

● **Geri Halliwell: *It's Raining Men*** (Jake and Jim, 2001)

This video can be obtained as part of the special edition CD single and on the DVD, *Now That's What I Call Music* (EMI, 2001).

The video was released to coincide with the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, USA/FR/UK, 2001) in which the song appears and it is thematically linked to the single female's point of view. The song is a cover version of the minor late 1980s' hit by the Weather Girls, two black American singers, whose video literally featured men tumbling from the skies. An alternative version of Geri Halliwell's video was released featuring clips from the film, thus acting as a trailer as well as promoting the artist and CD release.

The single also marked a key point in Geri Halliwell's career as a solo artist following the break-up of the Spice Girls, with the video acting as a showcase for yet another new image, with new hairstyle and a slimmed-down physique, accompanied by lots of tabloid publicity about fitness regimes and diets.

The video takes the form of a song and dance routine, very like a typical sequence from a musical – indeed it draws heavily upon *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, USA, 1983) and a particular sequence involving an audition that goes wrong, a clear use of intertextuality. In the original film, Jennifer Beals plays a welder/erotic dancer whose dream is to take up ballet. Here, Geri clearly plays a similarly 'ordinary working girl' (although without the additional angle of a non-white girl trying to make it in a white-dominated classical art form) whose dance routine may disrupt the expectations of the judging panel. Later in the video, she does not seem particularly cut out for ballet as the contrast between popular culture and high art is emphasised in the sequence where she is dressed in a tutu and dropped by her partner.

The video starts with a fairly faithful recreation of the sequence from *Flashdance*, notably in the *mise en scène* of the room and judges, the diegetic traffic noise from outside and the sounds of Geri's footsteps, giving almost a minute of pre-song material, which is not unusual for a spectacular music video. Anticipation is created by a series of fragmented body shots – her feet, her torso, Geri from behind, posing an enigma as to the identity of this dancer – and from the silence as she is watched somewhat quizzically by the judges putting the record on (vinyl, again signifying a relationship with an earlier, pre-CD era and a direct reference to the film) and beginning her routine.

This sequence takes a comic turn as the slipping needle is echoed by her sprawl on the floor and the first close-up of her face lifting into the frame. The slightly pompous reaction of the central judge is particularly comic and there is immediate focus on Geri as the central character:

Can I start again?

In your own time, Miss Halliwell

As the music re-starts, the camera is positioned at the feet of the judges and this foot-level shot will recur, both in terms of Geri's dancing feet and the eventually tapping feet of the judges themselves. There is movement of the camera motivated by the dancing, which keeps the video pacey to match the song's tempo. The camera is often positioned in these initial sequences for over-the-shoulder shots, which include the judges, and for voyeuristic and objective shots of Geri's body which emphasise her fitness and sexual attractiveness (all very important for a star attempting to reconstruct and reposition herself in the music market). The system of looks continues with a shot of a fellow student framed by the doorway watching her dance and after a quick cut to her, a cut back to a comic reaction shot from him. This is multiplied soon after as the crowd gathers at the door and later in the outdoor sequence when onlookers are seen reacting to the dancers from upstairs windows.

(Incidentally, Jennifer Lopez's video for *I'm Glad* (David La Chapelle, 2002) faithfully recreates the sequence even more closely shooting in the same room and even using some of the actual costumes, with Lopez made up to look just like Beals. Critics made much of Lopez's hubris in attempting to imitate such an iconic sequence and noted that her dancing is heavily cut into smaller and more manageable parts than the original, bravura athletic performance.)

As Geri begins singing, the camera tilts up her body to echo the word 'rising' in the lyric and as the first verse builds, we see more fellow students watching her through the door, giving her 'star status' within the narrative. As she approaches the chorus, the judges are shown to have abandoned their austere looks (Geri having won them over) and started to tap their feet and as the chorus itself kicks in, the rest of the dancers burst into the room in carnivalesque style. The cutting between dancers and star serves to emphasise the colourful nature of some of the costumes, as fluorescent pink and yellow outfits are briefly captured in the centre of the frame, but where Geri is shown it is either in big facial close-up or in a torso shot emphasising her bare midriff.

Her kiss of the central judge violates the patriarchal order (she is in control) and sets off the second phase of the video as it immediately cuts to her in a second outfit, above the rest of the dancers, accompanied by one at the piano and again controlling their 'look' by her presence. This time she is dressed in yellow hotpants, emphasising her new physique (she was once labelled as 'the fat one' from the Spice Girls) and the shot is tightly framed to suggest a crowded party atmosphere. Immediately there is a cut to a third performance by Geri, this time in intimate close-up, direct to camera in slight soft focus wearing a red top.

'Barometer's getting low', she sings, which is followed by a camera tilt down the bodies of two intimate dancers before cutting back to Geri in yet another costume change – a blue sweat shirt with a basketball slogan (again emphasising her sporty image and the retro 1970s' dance/sportswear in the styling of the video). This is an exterior low-angle shot of her on a fire escape, reminiscent of New York tenements which starts the next lines – 'According to all sources, the street's the place to go' – again linking lyrics and visuals. The series of cuts here take us between four separate performances of the song each in a different outfit (close-up in red, low-angle in blue, medium long shot in black bikini, and a dynamic framing of the yellow hotpants with Geri beating a tambourine) in the space of a few seconds.

When the next chorus comes in, the performance has built to something of a peak and we cut away to another staple of the song-and-dance routine – rehearsal and training, as we see Geri doing aerobics and sit-ups (accompanied by a cameo appearance from her pet dog, well known from tabloid stories) and then running into the corridor of the academy to check her locker. This fulfils much the same function as the rehearsal room for a rock band, lending an air of authenticity (she has had to train to dance this well) as well as maintaining an intertextual flavour (we have seen scenes like this before in films) and comic value. As Geri in jogging outfit races down the corridor to class, we cut to fragments of a fifth costume, Geri the ballet dancer, contrasted immediately with Geri in a gymnastic crab position and Geri kickboxing.

This all serves to emphasise Geri's status as performer/star as well as her place in the community of the video as popular student leading the dance. Like a piper in a leather jacket – the biker's symbol of freedom and rebellion, also worn by the androgynous Beals in her welder guise – she leads the students out of the building into the street for the finale, the longer shot revealing her red shirt is emblazoned with the logo: 'Famous' written in a font which clearly refers to another film text *Fame* (itself both a film by Alan Parker (USA, 1980), and a spin-off TV show). It also refers to what the character might want (to be famous) and to what Geri already is (a celebrity, here reinventing herself). The image of Geri as a joyous, powerful figure in the centre of the frame, smiling and holding arms aloft or fist clenched in a gesture of power is contrasted with the awkward shots of her in the tutu tipping from the male dancer's arms (ballet is an art form with associations of high culture and restraint, but this song, and the preferred image of the star, constructs contrasting images of excess and free expression).

'Tall, blond, dark and lean, rough and tough and strong and mean', she sings; yet it is unclear if she is referring to an idealised male, as she is surrounded by men and women dancers, or herself, often framed solo as a powerful central figure. These lyrics made the original song popular in gay clubs, where it

became an anthem. The makers, and Geri herself (who has flirted with aspirations of being a gay icon), seem to be enjoying the high-camp value of the lyrics, the retro-styling and the performance.

As she emerges from the building into the street, arms triumphantly held high, everyone else tumbles out and dances around as if at a street party (or even a riot!). They stop the traffic by jumping on car bonnets, while their happy faces and those of the onlookers indicate they are having fun. The London taxi painted yellow evokes New York once again (but reminds us in a knowing way that this is not New York, but a bit of intertextual fun that both audience and filmmakers can share) and the tight framing suggests even more of a carnival atmosphere before a crane shot takes us up over the whole scene with Geri, head tilted back, singing to the heavens.

For the final verse, chromakey is used to place Geri against a stormy sky (in an allusion to the original *Weather Girls* and the lyrics) in slightly slow motion and an almost godlike pose. The shot is reminiscent of Madonna's *Ray of Light* video with which it is roughly contemporary, a reference point that will obviously be of some advantage to Geri Halliwell. It is intercut with flashes of Geri in previous scenes – on the stairwell, dancing by the piano, so that there is constant reinforcement of her as both *with* the community of dancers and as more important. The chromakey footage echoes the lyrics:

I feel stormy weather moving in, about to begin
Hear the thunder, don't lose your head
Rip off the roof and stay in bed.



From *It's Raining Men*

With its obvious connotations that staying in bed will be high on the agenda when men are about to rain from the sky, it is also used to prefigure the downpour of literal rain for the final sequence, where we return to the massive street dance in what could be night-time or perhaps just the result of the dark storm as the dancers fling up their arms at the key point in their (rain)dance for:

It's raining men, hallelujah!
It's raining men, amen!

Geri is again framed centrally, red shirt on, jacket off, getting 'absolutely soaking wet'. Towards the end are several shots of her seductively running her hands over her body as she becomes 'Miss Wet T-shirt', finally dancing in front of the throng as the camera cranes down, then in on her and moves up her body twice – storms and rain are frequently used as signifiers of sexual release in films and television. In cutaways from previous scenes she blows kisses and pouts coquettishly, presumably much of this for the male viewer (although her actual audience is predominantly female). In the final shots, she is seen looking directly into camera in close-up, going out of focus in slow motion in a clearly sexualised series of images.

It is no surprise that this re-make was considered suitable for the film of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as both the novel's eponymous heroine and Geri are, like Mother Nature in the song's lyrics, single women 'who did what (she) had to do' to get a man, by conquering the constraints of traditional female roles and getting into the market. By implication, if single women get over their inhibitions and lack of self-confidence, it will indeed be 'raining men'!

It would be easy to simply dismiss this video as perpetuating sexism. Looking at audience readings of this and other videos reveals that the complex polysemy of the form leads to quite contradictory responses. Even the casual viewer would see this video against the many contexts of this artist's career and (as the main creator of Girl Power we are invited to believe) Geri is clearly complicit in a playful game of gender representation and sexual politics, as indeed are most contemporary artists. Nevertheless, the wider implications of such representations may be more problematic in real social contexts and for women who have considerably less status and autonomy; such issues provoke hotly contested opinions and it is important that students are aware of such strands of debate.

As Lisa Lewis suggests:

While the charge of sexism importantly foregrounds issues of textual politics, it too frequently treats MTV as a monolithic textual system and sexism as a static mode of representation. (Lewis in Frith et al, 1993, p129)

In other words, there are many 'textual systems' at work in contemporary media products and many modes of representation that are far from 'static', but fluid and often contradictory.

Overall, this video makes use of the lyrics without representing them literally; it is thus a typical example of amplification. The pace of the video goes with the music, the editing quickening as a climax approaches. There is some attempt to illustrate the instrumentation, mainly confined to the pianist. Generically, it is typical of mainstream pop, particularly that with a female vocal lead, with the song-and-dance routine and the iconography of ordinary people (joggers, T-

shirts, sweat shirts). There is obsessive attention to close-ups of the artist, a series of costume changes and lots of body shots, which are very much about Geri repositioning her image in her solo career.

Voyeurism is implicit in these body shots, which almost fetishise particular body parts (especially the abdominal six-pack normally associated with male 'hard bodies') but which here could be viewed instead as the artist's narcissistic reward for her arguably obsessive investment in her physique, displayed here to invite our admiration. In addition, the placing of the camera, the skimpy outfits and the system of looks involving the judges all emphasise the spectacle of Geri's toned and tanned body, and there is clearly a significant element of exhibitionism in the artist's performance.

There are significant intertextual references to both *Flashdance* and *Fame* (the video even includes some *Fame* cast look-alikes) as well as to other music promos and an attempt to make quick cuts of a London street look like New York. The video mixes a narrative (particularly with the pre-song sequence) with performance to show off the star's talent and offers the pleasures of both Geri as character and Geri as an apparently authentic dancer.