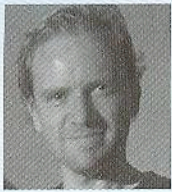


# Brief Encounter

## Making the BBC New Music Short *Round*

**Kirk Hendry** on turning one man's simple hand shadows into a mini epic that appears to have a cast of hundreds



— The filmmaker  
**Kirk Hendry**

New Zealand-born, London-based filmmaker Kirk Hendry works in both live action and animation. Having recently directed the unique film *Round*, he's now working on an animated picture called *Junk*. The film is being created in association with the UK Film Council and the Royal College of Music. Kirk is represented in London by the award-winning mixed media and animation company th1ng, and in Paris by Troublemakers. To find out more about Hendry and his projects, head to [www.kirkhendry.com](http://www.kirkhendry.com) and [www.th1ng.com](http://www.th1ng.com).

— The brief  
**BBC New Music Shorts**

"The BBC Electric Proms runs a scheme called New Music Shorts," Hendry explains. "In a nutshell, you choose one of three pre-selected music tracks, write a narrative treatment for it and cross your fingers... I wrote a treatment for a song called 'Round' by Mute Records artist XX Teens and was lucky enough to be commissioned to produce it."

Media

— Panasonic HVX200 HD camera	— Final Cut Pro 4.5 HD
— Rear projection screen	— Photoshop CS1
— Apple Mac G4	— Automatic Duck
	— After Effects CS3



**It's ironic – the dream projects you spend years trying to get off the ground seem to go nowhere fast, while the off-the-cuff, back-of-a-napkin ideas with a five-hour**

**deadline that you think will lead nowhere actually lead, well, somewhere. *Round* was one of those.**

Pitched at the 11th hour via a BBC website for the Electric Proms, all I had to do was pick one of three pre-selected songs and give it a narrative treatment. I had wanted to do a hand shadow film for some time, and here was an opportunity. XX Teens' primal rock perfectly complemented the jungle-based story I was planning to tell.

I was shortlisted and invited to pitch the idea. Next thing I knew, I was in a *Bond*-villain-sized boardroom in front of about 15 people. Luckily, I was prepared. I had pulled off whatever hand-shadow footage I could from YouTube and edited it together with a section of the XX Teens' track. It was crude, but it gave them all a clear idea of my concept. I wanted to go beyond what had been done with other hand-shadow films and create a larger landscape with articulate characters. I made examples of how this might look in Photoshop and took that along. It worked.



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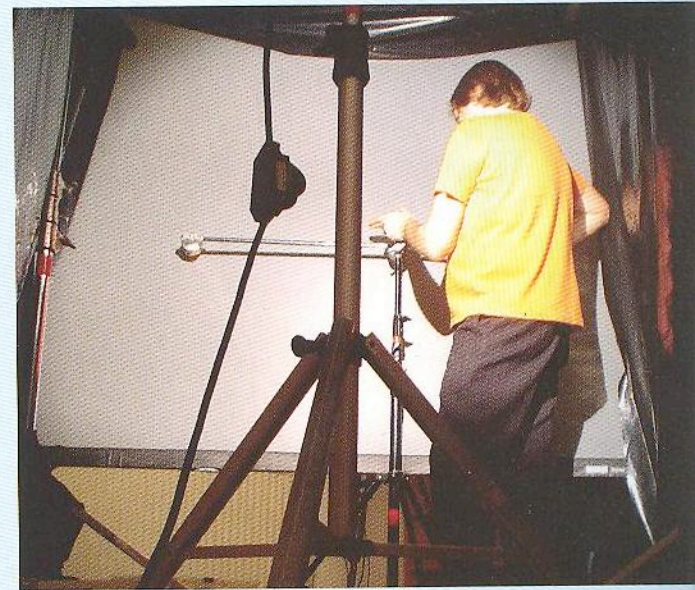
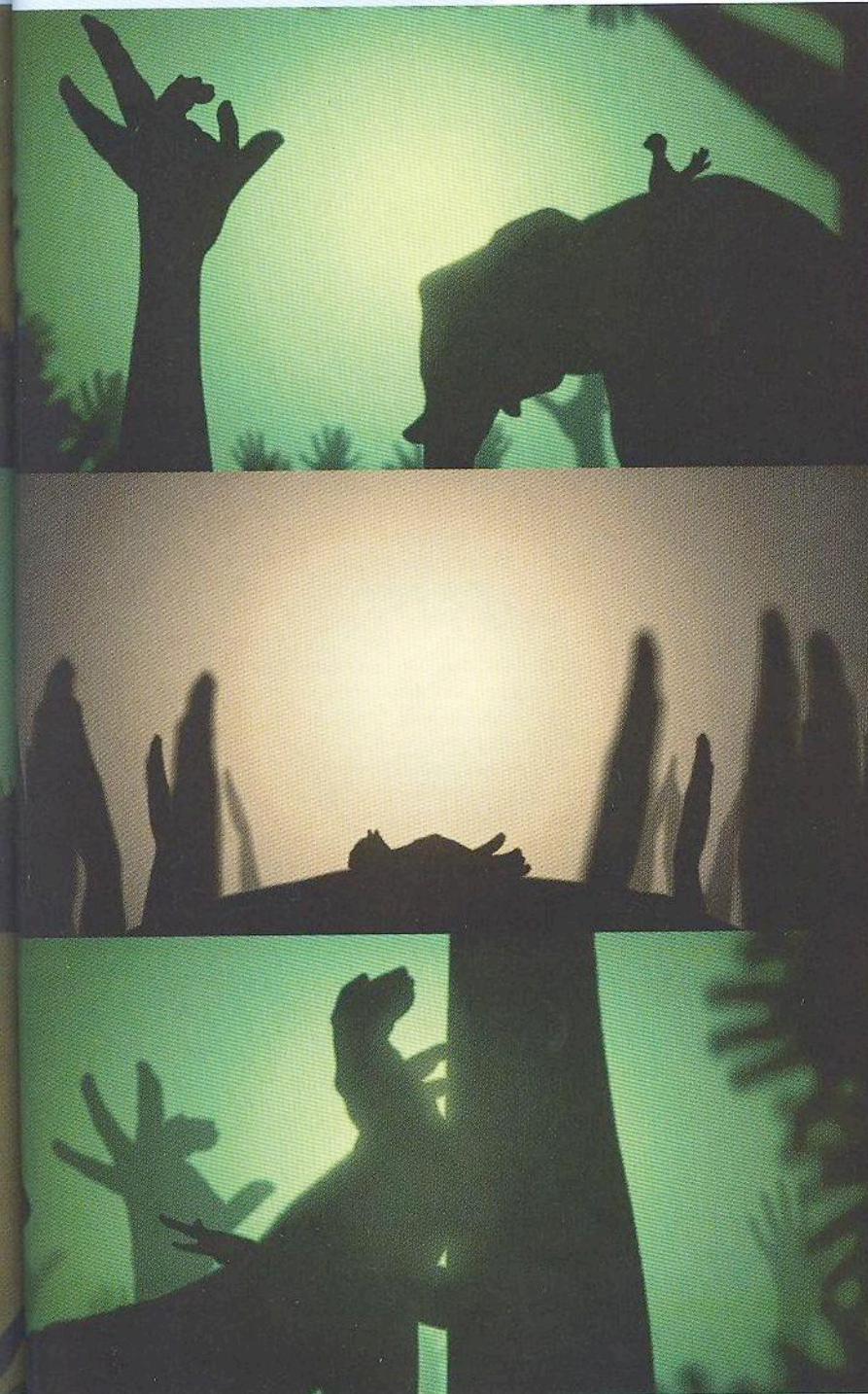
01 Hendry's short focuses on the **short-lived impact of man** on nature in Earth's long story

02 The **lo-fi** nature of *Round's* production included ad-libbing with a light stand to support hand artist **Mago Serpico's** hands

### Hendry's studio

My studio is based around a 10-year-old G4 400 MHz Mac that's never broken down but is so slow it won't even play YouTube clips properly. I use it for everything, including editing. Render times are a tea break in purgatory, so that's why the piano and guitar come in handy and there are plenty of toys lying around.

The 'Longest Drink In Town' milkshake tumbler on top of the monitor is from back home in New Zealand. It eases my troubled mind. I also collect Eiffel Tower stuff [see top of monitor again] – I guess this is an inspiration; a reminder of excellence... and of escape.



02

With a budget of just £5,000, could we make a five-minute narrative film using only hand shadows? Upon research we found no one had done a hand-shadow film longer than 30 seconds. What was worse, none were narrative driven. Uh-oh!

#### Seeking out the talent

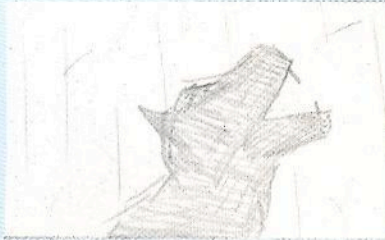
Having told the producers at the pitch that I already had a hand shadow artist on board for the project, it became a mad scramble to find a suitable performer who worked in this narrowest of niche markets.

We soon realised there was no one here in the UK with the necessary character skills to be able to pull this off. It's one thing to do the shapes, but to imbue them with personality and life is another thing entirely. So we ended up scouring the globe before deciding to enlist the services of the brilliant Argentinian shadow artist Mago Serpico.

With Serpico on his way over, I began to storyboard the film. I tried to stay within what I thought would be possible for a performer to achieve. The odd shot, I knew, would be essentially an animation job. I had to keep these to a minimum – after all, animation is never going to look like a live performance, and that would interfere with the feel of the film.

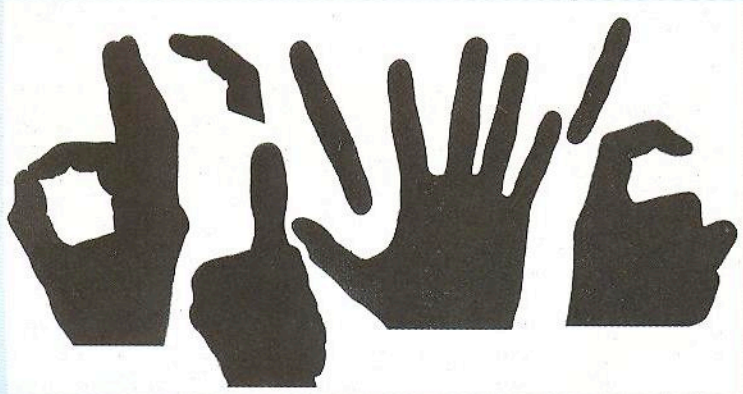
I intended to tell a story that showed the cyclical nature of the natural world; how humans are a very short chapter in the Earth's long story and will eventually go the way of the dodo, yet nature will continue to evolve really cool new species that could only prosper because we floundered. The lyrics of the song →

**03** The film was storyboarded with the limitations of the human hand in mind, and the aim of keeping **animated shots to a minimum**



03

**04** For some animals, however, individual hand shapes and **shots had to be comped together** in post-production



04

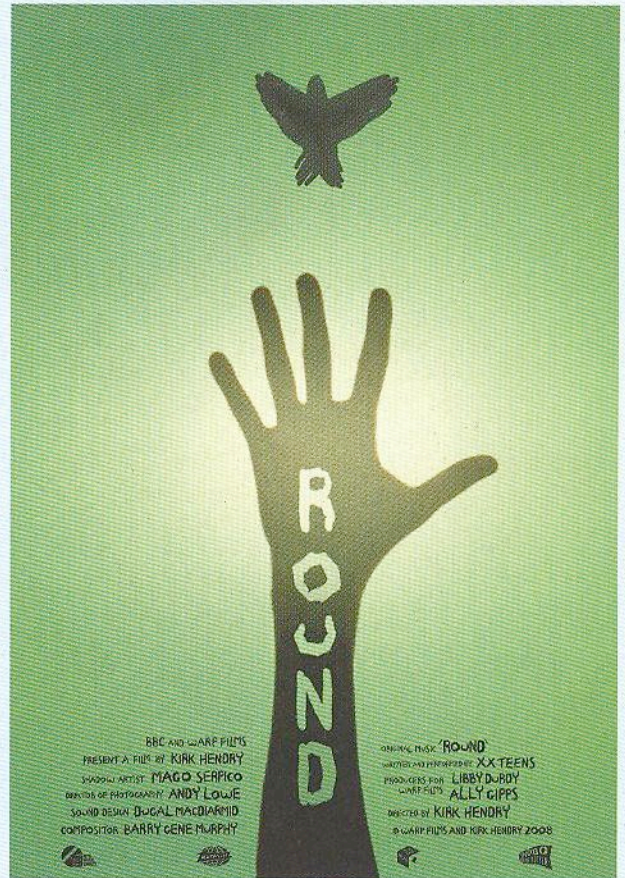
→ worked well with this idea. However, it's always slightly difficult when you're bound to a piece of music. I tried to make places in the film where the music would stop, so the characters could just exist in their environment, and try to use the song as if it was written for the film.

#### All hands on deck

Serpico arrived. There was no money for a hotel, so he stayed at my house. The guy had never been to London and he spent his four days here rehearsing and shooting, so he didn't see much more than Loughborough Junction. One night I did take him to see Buckingham Palace, St James's Park and Big Ben, though. He loved it, I loved it... then it was back to work.

Another hurdle was the volume of work we had. We had a hundred shots to get in two days and we couldn't extend the shoot because Serpico had to be back in Argentina. Halfway through the first day, we were only on shot nine! With 91 more shots to go, me and my producer began to get the fear.

**05** Many hands make light work: The **promo poster for Round**



05

From here on in, me, Serpico and our DP kicked things into overdrive and put in two horribly long days. The bright light was on constantly, so after the first couple of hours of each day the room we were shooting in became a sauna. This was made even worse by the fact we had blacked out all the windows with bin bags to make sure there was no light spill from anywhere but the main 2k light source. We couldn't risk having two shadows on the rear projection screen.

Serpico was marvellous at creating the characters, but I wanted some of the animals to have more body articulation. So for some animals we shot each part of the body separately, knowing we would comp the individual performances together in post-production. To prevent too much hand movement, which would make the comping impossible, we rested Serpico's hands on a light stand. It was pretty lo-fi, but it worked.

With the performance done, I began to edit the takes together with XX Teens' music track, building up the layers in Final Cut Pro over a couple of weeks. For certain shots that were just

## Visual CV

In pictures: a guide to the career and work of our Technique writers

## Kirk Hendry

The filmmaker guides you through some of his motion projects...



**Shave Like You Mean It! – 1999**

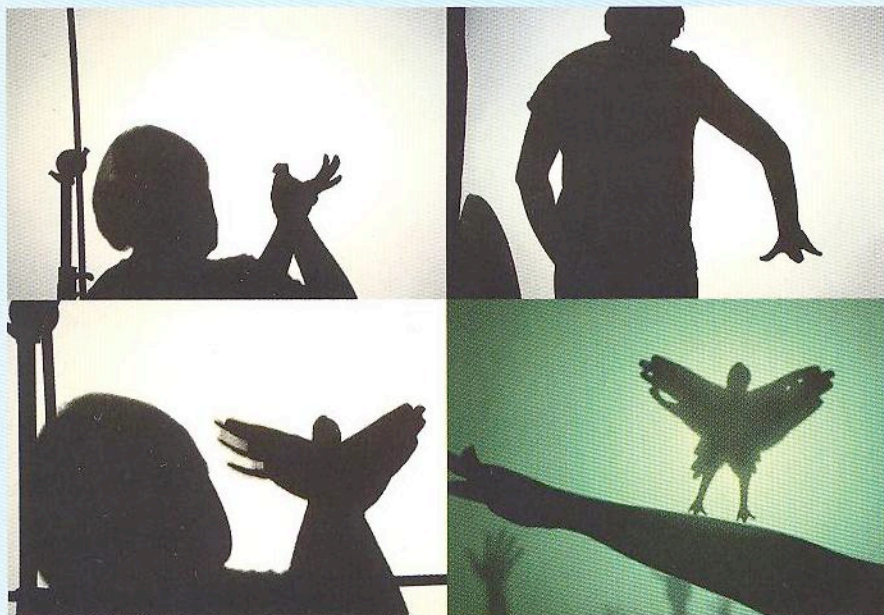
My first film – a mini-symphony on the art of shaving. It received a national theatrical release and was shown on Channel 4.



**Big Top Ha Ha – 2000**

This still is from a visual test for a children's television show that I created.

**06-07** Hendry and the team achieved their aim to make one man's hands appear as a **physical chorus** made up of 20 people



06

impossible to perform, I shot my hand in various configurations and then used these elements in Photoshop to create the characters, or occasionally add to one of Serpico's performances. I also used this method to create the end title credits purely out of fingers.

We then used Automatic Duck to get the shots from FCP into After Effects. We composited the performances in After Effects.

#### Finishing touches

I wanted the finished piece to look like there had been 20 or more hand artists working in unison, and that we'd shot it live from behind the rear projection screen. So now we had to recreate the rear projection screen and its hot spot, which we had worked so hard to eradicate during the shoot because it would have interfered with the compositing process.

The screen in the final film is a scanned texture of old paper. During the grade, we added the light in the centre of the screen and diffusion. I also used colour to change the tone, starting with white and introducing green to suggest the origins of life and

## Influences

### Walt Disney

A fearless risk-taker and innovator with an ear for a fantastic tune.

### Ben Burt

For his character-driven sound design. His sound oozes personality and contributes so much to the storytelling.

### Dr Seuss

It's like putting a hose in one ear and washing a lifetime of dogma out of the other. Unless you have kids, skip *The Cat In The Hat* and *The Grinch* and go for *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?* and *On Beyond Zebra!*



07

the animals' habitat, orange for the sunrise and violent confrontation on the plain, and red for the bird being shot. I tried to make these transitions very long so that the changes would be subtle.

#### The finale

You're always unhappy with what you do. It's just a struggle to get a film to the point where it's not completely embarrassing – when you feel it's still only 60 per cent complete, even though others involved tell you it looks fine, it's always really hard to drag it up that other 40 per cent. You never get there, but 80 per cent is acceptable.

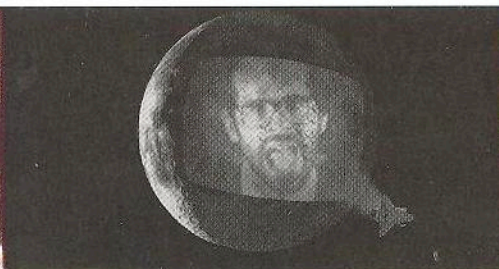
You look back at your work and wish you could be more economical with the storytelling. But I'm pleased with the result and it proves you can do narrative hand shadow films with longer runtimes. We joked during production about doing a hand shadow feature film. You never know...

See Kirk Hendry's 'Round' for yourself on this issue's disc.



#### 'There Must Be Some Kind Of Misunderstanding' – 2005

I made this music video for Brooklyn musician Andrew Thompson by mounting a camera on his bike and cycling around Manhattan.



#### 'Go Bananas' promo – 2006

We shot three promos for Andrew Thompson in just four days. This one grew from a Jacques Brel performance we both really liked where he sang 'Ne Me Quitte Pas' into the camera for five minutes.



#### Junk – in progress

An animation project – entirely in silhouette – that I'm currently making with th1 ng and the Film Council. It's about a boy obsessed with junk food.