

Speaker:  
Justin Ratcliffe  
(Standard British accent)

**Come abbiamo visto non è affatto andata così, ma nel 1979 uscì una canzone che decretava la fine della radio. La canzone divenne famosissima; furono gli interpreti (i Buggles) a sparire nel nulla.**

# Video Killed The Radio Star

by Fergal Kavanagh

When television became popular in the 1950s, it was thought that this would spell<sup>1</sup> the end for radio, but it survived this and many subsequent innovations. Yet in 1979 The Buggles released the huge hit<sup>2</sup> "Video Killed The Radio Star." Co-written, sung and produced by studio wizard<sup>3</sup> Trevor Horn, the singer reminisces about lying in bed at night in 1952 (although Horn would then have been just three years old!), listening to what was then known as a "wireless." Despite his tender years<sup>4</sup>, Horn was profoundly affected by what he heard.

Much has been written about the influence of the music video, but in the second verse Horn talks about how radio's influence has been ignored – the "second symphony" refers to the new wave<sup>5</sup> of more electronic music, using *technology* to rewrite old ideas. (Ironically, the electronic synthesiser features heavily on the track<sup>6</sup>, played by Hans Zimmer, who is now a film score composer<sup>7</sup>). Some day in the future the singer will shamefully<sup>8</sup> tell a new generation that video was the cause of the death of radio. The singer goes to an old radio studio to listen to old tapes on *playback*, and remembers the jingles, the short radio signature tunes<sup>9</sup> – just like the "oo-a-oh" of the song. Radio was *the first and the last*, music started with radio, and will end with its demise<sup>10</sup>. As he reflects, or looks around him as he

drives his car, he realises technology has come so far that it is impossible to *rewind*, or turn things back, and return to the golden age.

The song concludes with him surrendering to the new technology of the VTR (Video Tape Recorder – now, nearly 30 years later, it is itself almost obsolete!), and recognising the star on the screen as a one-time *radio star*. "Video Killed The Radio Star" was also inspired by the science fiction story "The Sound Sweep"<sup>11</sup> by J.G. Ballard. The song took three long months to record and went to number one in 16 different countries. MTV, no doubt aware<sup>12</sup> of the irony, chose it as their one millionth video to be screened<sup>13</sup>. Trevor Horn became a career-reviving producer, working with Rod Stewart, Paul McCartney, Grace Jones and Tina Turner, amongst others. He was also responsible for the success of Frankie Goes To Hollywood, a band who embraced the music video.



A detail from the cover of "Video Killed." Trevor Horn is on the left.

*This recording features a brief excerpt from the song "Video Killed the Radio Star" (by Trevor Horn, Geoff Downes and Bruce Woolley, Island Records, 1979)*



## Glossary

- 1 **spell** - significare.
- 2 **huge hit** - enorme successo.
- 3 **wizard** - mago.
- 4 **tender years** - giovane età.
- 5 **wave** - ondata.
- 6 **features heavily on the track** - ha un ruolo importante nella canzone.
- 7 **film score composer** - compositore di colonne sonore per il cinema.
- 8 **shamefully** - spudoratamente.
- 9 **signature tunes** - ritornelli pubblicitari.
- 10 **demise** - fine.
- 11 **The Sound Sweep** - titolo italiano, *Lo spazzasuoni*.
- 12 **aware** - consapevole.
- 13 **to be screened** - da trasmettere.

## English Through Music...

Fergal Kavanagh, the author of this article, runs the website [www.tuneintoenglish.com](http://www.tuneintoenglish.com). The Students' Area features activities for learning English through pop music.

