

# Nine Red Lights for The Strokes

Article by Kevin G. Coss  
8/13/06

While it has been some time since the newest Strokes album, *First Impressions of Earth*, hit shelves, the band has not had a quiet moment to speak of. In traditional Strokes fashion Julian, Nick, Nikolai, Fabrizio, and Albert took to the roads touring immediately after it came out, sweeping through many countries and even hitting the Eagles Ball Room in Milwaukee for a spectacular concert. Around and after this tour, the band kept busy, updating their merchandise to correlate the design on Strokes shirts with the new album cover.

But it's the music videos in particular that I find are worthy of note right now. They follow no particular template or style (the videos seem as different from one another as Julian's radical mood swings can be), but nevertheless prove to be interesting and meaningful. Recently I watched their latest video of the song "You Only Live Once", and at the end I couldn't figure out whether to be impressed or depressed. The video is expertly made, with film cutting and music synchronizing and a variety of good angles. The band finds itself in an empty, cubical concrete room with several small holes in its walls, and without a word or explanation they begin the palm-muted intro of their album opener. Julian, ever the character, begins to dance almost clumsily; you'd criticize him for it if he weren't notorious for being Julian. Still, it's amusing to watch him shuffle to the beat as he waits for his lyrics to come. The entire band is clothed in plain white,

the only exception being a chessboard printed in black on Julian's back. As the band reaches the chorus, the holes in the wall begin to leak black liquid, and flooding ensues. I could find amusement and creativity in it, but it almost struck me as terribly depressing. Regardless, it was a very admirable video and surely one of the finer I've seen lately.

Comparable to "You Only Live Once" is the video for "Hard to Explain". While it features almost no footage of the band itself, the video excels at matching the song's progressively moving feel. To the four-bar musical bridge, for example, it synchronizes the take-off and landing gear withdrawal of an airplane. To the songs opening guitar line racecars speed off down the street. The video, especially in its first half, seems to emphasize the Strokes's love of vintage cars, clothes, behavior, and girls. Strangely, the initial, thrown-together feel of the clips changes to one of appropriateness as you begin to sense that they do, somehow, correlate. Even if you weren't to like the song, the video is well worth seeing for its impressive montage of camera angles and visuals.

"Someday", another favorite from the first album, is a more traditionally-oriented music video. Simply put, it shows the band off-stage, and is full of candid charm and wholesome good times with friends; those sorts of things. Most entertaining in this video is the game of Family Feud the Strokes enter as a team. Needless to say, it turns out to be an eclectic time at the game show, with Julian perhaps to blame. Also from *Is This It* is "Last Nite". While clearly their most popular song back in the days of their first record, the video seems to be their loosest effort, boiling down to the band playing on a stage with flashes of strange subliminal messaging hitting now and then. It's unlikely to be much as a music video alone, but if you enjoy the song it couldn't hurt to watch.

With the album *Room on Fire*, the Strokes seemed to introduce more serious degrees of effort into their videos. The first video released from the CD's tracks was "12:51", an abstract video of the band with a few surprises. Aboard a virtual tank drawn in poor 3D graphics, the group likely meant to pay tribute to the old arcade games of their childhood. As they play the song, lights decorate their instruments and their clothes, giving the video a soft, pulsing, electronic feel that complements the distortion on the lead guitar. The video is aesthetically enjoyable to watch as the glowing colors change, and, for those keeping track, marks in film the beginning of Julian's mic-stand abusing antics.

Also on *Room on Fire* was the hit song "Reptilia" which seemed to be the Strokes's most viscerously energetic song yet. Like "Last Nite", the video focuses entirely on them playing their instruments. Unlike it, however, it utilizes close ups, split screens, and camera movement intervals to convert the song's musical feel into visual momentum. This video reminds you that being a musician requires talent, and you see quite a bit of talent firsthand as the band tears through the music at a steadily fast tempo.

The last song to have a video shot from the Strokes's second CD was "The End Has No End". Featuring very little of the band playing, it focuses on the lives of several men at crucial points in their lives. It shows them at their high school proms, meeting girls who they later marry, graduating, being hired, being fired, having relationship troubles, having children. The video is eerie, especially as it progresses. If you pay special attention to the lighting and what's displayed on the T.V., it proves very disturbing. A good video for interpretation, but it has a negative, depressing feel about it regardless. I strongly recommend seeing this one, as it's what music

videos *should* be, and sports a catchy song.

Two videos remain in the Strokes arsenal, both from *First Impressions of Earth*. "Heart in a Cage" features a black and white video of the band playing in New York City, the Strokes's hometown, and is by far the most mysterious of the videos with regards to meaning. Jules finds himself singing against the pavement of the sidewalk as hundreds of people walk by, ignoring him. Albert and Nick, the guitarists, pull their riffs from on top of skyscrapers. \*Warning\* Guitar fanatics will cringe when watching, as a guitar is dropped from the roof of a skyscraper. The other video, made for the single "Juicebox", begins with an annoying radio voice introducing the band for a live on-air performance of the song, the name of which the radio voice gets wrong after introducing them as "Our musical guest, STROKE!". The man also mistakes the song for being titled "Juicyjuice" and tells them he expects their success in Europe to make them big in the U.S., even though they are an American band from NYC and very widely known. The video is, by far, their most "colorful", focusing on the darker side of city life. The clips include vomiting and same-sex make-out scenes. While not too overly, I wouldn't suggest it for the feint of heart.

With nine music videos, the Strokes cover a wide range of film techniques and video ideas. In addition to their music videos, they released an internet movie entitled *In Transit* which is shot by the band itself and shows their lives on tour in Europe. Some parts are slow and uneventful, as travel can often be, while other parts are quite amusing. Julian shares his crazy dream about a giant man, for example, which proves hilarious. At 37 minutes long, this is only worth the watch for Strokes fans, not those with mere curiosity towards them.

The Strokes are currently touring again, but afterwards will no doubt begin work in the studio on a fourth album. More creative, peculiar videos are much anticipated. As Jules sings himself in *First Impression*: "The light is red, the camera's on..." The Strokes have seen that red light nine times making music videos, and we can only expect they'll see it many more.

*Videos available on stream at*  
[www.thestrokes.com](http://www.thestrokes.com)