



Music videos:

Corinne Bailey Rae *Stop Where You Are*

(dir. Favourite Colour: Black, 2016)

Overview

- Corinne Bailey Rae is an English singer/songwriter. *Stop Where You Are* was a single release from her third album.
- The video for *Stop Where You Are* was directed by Favourite Colour: Black (aka Chris Turner) and preceded the album release. It was made available on YouTube at the beginning of April 2016, a month before the album was released.
- At the time of writing, the video has close to 920,000 views on YouTube.
- The video was shot at the Southbank Centre in London, a brutalist complex of buildings built in the 1950s which houses, amongst other institutions, the National Theatre.
- Bailey Rae told *The Independent*: "I was just trying to write a song about being optimistic, really, about grabbing opportunity where it falls." She was also quoted as saying, "...it's really about being in the moment and taking a moment to ritualise and celebrate your life now. That's become an important thing for me, recognising that 'now' is good, instead of waiting for everything to be perfect."
- The video juxtaposes Bailey Rae's positive, optimistic performance with the grey concrete of the Southbank Centre's brutalist architecture. While she sings, a variety of interlinking narratives are shown. Some depict moments of human kindness while others focus on conflict. A range of representations are depicted including race, gender, age, and social class. The video also touches on issues of stereotypes and countertypes.

Overview (continued)

- Discussing the video, Bailey Rae has said, “Sometimes we hold our happiness away from ourselves because we’re waiting for the perfect moment and we say, ‘When I get this job, I’ll be happy. When I lose this weight, I’ll be happy. When I get a partner, I’ll be happy’. So I really wanted to write this song, which is about being in the moment and being present, and stopping and ritualising the moment, celebrating it. I love the image of being in darkness and lighting a fire and saying, ‘Here we are together. This is life with all its pain, all its agony, all its beauty, all of its joy. This is it, this is what we have, this is the world that we’ve made!’”

This factsheet introduces *Stop Where You Are* as a case study to explore media language and media representations, including a consideration of the social and cultural contexts that influence how media language is used to construct representations. You are reminded that two music videos should be studied as part of the OCR A Level course. *Stop Where You Are* should be partnered with one of the three videos on **List B**.

Section B: Media Language and Representation (Media Messages, Paper 1 Question 5)

Sample exam question:

‘Explain how representations in music videos are chosen to promote the artist(s). Refer to one of the music videos you have studied to support your answer.’¹

¹Taken from H409/01 Sample Assessment Material



Media language

Here are some key points you might consider.

Communicating meanings

Here you could explore how Bailey Rae’s various comments about the meaning of the song compare with the visual codes seen in the video. Music videos can communicate multiple meanings using elliptical, fragmentary editing as well as symbolism and connotation. Bailey Rae’s optimism is evident within the video through the symbolism of her red dress and her generally positive body language contrasting with the grey environment and costumes/behaviours of the other characters.

Many of the moments in the video are open to interpretation (for example, when Bailey Rae tries to stop the running girls; the moment where she encounters the tattooed man with the dog; the slight moment between Bailey Rae and the dreadlocked man). Slow motion is often used to emphasise these events,

although it is not clear what the audience is intended to infer. Has Bailey Rae succeeded in “stopping” the girls, who appear to be engaged in some sort of gang fight? What does the look between the singer and the man with the pit bull mean? How should the audience interpret the expressions of the characters at the end of the video where the close-ups suggest an ambiguity of meaning? The conclusion of the video implies a degree of closure (the girls are hugging; the homeless woman is still talking to the well-dressed man; Bailey Rae is petting the dog) but the character cutaways suggest that this may just be temporary (linking to her comments about the “now” and the idea of the perfect moment) since their expressions are somewhat suspicious and negative.

The imagery suggests that Bailey Rae is a heroic figure, often enlightening or inspiring characters who are (before they encounter her) in various negative states (the girl in blue looks sad; the gang of girls are angry;

the homeless woman seems abandoned and confused; the man with the pit bull looks uncomfortable and slightly threatening). In other situations she tries to make a difference, implicitly succeeding (depending upon how the ending of the video is read). Once the characters have been introduced, the video cuts back to Bailey Rae. The lyrics of the song could be seen to be addressing the characters, for example:

- “Stop Where You Are” is sung as the gang of girls run past Bailey Rae, who seems to slow the action down through her movement.
- The line “Miracles just like a winter rose” is sung as the well-dressed man gives the homeless woman a hot drink and then sits with her.
- “Wherever you are, you’ll find you’re home at last” seems to inspire the dog owner’s happy moment with his pit bull.

Bailey Rae is generally presented as an observer (there are several point of view shots from her perspective) although she does engage occasionally with the action (the attempt to “stop” the girls; sitting with the sad girl in the blue coat; petting the dog).

The narrative structure of the video might be explored. For example, it adopts a fragmentary narrative including several vignettes broadly held together by Bailey Rae’s journey around the concrete wilderness. There is a vaguely dreamlike quality created using slow motion, the sequences where the singer is alone, the regular cutaways to shots of the buildings/ceilings/stairwells (often angled quite steeply creating a disconcerting effect) and the occasional moments where Bailey Rae is in a dark, smoke-filled space (“I love the image of being in darkness...”).

The editing clearly benefits from digital effects (the slow motion especially) and makes use of the advantages offered by offline digital technologies to match the pace of the editing to the tempo/movement of the track. Moments of climax such as the chorus and the crescendo are emphasised using editing effects – the slow motion of the first chorus, the abrupt timing shift emphasising the dancer’s flip during the second chorus, the increased pace of editing towards the end of the song – which would be difficult or impossible without digital editing facilities.

Bailey Rae’s potential ideological stance might be considered. The focus on Bailey Rae and the use of point of view suggest that the video includes a personal ideology. The lyric “Stop Where You Are” implies an ideological authority; the video suggests that Bailey Rae’s optimistic world view can make a difference. For example, the line “underneath the blanket of the cold where you are” is matched with a high angle shot of the homeless person on a staircase. Seemingly ignored by the well-dressed man, Bailey Rae’s caring nature is communicated to viewers when (perhaps inspired by the song) the man returns to offer the homeless woman a drink. The audience is then presented with a powerful binary opposition of wealth and poverty: the unconventional homeless woman sat talking with the conventional suited man, shot in a way which creates empathy for both characters. In general, the narrative and performance interweave in the editing style of the music video to construct a socially conscious message of helping others – the video does have a celebratory quality, although one which is slightly tempered by realism.



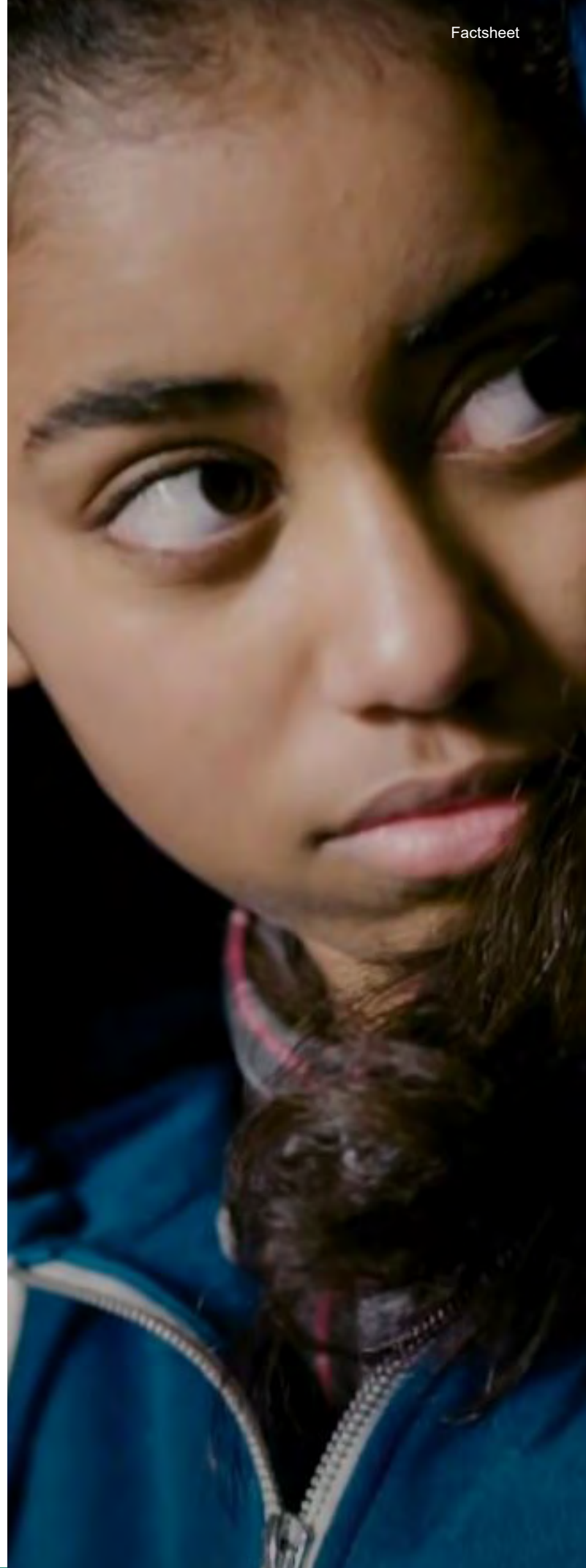
Codes and conventions

Here you could consider how *Stop Where You Are* fits into the broader category of music video as a form, as well as performance video as a genre. The focus on Bailey Rae as the star is conventional for music video and immediately draws audience attention. The use of low-angle/direct address/backlit shots of Bailey Rae throughout the video connote her importance and are again conventional for the genre.

The use of slow motion linked to the comparatively slow BPM of the track is again conventional and encodes for an audience that the video is probably going to be a straightforward visual interpretation of the track, again a typical generic convention. The focus on an urban environment and the selection of characters could be seen to be typical of the genre. Different characters signify urban life and ethnicity – the dancer who is clearly a talented street performer – again, these might be regarded as conventional generic signifiers. Other elements – for example, the homeless character, the well-dressed man, the (possible) bullies are less so.

The image of Bailey Rae exploring the urban environment in what is clearly an expensive dress could be seen to be typical/expected in relation to how female singers generally present themselves, so being conventional for the genre. Conversely, it might be seen to be subversive of the social realism genre which seems to be being referenced with some of the imagery, which might lead to a slightly different audience response. The environment itself creates some interesting contrasts in the way that it has been shot, with imprisoning buildings juxtaposed with the freedom implied by the blue sky. On the one hand, there appears to be a message about freedom; on the other, the suggestion of being trapped.

The interweaving of narrative and performance are conventional for a mainstream music video. Furthermore, ethnicity and alternative lifestyles are signified as positive in relation to the centrality of the star image and the urban reality of everyday life. The star image reinforces this message – all of these could be seen as generic for a fairly mainstream track.



Intertextuality

Here you might discuss that there is little obvious direct intertextuality in the video, although some can be inferred. Bailey Rae's red dress may reference a number of film characters, for example the "Woman in the red dress" from *The Matrix*. However, the red dress could simply be a way of making Bailey Rae stand out without using a colour which would look too out of place; a red dress is a common costume and red has multiple connotations, any of which might have inspired the director.

The setting itself has been used for many films and TV series (it is in central London and is so convenient as a

location), some of which may be familiar to audiences, although it is unlikely that any specific product is being referenced (the location is often chosen, as appears to be the case here, for its somewhat bleak "urban jungle" connotations). The setting is a stereotypical "inner city" location and the characters (to a greater or lesser extent) are stereotypical for that kind of location (the homeless woman, the gang, the man with the pit bull). It may be that certain characters or certain performers might have a resonance for individual viewers based on their own media consumption, leading to meanings which may not have been intended by the director.

Media representations

Processes of representation

Here you could consider the choices which have been made regarding the representations in the video. The representation of Bailey Rae has been constructed to show her in as positive a way as possible; the expensive-looking dress, the dominance of her image in the video, the many close-ups, low-angle shots and her position in the narrative all combine to connote her importance (as would be expected with a music video marketing not only the song but the artist). Her interactions with other characters (for example, with the urban dancer or the girl in the blue coat) are often positive or represent her in a positive light. Choices have also been made in the casting of the various characters, who are clearly designed to portray archetypes, although perhaps slightly unusual archetypes (particularly the homeless woman and the man with the pit bull, whose age, demeanour, and behaviour are slightly at odds with the construction of their characters audiences might be expecting; the girl in the blue coat and the gang of girls are perhaps more stereotypical).

It might be discussed that the video presents a kind of magical realism. The setting and the emphasis on the

buildings/urban environments/seemingly grim lives of the characters suggest a realistic representation of urban life in the 21st century. The slightly desaturated grading, emphasis on grey and dark colours and the choice of actor all seem to suggest this. However, the role of Bailey Rae in the video, the use of slow motion as an effect and particularly the (perhaps unlikely) positive resolutions of the narrative suggest a magical element (for which Bailey Rae is responsible) which tie in to the lyrics' hopeful tone (and the artist's view of the track). Very few music videos would claim to present a realistic view of the world. It could also be discussed that the video does include some elements which suggest a kind of documentary realism (for example, the use of hand-held camera, the cutaways) which might provide an interesting counterpoint to the more fantastical elements.

It seems clear, based on what Bailey Rae has said about the song, that the choices made by the director aim to illustrate the song's message of hope and positivity, with several moments of hope and joy being included as climactic elements. These are partially linked to the use of stereotypes/archetypes (see below) and partially the convention that music videos will link image to lyrics.

The effect of contexts on representations/media contexts

The social and cultural contexts influencing the video should be discussed.

Social contexts might include:

- gang culture
- social isolation
- urban decay
- homelessness.

Cultural contexts might include:

- Bailey Rae herself as an established star
- the Southbank Centre as a location.

Discussion might be had of the way stereotypes influence the representation of society in the video, since (when the characters are introduced) they are almost all represented in a seemingly negative way, which is perhaps how society at large might view them based on broader social perceptions (gangs, pit bulls and the homeless are rarely represented positively). However, the video makes great efforts to present these characters in a positive light (thanks to Bailey Rae's interventions within the narrative) which suggest an effort to challenge what might be seen as dominant ideologies and attempt something of a hegemonic shift.

There is perhaps less to be said about the impact of cultural context; Bailey Rae's dominance in the video would be expected for a mainstream artist, particularly in a situation where she was undertaking something

of a comeback (both the album and the single were her first releases in six years). There is some speculation that the song and potentially the video were influenced by events in her personal life (the death of her first husband and subsequent marriage several years later) although there is no direct evidence that this is the case. The use of the Southbank Centre may be seen to have some cultural significance, but again this can only be speculation since the likelihood is that it was simply chosen for its rather grim urban look (the brutalist architecture could be regarded as having a degree of cultural importance and it is certainly highlighted in the video with many shots), with the mise-en-scene contrasting the order of the buildings with the disorder of the characters' lives.

Representational issues

The way the video depends upon a range of stereotypes and countertypes might be debated.

The representation of different social groups (and of the setting itself) could be explored. The setting suggests a stereotypical urban social housing wilderness; the characters mostly (apart from the man in the suit) appear to be stereotypical for that environment. The costumes, behaviour and casting all reinforce this, with Bailey Rae standing out not only because of the colour of her dress but also the clearly expensive nature of her outfit (there are several close-ups of her shoes, for example), which do not seem to fit the location.





The representation of an urban underclass transcending its limitations appears to be a key theme of the video; the way this is achieved (or not, depending upon how the final shots are interpreted) could be considered.

Gender representation is an interesting area for discussion. Bailey Rae herself appears to be represented in quite a conventional way (make-up, expensive dress, high heels) while the man in the suit also offers a somewhat conventional look. These contrast with the other characters we see in the video – the girl gang, the homeless woman, the urban dancers, the man with the dog – who initially present a level of threat before being shown in a positive light. Perhaps part of the message is to do with not taking individuals at face value.

Discussions might also be had about representations of age and race, both of which are evident within the video, although the way these are presented is clearly open to interpretation.

Audience positioning and responses

Some discussion should be undertaken relating to how audiences might respond to and interpret the representations. An interesting activity might be to consider the various comments on the YouTube video (at the time of writing there are around 400) since these offer first-hand reflections on the impact the video has had. It is perhaps telling that few of the comments refer to the video, with most referring to the artist or the track. This perhaps suggests that the video did not have a significant effect (some of her videos have significantly higher views, in the several millions).

Discussions might be had about potential audience responses to the video. How might the various social groups represented in the video consider their representations? Might there be a positive effect of presenting counter-culture stereotypes in a positive way? Might this have had a negative impact on the video's reception?

Academic ideas and arguments

While there is NO REQUIREMENT to study the set academic ideas and arguments in relation to music videos, this might be an interesting opportunity to discuss some elements of theory. You could consider introducing applying the following theoretical perspectives at A Level.

Semiology – Barthes

The video includes symbolism (the red dress, the pit bull, the setting). There is certainly scope to consider denotation, connotation and myth, particularly as the video does seem to be trying to challenge some conventional connotations (for example, the tattooed man with the pit bull).

Genre Theory – Neale

Neale's ideas about hybridisation and genre evolution are relevant to music video given that it is quite a self-referential form which plays with the genre conventions of other forms (particularly film) as well as those of other videos. Depending upon which other videos are studied, there might be scope to consider *Stop Where You Are* in the broader context of the genre codes of music video.

Structuralism – Levi-Strauss

Levi-Strauss' ideas relating to binary oppositions may be seen as relevant here given that there are some quite explicit examples in the video (red/blue; homeless woman/suited man; urban setting/evening dress); given Bailey Rae's feelings about the song, there may be some relevance in applying structuralist theory to decode the video.

Feminist Theory – Van Zoonen

In some respects the video supports Van Zoonen's ideas of gender – this is perhaps particularly true considering how Bailey Rae is dressed and is the object of focus; the way the male characters are represented also fits. However, some of the female representations (particularly the girl gang) might be seen as challenges to Van Zoonen's position (although the contextual ideas may have some relevance here).

Sources

[Corinne Bailey Rae - Stop Where You Are](#) (YouTube)

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[The Quarry's Mark Whelan Cuts Corinne Bailey Rae's Latest Music Video](#) (lbonline.com)

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[Corinne Bailey Rae unveils video for first official single 'Stop Where You Are'](#) (wilfulpublicity.co.uk)



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