

MAN OF VISION

After topping the charts with 10cc, Kevin Godley became one of the fathers of the modern pop video. The Stoke-on-Trent art-school graduate tells us how he created music's most memorable clips

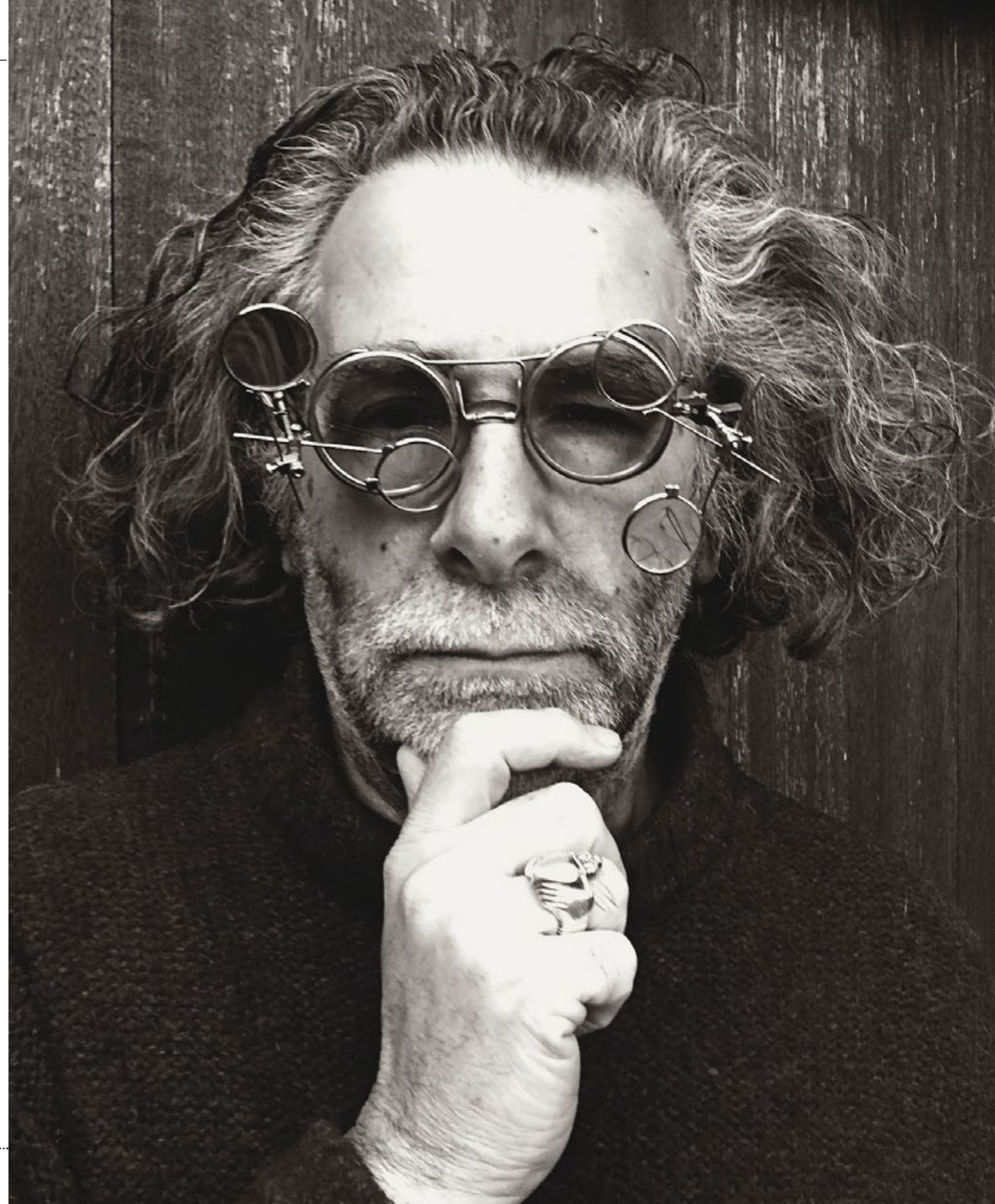
In the late Sixties, Kevin Godley spent three years training to be a graphic designer at Stoke-on-Trent College of Art, now merged into Staffordshire University. He recalls: "There wasn't a notion back then that people could work in lots of different media, like music and design. I don't think the word polymath was used very much."

It's difficult to come up with a better word for someone who has mastered so many creative fields. As one quarter of the Manchester group 10cc, he wrote, sang and played on some of the most inventive pop of the Seventies.

But at the peak of the band's success, after two UK number-ones, he and Lol Creme left to start their own musical

partnership. As well as having hits of their own – and inventing an eccentric guitar effect called the Gizmotron – Godley and Creme soon moved into video production. They became two of the most sought-after directors of the 1980s, making ground-breaking films for artists including Duran Duran, The Police and Frankie Goes to Hollywood.

Godley split from his working partner in 1989 and continued to direct videos for major acts such as U2, Bryan Adams, Katie Melua and Snow Patrol. He has recently published an autobiography, *Spacecake*, and developed Youdio – a music platform for the iPad that allows artists to collaborate in both sound and vision.



Horizon: What did you make of your time at art college? In your book, you said that you learned a little about graphic design and a lot about yourself.

Kevin Godley: I suppose what it did more than anything was instil an appreciation of all things visual, and a certain freedom of expression. The revolution was just beginning, and I felt that we were part of something special that was going on across the country. The most exciting moment was not to do with the course at all; it was the day the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album came out. Every department in the college was playing a different track at the same time and everyone was poring over the album cover.

It was a cultural high. I sort of aspired to all that because it was so free, whereas I think the course was about giving you the basic tools to become a very specific type of professional: an illustrator or a graphic designer. But I was in a band while I was there, and much more enamoured with that than about learning anything.

H: When you had so much musical success with 10cc, did you feel you had to put your visual art to one side?

KG: That wasn't by design, particularly. I was open to whatever was going on, but I think every kid of our age wanted to be in a group at that time. We followed that path and did well. But it's not actually that different from design – you're doing the same things, but with sound.

It was only at the beginning of the 1980s, or slightly before, that we were driven backwards to rediscover our visual roots when we got involved in music video. They had lain there dormant for quite a while, but obviously hadn't gone away.



All made up: Visage's *Fade to Grey* video

H: Today, music videos are everywhere, and there are degree courses that teach the art. But when you made your first video [for the Godley and Creme song *An Englishman in New York*], there was much less out there to draw upon. Did you instinctively know what to do?

KG: Well, whenever Orson Welles was asked how he found the confidence to do something he hadn't done before, he'd say: "Ignorance – sheer ignorance." To a great degree, that's what it was about. We were never afraid of jumping into this new medium, because we were driven by enthusiasm and what we thought we could do.

H: Your first video for another artist – *Fade to Grey* by Visage – became a hit. How did that kick off your commercial career as videographers?

KG: We did that for £5,000, and £2,500 went to the make-up guy. But it was the beginning of a movement: people like Duran Duran and Toyah Willcox started coming to us, and before we knew it, we were doing more videos than music. Once MTV came to the fore, it changed everything. It meant that there was essentially a global art gallery for videographers, or whatever we called ourselves, to show our work in.



SELECT VIDEOGRAPHY

WITH LOL CREME

Godley & Creme – *An Englishman in New York* (1979); *Cry* (1985)

Visage – *Fade to Grey* (1981)

Herbie Hancock – *Rockit* (1983)

Duran Duran – *Girls on Film* (1981); *A View to a Kill* (1985)

Frankie Goes to Hollywood – *Two Tribes* (1984); *The Power of Love* (1984)

The Police – *Every Breath You Take* (1983); *Wrapped Around Your Finger* (1983)

SOLO

U2 – *Even Better than the Real Thing* (1991); *Sweetest Thing* (1998)

Blur – *Girls and Boys* (1994)

The Beatles – *Real Love* (1996)

Snow Patrol – *Crack the Shutters* (2008)

Elbow – *Gentle Storm* (2016)



Freeze frame: Clockwise from top left, *Wrapped Around Your Finger*, *Two Tribes*, *Cry*, *Rockit* and *The Power of Love*

H: What are your favourites from the videos you produced in that era?

KG: We did three for the Police, which I think were really good. And we did two for Frankie Goes to Hollywood, my favourite being *The Power of Love*.

H: That video was a straight retelling of the nativity story, with Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus. Did people find that a startling idea for such a controversial band as Frankie?

KG: Yes – and that's why it worked, I think. Our goal was always to try to do something that was different from what was out there. One thing we tried to avoid at all costs was telling the story of the song. I hate that. If a guy's singing about meeting a girl and taking her to dinner, I want to picture in my mind a girl I want to meet. I don't want to see your girl. You've already told me about her; I don't want to see her as well. It's bad audio-visual practice.

What a music video should be is something that captures the spirit of the music. It doesn't need to tell the story of the music, and it doesn't necessarily have to show the band playing. But if it's a good music video, then whenever you hear the song, it should bring those visual images to mind.

H: One of the most innovative videos that you and Lol Creme produced was for another of your own songs, *Cry* – just a series of faces in close-up, merging into each other. How did that come about?

KG: The first idea was to film the skaters Torvill and Dean doing an ice-dance routine. They said they'd love to, but they were busy in Australia or somewhere. So we had to think of another idea very quickly. We felt the song was one that anybody could sing, so why not get a load of different people to sing it, and

do a visual mix between them? We then found that when you wipe between two faces, what you get is a non-existent person on the way from face A to face B. That was the magic of it. The technology was very simple. It was all analogue, and there was no such thing as morphing or anything.

H: What do you think of current music videos?

KG: Music is now far more of a commodity than it used to be, and a lot of the stuff looks like no one has really thought about it. There seems to be very little art out there. Of course, there are artists who transcend that rule consistently: people like Björk and Radiohead and so on.

The thing to me and to most of my contemporaries was that when you did something, you wanted it to stand out. But so much stuff that's made today, both musically and visually, seems to be afraid to do that. The music business is so much in a state of panic and change that it's playing safer and safer.

H: What advice would you give to today's aspiring film-makers and videographers?

KG: The landscape's so different today. But in the end, it's really all down to your idea. You have to feel confident that the idea you want to transmit to film is great: it's something that has to be seen on screen. If you put something up there that makes you say: "That's amazing," then there's a good chance that other people will feel the same way about it.

So you have to do something that makes people sit up – and then you need to ensure you're known for doing it and that you're sought out to do it. There's no point in doing what everybody else is doing. You probably wouldn't do it as well as them, anyway!



Camera ready

Staffordshire University offers a BA (Hons) in Advertising, Film and Music Video Production that supplies all the skills needed to thrive as a commercial film-maker. Award leader David Wheeler says: "We're all from the industry, and we know what it needs. We're totally career-focused. We have our students working with clients, developing a brief and then delivering it.

"As well as learning the craft of film-making, they develop their digital profile and learn about working as a freelancer and running an independent company. Crucially, they also go out and do work experience, and we help them network and develop professional links in the industry.

"When they graduate, they'll have a show-reel with the highlights of three years of film-making, they'll have experience and they'll have contacts. That's how they'll get work in a very competitive industry."