

ADVERTISING AND CREATIVITY WORLDWIDE

cannes contenders

philippe andré



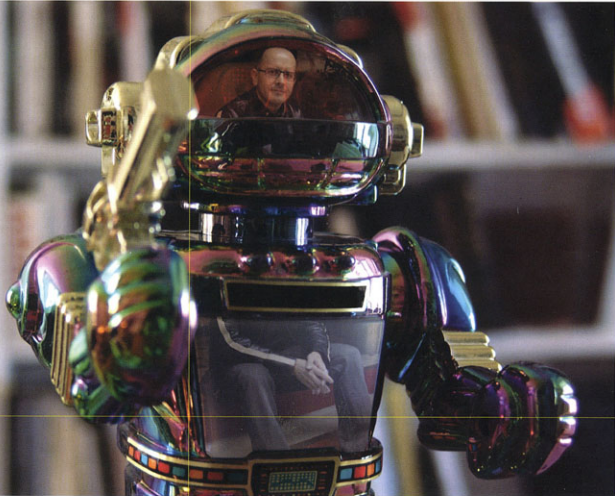
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philippe andré



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According to the director of the latest Peugeot 407 spot:

"Style means nothing. Having a certain style is having a lack of ideas."

A shabbily dressed **Danny Edwards** buckles up for the scenic ride
from film school to toy town



"It's a kind of luxury to be working in commercials as they have a lot of tools available and when you work with good creatives, a good agency and you have a strong idea you just, as a director, bring your input and try to give your vision and share your ideas and it's a constant debate between people who understand each other"



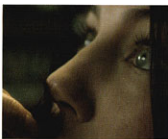
(Far left from top)
Peugeot 407 The Toys

(left from top) Peugeot 407 The Toys, Integra Puzzle, adidas Tennis Club and Guinness Black Market

It's fair to say that the French have style, a certain chic, if you will. They are renowned for it. Sartorial cornerstones like Chanel and Dior are wardrobe essentials, and Louis Vuitton bags hang from the arms of most discerning Parisiennes. The English - and by that I mean me - are, on the other hand, more Marks & Spencer than Dolce & Gabbana, with accompanying

bag of the plastic variety by those celebrated designers at Tesco. Philippe André is certainly a Frenchman with style, and, as our cultures and clothes collide, he strikes the first blow dressed as he is in directorial black and looking cooler than the other side of the pillow. All is not lost though. "Style means nothing," André proclaims during the interview. "Having a certain style is having a lack of ideas, and I don't believe in directors having certain styles." It's film he's referring to though, not fashion, and it's André's





(Top) Adidas Tennis Club. (above) *Lust for Life* Rain and (left) *Kinder* *The Regression*

"The good thing about music videos is that I hear the track, I write the story or concept and it's purely my idea. It's more related to music and with my background I can really play with the story or with scenes and it's a bit different"

eclectic approach to filmmaking that sets him apart from other members of his profession. The reason that he is in London at the moment is to complete a Christian Aid spot he's been working on as well as to add the finishing touches to the new Peugeot 407 commercial that will have, by the time you read this, aired across approximately 60 different countries. It's a commercial with a fantastically simple but effective idea from BETC Euro RSCG in Paris and Euro RSCG Worldwide, executed in an equally fantastic and effective manner by André. Set in a nostalgic toy town, it features a host of superbly crafted, life-size toy cars that look cool but, like the Rolex I once bought from a bloke in Piccadilly Circus, never quite work properly. "It's a great idea," André enthuses, "and you wonder why another car company hasn't used it before. I had to work very hard to be awarded the job as there was a lot of competition from plenty of good directors. The point was to bring a vision that the other directors didn't have and maybe a vision that the creatives didn't already have. So, I came with two main ideas which were to make something very real, almost like a documentary, not something very slick and glossy like a classic car commercial, and the second thing was to introduce the 407 as late as possible, to build it up so that you wanted to see the car. I wanted to make a very human, sensitive world where the toys are going to be very cool and a bit nostalgic. Something friendly where we could introduce the car in a friendly way." This is all brilliantly achieved and the cars, with their individual characteristics and drivers, steal the show. "We built 27 cars in total," says André, "some for this commercial and some for another that will introduce

the estate version of the 407. All were built for real, with real engines that could be driven. In a perfect world these cars would be fantastic, and I would prefer to have a cool toy car, but they are broken or they crash or they have bits missing - it's not a perfect world and the 407 is the car to remedy these problems."

André is no stranger to whimsical and curious stories, having previously helmed interesting and slightly left-of-the-middle promos for Roger Sanchez's *Another Chance* and Morcheeba's *World Looking In* to name but two. It's music that is actually his first love and directing is something that he came upon almost by chance. "I didn't plan to be a director," André confides, "I wanted to be a conductor which is quite a different direction but that's very difficult as it's a very monk-like existence, very disciplined." While studying to make music for film at film school, he says he "discovered what the picture was and what it is to be a director" and so a new path was forged.

Music's loss is the commercial world's gain, and, after a couple of years at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, making videos around exhibitions and working with video artists, André made the jump to promos and then on to commercials. He's been working on the Peugeot 407 commercial since December, and, alongside

the Christian Aid spot, there's not been room for much else. Music videos have, of late, taken a back seat but that won't always be the case. "Promos are still very important to me," André states, "I haven't done one for a year now and I definitely want to get back to them soon. It's a kind of luxury to be working in commercials as they have a lot of tools available. When you work with good creatives, a good agency and you have a strong idea you just, as a director, bring your input and try to give your vision and share your ideas and it's a constant debate between people who understand each other. And I am happy to go in a direction that is more their's than mine sometimes as that can often be a good direction to go.

"The good thing about music videos," he continues, "is that I hear the track, I write the story or concept - It's purely my idea. It's more related to music, and, with my background, I can really play with the story or with scenes. It's a



(Left) *Joujou* Ndour. *My Hope is in You* (bottom) *Mereheba*. *World Locking In*. and *Belou* *Emilie Simon*. *Desert*



bit different. That's the reason why, whatever the budgets are, I like to move back and forth between commercials and promos. I think it's healthy for a director to pass from a £2 million commercial to a 20 grand video. If you can be

"It's a question of respect for the idea. If an idea goes in a certain direction then you have to follow. You can't fight the idea in order to go your own way"

creative only when you have a fortune then you start to be finished." Signed to Wanda in Paris and Bikini in London, André jokes that his real base is the Eurostar. He travels continually between the UK and France, and, though Paris sees slightly more of him, it's not by much. When he's not working - which, by the sound of it, is rarely - he likes to immerse himself in, well, everything. "I think you have to keep an open mind and see as much as possible," he says. "You have to go to exhibitions, to the movies, to the theatre, the opera... everything. And I listen to a very eclectic selection of music too: techno, house, jazz, pop, rock and metal. The same for film, I watch Bergman and Tarkovsky, but I also love the American blockbusters and French cinema, of course."

André's enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, all aspects of the creative process means that he likes to be involved in a production from beginning to end. He's a hands-on sort of guy, but is being so involved always possible? "Well, it depends on what you mean by being involved," comes the reply. "With Peugeot the idea was already there. What I brought was my vision of it, and it was because everybody was happy with this small vision that I am involved at all," he adds modestly. "It could have been done by plenty of directors in a different way maybe, but the original idea was already there. I try to be involved as much as possible though and I prefer

to do fewer commercials but be involved full time. I'd hate not to be a part of the editing process or the music and I think it's the same for every director. You want to be sure of what's going on a/c. The commercials industry has so many people involved and everybody is allowed to say something - which is good - but if you're not directly involved all the time then the job can go in so many directions. The more I am involved, the better."

Though a self-proclaimed latecomer to the director's chair, André believes that, over the course of his relatively short eight-year career, he has grown up somewhat. As he has already declared, having a particular style isn't really his style, but he thinks that he has eschewed the more polished and cold directorial approach he once had in favour of a "more real" method. His showreel, like his taste in music, is certainly varied, with hi-tech spots for Lucozade jostling for space among more performance-oriented pieces like *Kiinder* and slick promos for *All Saints*. "It's a question of respect for the idea," he says,

when asked about the diversity of his work. "If an idea goes in a certain direction then you have to follow. You can't fight the idea in order to go your own way. You know, if I am a director who makes blue commercials but I receive a red one then I cannot and must not make it blue. It has to be red otherwise it's stupid."

This colourful explanation perfectly encapsulates André's outlook on his career. The idea is everything - without it you merely have a collection of incongruent moving images.

Next up for this energetic Frenchman is another trip across the Channel to Paris. For a rest, maybe? A chance to recharge the batteries and possibly work on some music? "No, it's work," he says rather brightly. "I'm not really involved in music outside of this business now. I can play the piano and the guitar, but I just don't have the time anymore - plus I can't fit the piano on the Eurostar." ☺