

WAKE UP AND SMELL THE MUSIC

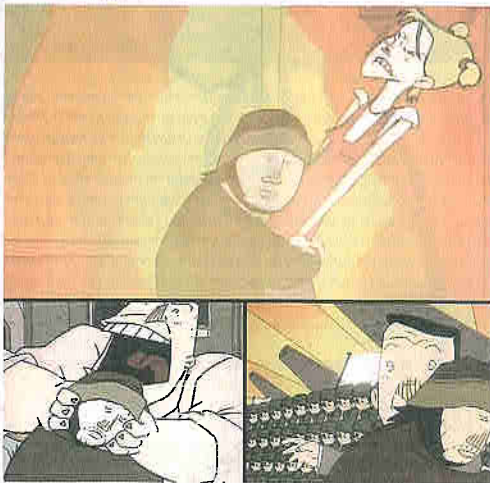
The Commercials Music Report

Monkmus keeps it positive

By Melanie Shortman

Animator and director Monkmus had never heard the music of Badly Drawn Boy before he bid to direct a music video for the British songwriter's song "Year of the Rat," but he became a big fan after buying a few albums and winning the job. "I've got *The Hour of Bewilderbeast* in heavy rotation in the studio right now," said Monkmus, who is repped by Toronto's Soft Citizen. About a month ago, "Year of the Rat," from the latest Badly Drawn Boy album, was on repeat as a team of animators put together the four-minute vid in a super-speedy six weeks, using traditional pencil animation combined with Flash and other computer-generated techniques. The song—sure to pluck at a few heartstrings with orchestral backing and earnest vocals from Badly Drawn Boy and a children's choir—is made even more touching without dipping into cheesy territory by the concept and execution of the piece, which Monkmus describes as "[Badly Drawn Boy] brings world peace through hugging." It starts when the singer wakes in his apartment and comforts an angry friend with a hug that she first resists. She bursts into flames and struggles to get free until a musical crescendo, when she collapses in his arms and sheds a single tear. Then the scope of the hugs widens, as one to a burly stranger starts a chain reaction on the street, and Badly Drawn Boy travels to hug members of British Parliament and warring world leaders. After a busy day of solving the world's problems, he heads home, where the last hug of the day goes to his dog.

Unlike a lot of music videos, the visuals don't directly display what's happening in the song's lyrics, but the connection between them is made through a series of powerful musical moments. According to the Toronto-



Scenes from Badly Drawn Boy's video "Year of the Rat"

based animator, who has directed videos for Canadian DJ Kid Koala and worked on MTV's *Celebrity Death Match*, it was one of the most challenging parts of production but also the most crucial for the drama. "It took a lot of work to get the concept to match the music beat for beat." Though he describes his style as quirky and occasionally macabre but never the same, Monkmus says that this video is most representative of his drawing style. "I've finally gotten comfortable with the way I draw," he says, explaining that he's not devoted to one technique and has experimented a lot in the past.

Another secret to avoid the overly-sentimental is the presence of quick, quirky visuals, such as a shot of a car smashing into an elderly woman and destroying itself while she remains unharmed. "Animation can be very structured once you storyboard it, and I think it makes the process more fun if we can throw some curveballs in there," says Monkmus. "A lot of animation can come in tight, and I like to make it more lively for myself, for the people I work with and for the viewers." ■

