

Director File · Michel Gondry

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"I always hated pretentious commercials and videos before I started directing, not following the typical and saying that people are all fashion. It has always been my goal to make people feel alright when they watch my work."

Michel Gondry was born and raised in Versailles, France. Now in his early forties, his repertoire is astounding. He has scripted inspiring imagery in the form of commercials, music videos, shorts, feature films, and other media. He is partially credited with reviving the music-video format in the 1990's. He has been named a genius by too many people to count.

Michel Gondry's age is deceiving, however: his works are marked with a child-like explorative eye. Like old-school hip-hop Gondry's films are his playground. He tells stories about people and their lives while questioning our definitions of reality. His characters are honest and human and his worlds playfully reflect the interaction between the worlds we live in: nature, society, and the mind.



The turning point in his career was Björk. As the story goes, the Icelandic singer saw a few of his videos, including one of the videos for his former band, Oui Oui, and gave him a call. After some exchanging of ideas, they created her unforgettable solo debut, Human Behaviour.

That was 1993. Between then and now he has overall redefined the entire music video genre, rearranging classic film techniques in ingenious ways.

Since the release of Gondry's first feature film Human Nature and more successful second feature Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, which garnered him an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay, an award shared with Charlie Kaufman and Pierre Bismuth, Gondry produced the somewhat autobiographical film The Science of Sleep and the hip-hop concert documentary Dave Chappelle's Block Party. 2008 saw the release of his fifth feature film, Be Kind Rewind.

Besides creating feature film work for Partizan, Gondry has released a DVD collection of his multiple award-winning videos and ads through the Directors Label.

Here's some information from the man himself. The following text comes courtesy the mini-biography of Michel Gondry found in Björk's 1995 book Post. The interview was conducted by Sjón Sigurdsson.

"As a child I was interested in the possibilities that Lego and Meccano opened up, to create and invent new discoveries. My cousin and I used Meccano to build a prototype cartoon machine, quite similar to the zoetrope. It was a black circle with a gap to look at the little drawings. One of the stories we drew was about a journey in which you fractal zoom from a larger infinity to a smaller infinity. It started in space, with the planets, and then closed in on the Earth, then the continents, the countries and cities, the streets and the houses, down through a chimney, deep into the wood and right into the little atoms. Then it zoomed back out to the planets again. It was about a minute long, and we were 12 years old.

"These days my cousin is an architect, but he is still interested in inventions. He loves the idea of visual stereo and he's discovered a machine that draws in 3D. As you can imagine it's quite complicated. You draw into the air with a cursor that's connected to two small arms, and each arm holds a pen. If you trace over someone's face with the cursor, each pen draws it from a slightly different angle. You can see the portrait in stereo when you look at it with 3D glasses.

"As well as the cartoon machine, we used to make a lot of flip books. You know, the ones where you draw a sequence of pictures and flip them fast so they seem to move. We did one with a story about a man who goes to the toilet. This hand comes up out of the toilet and grabs his penis and then drags it through all the pipes.

"At the time we were very interested in horrific images, gore; when you're young there's stuff you have to shit out and you like horror. Later you progress to other things but it's important at that age.

"I was drawing from a very young age. I liked it. When people know you can draw they ask you to draw different things, so it's as though you're already part of society. If you're good at drawing you have a social role, however young you are. And you produce something tangible at the same time as being creative.

"Drawing also increases your status at school. I was the best draughtsman in my class, and I was able to teach the other boys how to draw naked women. It was a very simple picture made out of three lines and they soon picked it up.

"You could say I came from a musical family. My grandfather, Constant Martin, invented one of the first keyboards. It was a little synthesizer called a Clavioline and I think 100,000 were sold in the UK alone. You'd stick it next to the piano and if you wanted to play the trumpet it would imitate one, in a shitty but charming kind of a way. My grandfather had an electronic church organ shop, which also did very well. Soon all the old pipe organs were replaced by electronic ones.

"Then my father took over the shop. Of course my father was much more into pop culture. He started selling electric guitars and was very cool. But pretty soon he was bankrupt because he'd just give the instruments away. If a young hippie really wanted one of his guitars or keyboards, but couldn't afford it, my father would practically let them have it.

"My family was a little bit like Pop family -- you know, like the families you could see in progressive sex education books at the end of the Sixties. On the first page you'd see the whole family out in the woods in flared blue jeans and then you'd turn the page and they'd all be standing naked, to let you know how good they were feeling together.

"We listened a lot to pop music, rhythm and blues, and my father was a big Duke Ellington fan. So I never got into music as some sort of reaction to my parents. I didn't have to use music to throw shit back at my parents. They gave me lots of freedom in thinking. I just listened to the music I had always liked.

"Before he lost the shop my father gave me a drum kit and my brother a bass guitar. We formed a couple of bands together, that played punk rock...or maybe it was more like New Wave...and that's how I got into music. Then when I left Versailles to go to art college in Paris I formed the band Oui Oui with some friends from college."

