets their quick lunches apart." Yeah, right, France.



The video for Beck and Charlotte Gainsbourg's duet, "**Heaven Can Wait.**"

The Bronx Museum is celebrating the **Grand Concourse's 100th year** with an exhibit comparing it to the Champs-Élysées.



The Times' editorial board calls for Goldman Sachs to help pay down the public debt.

The amazing clip of Tim Burton as the creepiest dinner guest ever, in 1979's *Doctor of Doom*, at MoMA.

Fiji's military dictatorship has apparently just **banned unapproved television broadcasts.**

Albert Maysles has released a "**signature eyewear collection.**"



H1N1-vaccine shortages are affecting mall Santas, who need to get inoculated before working with kids.



Devendra Banhart's quivering vocals with Little Joy at Town Hall.



The announcement for a reading of *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* at the Bluestockings Bookstore: "Ms. Austen will be making her first in-store appearance since her death in 1817."



In-flight magazine *easyJet Traveller* publishes a **fashion spread shot at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial.**



Excessive appearances on NBC's "Green Week" by **Al Gore.**

DESPICABLE

BRILLIANT



College-football honchos **hire Ari Fleischer** to defend the Bowl Championship Series.



The possibility that, thanks to expanded nominations, *New Moon* will be **nominated for a Best Picture Oscar.**

Oprah... noooooooooooooo...



The Mets get **new pin-striped uniforms** for home games.



Brit band **the Joy Formidable.**

Joseph Gordon-Levitt's refreshing exuberance and hidden talent for slapstick on *SNL*.



Octomom says she might want more kids—and, thus, a **less-catchy numerical prefix.**



The **Fake MTA Twitter feed** disappoints with a great premise. "Overhead announcements now 20 percent more inaudible." Eh.

Nicole, the genuinely smart, stunning (and petite!) winner of *America's Next Top Model: Cycle 13*.



The hilarious and terrifying **Gavin McInnes video short** in which he slides naked, like *really* naked.



It is possible to purchase a **five-pound, 12,600-calorie gummy bear.**



The number of **hot-tub-related ER visits** has nearly tripled in the last two decades. Keep it safe while you're pimpin', y'all.



Adam Lambert's **heinous fellatio pantomime** at the AMAs ...



... Prompts **Good Morning America** to cancel his performance. Come on, he wasn't gonna do it again.

Seasonal rediscovery of the **Elf Yourself** website. Check it out, then laugh and laugh and laugh. Delightful!



Cuban authorities announced that they are offering **free penis implants** to men whose "sexual suffering does not respond positively to traditional treatments."

LOWBROW



Interview: Keith Schofield

- 082 -

Interview: Keith Schofield

- 082 -

Interview: Keith Schofield

- 083 -

MILTON GLASER
DAN TOBIN SMITH
TOM DIXON
TOM GAULD
KEITH SCHOFIELD
MAISIE BROADHEAD
PAUL SMITH

With the rise in popularity of Youtube, Vimeo, and online video content, the role of the classic moving image director has naturally altered. Keith Schofield is one of a new breed of digital-savvy filmmakers who have instinctively learnt how to respect and relate to their new, virtual audience. Since he first picked up a video camera as a boy through his time at film school in New York, Keith has always been determined to maintain surprise and humour in all he does. Whether reappropriating pornographic footage for his now infamous risqué viral for Diesel, or making the end credits of a film solid and tangible, Keith's tongue remains firmly in his cheek. We caught up with him to discuss how he measures the success of his own work and find out why he's so suited to making viral videos.

Interview: Keith Schofield

- 083 -

Interview: Keith Schofield

- 084 -

Hi Keith, your films are predominantly seen online - do you see yourself as part of a new generation of filmmakers that are having their work dictated by the internet? Or are you not doing anything particularly different from older directors? No, I think it is a slightly different generation. There are a bunch of guys that started out in the mid-2000s, just before YouTube, who have been able to start a career by having their work seen online. Five years before that you pretty much had to start with music television as there wasn't really any other platform to have it seen. I was really inspired by a director called Ruben Fleischer - he directed *Zombieland* and now he's a top name in Hollywood. I was always following people I admired and trying to see as much work as I could - he was a big influence and also the first director who created a blog, back in 2001. Before that they weren't even called blogs. He was the first guy who was describing what the industry was like and what went on during a shoot - really showing stuff I was interested in. He was also the first guy to start streaming his films online which was really helpful for me because I didn't know how to write a treatment but could see how he did his. I learned a lot from his model so that's what I wanted to emulate. I liked the idea of putting all my work online, sharing as much I could about the process including the treatments. Just putting your hands up and saying, "This is how I did it, here's my pitch, and here's how I did the camera tricks." Just a couple of years earlier everything was secret and there was a real secrecy about intellectual property which is still apparent, but I just thought, "What can go wrong?" Do you not see a downside of being so open? I don't really, but the upside is that you build a creative group of fans and followers that are going to watch any of your new work right away. When you say it like that it just seems to make sense to put it out there... Yeah, the whole idea that the director is kind of this untouchable auteur just isn't true. If it was you'd never have any insight into the thought process. I always liked showing how I did my work. That feels like quite a modern way of looking at it - would you say it's a natural progression? Yeah and I think a lot of the business models and ideas are left over from the late 90s. It was a different period when you had million dollar videos and a low budget was about \$200,000. I think it worked back then but today you've got to be open and share stuff. It's healthy to do the Twittering and be active - I think that can launch a career now and it's where you can get your work seen for the first time. Do you find yourself just pitching ideas that you think will be popular online, is that what companies are buying now? It's a good question, I'm not as concerned with the amount of hits the videos get on YouTube. The hits are important at one point but I pay more attention to the reviews, feedback and the critical reaction, or people contacting me saying they like it. That's how I judge how successful a video is to some extent. Obviously hits are great too but they're not the only thing... Do you think the brands and companies you work for approach it in the same way? You could have 100 people



watch a video online, do you think the companies are reading their reviews or just looking at how many people have clicked on it? I think it all depends. YouTube comments can obviously be misleading. I think another way to see if a music video has done well - that perhaps sounds a little crass - is if it shows up on advertising websites and blogs. If the advertising world likes it then I've usually done something right. If I'm happy with something, feel it represents me as a director and has come out as I wanted it, then it's a success. I'm not jealous of a mainstream video that gets a thousand times more hits than mine - I look at it more in terms of what I was able to deliver. So when did you first pick up a camera? In eighth grade my parents got a video camera so I started making videos with my friends just because it was fun. That led to film school and there I started to do my first, proper music videos. I think I did my first video in 2000 and then I took off for a couple of years, came back and started making them again. Being able to actually get budget took a long time - I must have made something like ten videos before I started having any kind of reputation in the music video world. Have you always incorporated humour in your work? I think it's what I always wanted to do. Like so many others my two favourite directors when I was growing up were Spike Jonze and Michel Gondry. Gondry was always playful but combined that with some really cool visual tricks and Jonze was more punk rock, ripping up pop culture. I always loved the idea of trying to make a music video just for online because there was the chance to push the boundaries a little. I could do something *Prerated*, or something that used brands that I could never show on TV. That was really exciting - I was trying to be a prankster who came up with the most obnoxious or offensive thing possible. We've read that you've recommended the rebellious approach to film students before. Do you think that kind of weights the importance of the work a little bit the wrong way? Should it not be about worthy content? Obviously it has to be good. I can only give advice to people from my point of view - if they don't want to emulate a career like mine, then don't take the advice. If somebody wants to be Chris Cunningham my advice is not going to be good for them but if you want to be more like Spike Jonze you have to make videos that really stand out. The great thing about that kind of director is that you know you can go and shoot something on DV - you don't have to have any money to do something outrageous and there's something really fun about that. I feel like aspiring directors too often want to make their work look expensive, which is a great goal, but I'd rather see a really great low budget video that is really funny and has a great idea behind it than a \$10,000 video that looks like it cost \$40,000 but is pretty boring. Do you think you need a certain mentality to make a good viral? I imagine you were always that kid who played pranks on his friends? Yeah, this sounds pretty nerdy but I just spend a ton of time online. I look at tons of blogs, virals and absorb enough stuff to get an idea of what's out there, what works and



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Copycat

what doesn't. I don't have a flawless success rate but I did this one about Atari cartridges which was pretty simple and it did well because video game stuff is very popular online. If you do a music video based around a video game, especially a copyrighted one or a well-known product, it'll be really loved. That's how I pitched it and it did end up doing really well.

What with virals, video games and spending so much time online, do you ever get sick of being stuck behind a screen? Well I do have a post-production background. It can get kind of dull and annoying after a while but some of that process can be fun. I would probably say I'm more of a post-guy than an on-set guy.

Does the feel-good factor from your films transcend onto your sets, or is it really tense? The shoots have obviously become better as I've got older and more experienced, and commercial sets usually have a pretty good atmosphere because there's always enough money and you rarely ever plan. It always helps to create a nice atmosphere if everyone's getting paid! Music videos have always been generally good but there are always panic moments. The video for BPA with all the naked people was actually a really fun set. I was very nervous about that one because what would've happened if people weren't having fun or there was no energy? It could have been really creepy but it was actually really fun, nudity aside! It was just fun because the vibe was good and people were having fun with it.

I guess your job is made easier by high-profile or feel-good songs - how do you deal with a bad track? Do you just say no to them? The only stuff I really have a problem with are things that are a bit dull or depressing. If it's not a great song, but has some energy to it, then there's always something to work with. I've done a couple of videos where I didn't think the songs were that good but there was something joyous and fun in them so it was OK. The track can't be a snoozer, you know?

In that respect, do you think you're genre specific? Well, the Charlotte Gainsborough one was a little bit different stylistically but I guess if it's an unknown artist and it's a really depressing song it doesn't have a lot of potential to go viral. I could be wrong though, unless maybe it's something completely ironic.

You mentioned Gondry and Jonze as influences, do you see yourself going on to make feature films like they have? Maybe you'd be suited to writing a sitcom? Ha, that's great! I'd love to but these things take time. After a certain amount of years you end up feeling more comfortable with your work and hopefully something in the next couple of years will gain some traction.

Do you have any plans aside from that? I just did a K-Swiss commercial and it's a bit like a shoe commercial version of the Charlotte Gainsborough video I did. I haven't seen the most recent cut and I think it's been toned down a little bit but that's what the idea is based around. We had a bunch of goofy costumes, horse heads and all that, so we'll see how it turns out. We shot six days on that one and there was some really great looking footage. I also just did a spot for Sony and one with The Viral Factory for Skype, which is a really neat spot but it's been



delayed endlessly so I hope it comes out eventually. I'm also still pitching on stuff - a few different things here and there.

When you pitch on work and you don't get the job, what's usually the feedback? I'll be honest, I've been lucky because I've probably written 150 treatments in my life and the worst 50 have never been taken on. Often I do find it hard and early in my career I think I was specially lucky because I pitched a lot of videos that I didn't get to make and they weren't necessarily good ideas - I was just pitching because I was desperate to do work. I don't always pitch insanely crazy ideas, sometimes the ideas just aren't there. I have problems with bands or songs I really love because it feels like I could never do it justice. I would hate for it to come out as a great song, by a great band with a stupid treatment. When I don't have much of an opinion on a band or artist it's usually a little easier.

Do you have a bank of treatments already built up in your head that you're ready just to push into the right brief? Yeah, that's definitely true. I'm sure every director will probably say this, but lots of the ideas for my recent videos were thought up a while ago, or were pitched for something else and repurposed. I came up with the idea for the Justice video while writing a different treatment completely but I didn't pitch it to them because it didn't feel quite right. So yeah, I hate to say it, but very rarely do you hear a song and just come up with a brilliant new idea based exactly on that song.

Are there any artists you'd really like to work with? I would love to work with Ghostface Killah as he's one of my favourite rappers. He's just one of those guys that is so musically amazing that the videos can't compete with the music. Oh Copy are another one of those bands I really like. Radiohead would be fun and Muse are one of those bands that I really like but I find them really challenging because their songs are anthems, you know? How could you make a video for them for less than a million dollars and do their tracks justice?

Finally, to put you on the spot, what would you like to make a feature film about? That's tough. I don't want to tell you something specific because they're little pieces of intellectual property, but let's just say a teen sex comedy.

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November, 2008

\$7.00

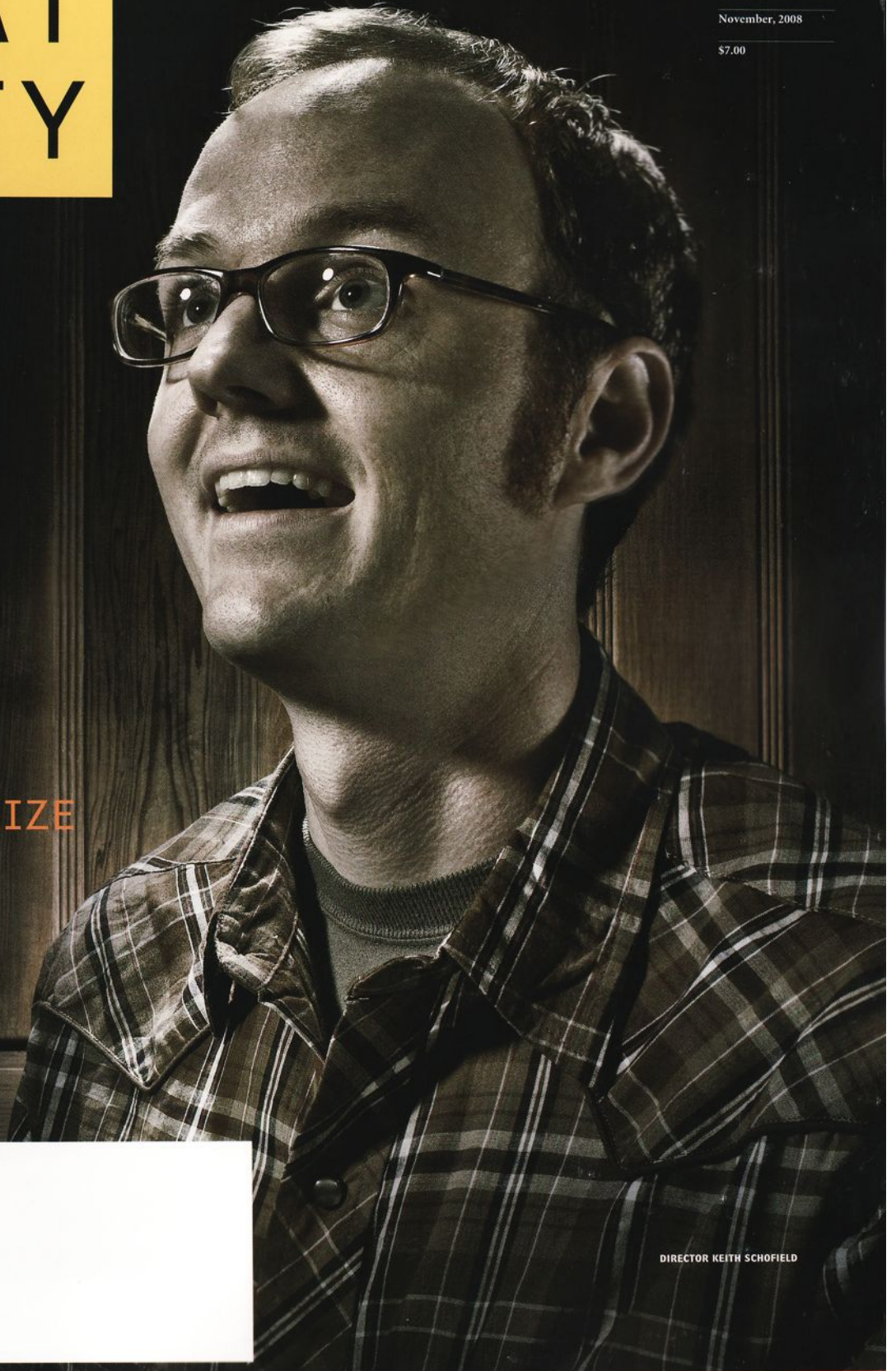
EYES ON THE PRIZE

DIRECTORS TO WATCH 2008

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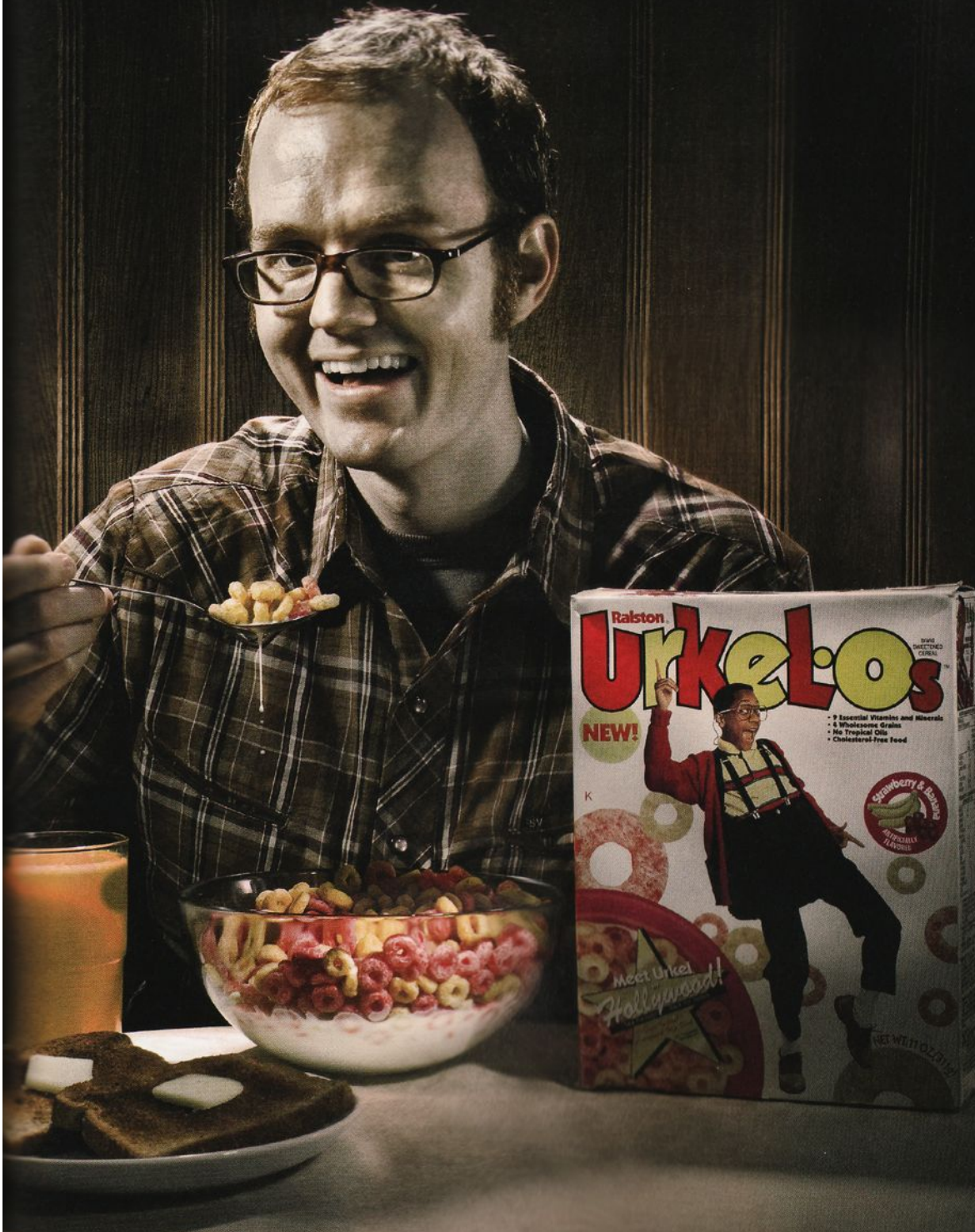


Directors To Watch 2008

ROBOTS, DEATH-DEFYING STUNTS, VIRALS, DIGITAL WIZARDRY AND OF COURSE, SOME VERY COMPELLING STORY-TELLING. YOU'LL FIND ALL THIS AND MORE ON THE REELS OF THE DIRECTORS WE PROUDLY FEATURE IN THIS YEAR'S REPORT. ALSO, WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GO FROM BEING A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN QUANTITY TO BECOMING ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST WANTED? WE WENT STRAIGHT TO SOME OF ADVERTISING'S MOST RESPECTED PRODUCING AND DIRECTING PROS TO FIND OUT THE KEYS TO BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MICHAEL
KENNEDY





Keith Schofield **Caviar**

Many have made the argument that there's nothing more successful on the interweb than nudity and porn. Keith Schofield would be hard-pressed to disagree.

The Chicago-born, NYU film school-bred director has used both to his advantage for a creative transition from music videos to commercials. Consider Diesel's "SFW XXX" web film touting the brand's 30th anniversary party. Schofield and The Viral Factory decided to superimpose innocently animated images atop a musical montage of vintage porn, rendering the footage questionably SFW. The video became Creativity Online's most watched film—ever.

"Sometimes simple ideas just work," Schofield says. "You can't use porn on TV, so why not online? Maybe it seems cheap and easy but there are ideas out there that haven't been done. The Diesel thing started out as something that might be a fun little project and turned into this big web thing. So you never know how it might turn out, in terms of how audiences will respond."

The now L.A.-based director also gained international attention recently for the video "Toejam" for The BPA (Fatboy Slim), with David Byrne and Dizze Rascal, that featured artfully blacked out bits of dancing naked folk, and was included in the 2008 Saatchi & Saatchi New Director's Showcase (and recently parodied on South Park).

While Schofield has done videos for Death Cab for Cutie, Supergrass, CSS and others, his visual "stunts" have translated easily to spots as well. His commercial work includes Jennie-O's "Wrestler," where we meet a woman who has her hands full with a particularly slippery uncooked turkey, and a pair of spots for Belgacom, "Bee" and "Grandfather," that cleverly walk a collection of characters through narrated tales about internet use. "I'd say my style's very concept- and idea-driven, which in music videos can be identified as gimmicky," he says. "But I see it as just finding the idea or trick that will get people to like it enough to forward to friends. I'm not a visual, lens and telecine director, so for me it's all about the premise and the story." (Jeff Beer)