



Lyric Theater

It all started late last year when "I was watching MTV one night and I had the closed captions on —the plain white type in the black box — and I said to myself, 'Man, they've gotta be able to do something with music videos better than this,'" recalls Gregg Brokaw of Chicago motion graphics firm Brokaw Motion (see Brokawmotion.com). So Brokaw, a onetime designer at socially-conscious Thirst, decided to make a music video for the deaf in which they may be able to "hear" the rhythm of the music, via a typographic treatment of the lyrics. He chose Peter Gabriel's "I Have the Touch" for this personal project, and with what Brokaw calls "the usual design stuff" — a G4 Mac, After Effects, Photoshop and Illustrator — he made two versions of the song, one in black and white in which the type and stock imagery have equal weight, and another in blazing color with strictly type. They were tested via the Berkeley, Calif.-based Corporation on Disabilities and Telecommunications, and, interestingly, the more sedate black and white version was preferred three to one by the hearing-impaired. Explains Brokaw, "I figured the deaf had an enhanced visual perception, so I sped up the color version, which was an explosion of color and type; the black and white version was deliberately slower paced." At any rate, Brokaw runs the videos simultaneously as a split screen on his DVD sample reel, and together they *really* rock. "I put them side by side for the convenience of the viewer — I was worried it could be a little confusing, actually." Has he considered that it might enhance the experience for deaf people? "Not really, but when I watch it, yeah, it is pretty cool that way." This "stereo" approach has yet to be tested on the target audience, however. In the meantime, Brokaw was honored with a special Audience Access Award at Superfest, an international media festival on disabilities, held earlier this month in Berkeley. Brokaw did not get clearance for his use of the song, but he's confident Peter Gabriel would approve. "I'd love to share the concept with him; he seems like the type of artist that would go for something like this." (TK)



BYRAN BUCKLEY
AMERICA'S CHOICE