

Art exploration

Charlotte Rivers is the author of two popular books relating to media art and design, in particular experimental CD & DVD cover designs and how they reflect the digital content of the disc inside the package. Debbie Galante Block reports



CD ART: INNOVATION IN CD PACKAGING DESIGN; DVD ART: INNOVATION IN DVD PACKAGING DESIGN
by Charlotte Rivers (Rotovision)

Following her graduation from The London College of Printing where she studied media and journalism, Charlotte Rivers worked as a writer at the UK's leading graphic design publication *Graphics International* (now *Grafik*) before travelling to Sydney, Australia where she worked on media and marketing title *Ad News*. On her return to the UK, Rivers established herself as a freelance design and lifestyle writer. In 2001 she wrote her first book, *Identify: Building Brands through Business Cards, Letterheads and Logos*. Though Rivers has officially stopped freelancing and is working fulltime in an ad agency, she continues to write about her passion for art. A new book about magazine art is scheduled to hit the market this autumn.

MediaPack: What made you decide to write the book on CD cover designs?

Rivers: It was an idea that was proposed to me by Chris Foges, a then editor at Rotovision. In the marketplace, so much mainstream CD art offers the same layout, band name, and band photo. The idea was to look at experimental CD covers and design to show there are other ways to design covers. Of course, a lot of the time designers are unable to design what they like

as there are so many restrictions put in place by labels. However, at the more non-mainstream labels, there is much more freedom and this is where you tend to see experimentation and more interesting design.

MediaPack: What is different about CD art compared to LP art? And how different is CD art today in 2005 compared to 1985?

Rivers: The CD is much more of a 'package' than the LP, so CD art should really be approached like that design-wise. Rather than thinking solely about having an image on the cover that makes an impact on shelves, successful designers look at that together with what will be inside the package from stickers, to booklets, to band photos and so on. I guess in the beginning designers thought adapting LP design to a CD would be OK but a lot of the time it didn't really work. CDs have to be designed in their own right.

MediaPack: Does DVD art compare more closely to CD art than VHS art? In other words, if DVDs are targeted to a movie fan, is the thought process different than selling to a music fan?

Rivers: To be honest I don't really know much about VHS design but I'd say that DVD packaging is a lot more experimental because of its smaller more compact size and the variety of packages available – gatefold, six-sided and so on. It is not dissimilar to CD packaging, which means that some of the same

cover and packaging design can do is add to the consumer experience when buying a DVD, whether that is through the use of striking typefaces and colours, or inclusion of behind-the-scenes photographs and previously unpublished images.

Typography also plays a role. As with music CDs, much of the text on a DVD cover is there because the client has requested it, but the designer can choose the typographical layout of that text to make it more interesting and creative.

MediaPack: Tell me a little about your favorite CD packages. Why you like them?

Rivers: In terms of CD art, I have a number of favourites. The work by London-based designers Airside for Lemon Jelly is fabulous. I love the materials – the design touches, die-cuts etc – and the fab illustrations. German designer Angela Lorenz does great work for the Staalplaat label, really experimental and unusual. Stanley Donwoods, special edition design of a library book for Radiohead's *Amnesiac* is an all time favourite. I also like all the work that Stephen Byram has done for Screwgun and packages for various artists on the Winter & Winter label where they use lots of matte, corrugated card but still keep within the constraints of the CD size. The more commercial packages that I like include work by Big Active for Basement Jaxx, The Charlatans and Goldfrapp.

MediaPack: What about your favourite DVD packages?

Rivers: Some of my favourites include a package for Nike Presto designed by Nike, Neverstop, and C505. It used egg carton material for the outer package with a circle cut in the front cover revealing the DVD which has eggs printed on it. Like their CD designs, German label Winter & Winter has created some great DVD packages for their artists including *Step Across the Border*, a 90-minute music film. Other favourites include packages by Australian designers Pandarosa who experiment with materials, format and illustration. UK designers North made a simple, clean package for a DVD about Marc Newson. They use the conventional super jewel case and screen printing but it still really stands out which is clever. The White Stripes package for *Under Blackpool Lights* is also a favourite as are the Arthaus film series from Norway and the onedotzero series. ●

thought process would go into it, especially if it is for a band's tour DVD. However, the area of music and moving image DVD design tends to allow for more creative and abstract ideas to be explored within the artwork. As with music CDs, consumers take home a DVD package, unwrap it, and explore it – first the physical material then the disc DVD itself. It is therefore extremely important the DVD package is a reflection of, and something of an introduction to, the digital content of the DVD it houses.

MediaPack: As downloading becomes more prevalent, do you see cover and box designs becoming more important as something which adds value to a product?

Rivers: Absolutely. To encourage people to buy CDs and DVDs, I think designers and labels need to think about making the CD package much more collectable and this can be achieved with good design and without a jewel case! What a good