

1. Emperor Gum Moth

I found this an informative AV. It described the life cycle of the Emperor Moth - illustrating it with some excellent macro photography, accompanied by the beautiful flute playing of James Galway that was easy to listen to. The author paced the transitions well to fit the music. I particularly enjoyed the inclusion of video clips. These were excellent additions, providing amazing close-ups of the bugs at work.

While the text slides, with their well-defused backgrounds, were fairly easy to read, I felt there were a few too many. Using voice-over to tell the story might have lifted the AV to an even higher level. Nevertheless, I've awarded this AV, Honours.

2. I'll Show you Something to Make you Change your Mind

This was an ambitious AV. The author took us to London and showed us contrasting aspects of the city. It began with well-known locations, Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus, then a change of music took us 'behind the scenes', showing shop names around Soho. Another change of music took us to street festivals and a hotchpotch of different people on the streets. Returning to the opening locations, the author cleverly superimposed some of the characters from the back-street images to complete the sequence.

The AV comprised a mixture of what might be termed 'record' tourist shots and some excellent photojournalism. Although I understood the reason for the changes of music, I thought they made the AV somewhat disjointed. This was exacerbated, in my opinion, by the amount of zooming, and the use of split screen verticals. There was rather too much 'camera movement' to my mind. The author may like to consider giving the piece a shorter title. This AV is Highly Commended.

3. The Marvellous Toy

I tremendously enjoyed this happy little AV. It told a story and illustrated it simply and well. The story began with the boy's introduction to a magical toy and ended with his son's amazement at the same toy many years later. The transitions were varied and well timed. The magical movements of the toy were well illustrated with distorted images. The first boy's love of the toy was conveyed well. The initial delight of the second boy is well captured in the close-ups of his eyes, but in my opinion not quite sustained. I would like to have seen a bit more of his relationship with the toy. The pictures of him in and around the furniture were a slightly weak ending. Nevertheless, Honours.

4, Monolith

I found this AV quite demanding. Why 'Monolith'? And what was the significance of the sub-title, '50 years - 2001 A Space Odyssey'. Why was this shown throughout the sequence? Consulting Dr Google, I learned that 2018 is the 50th anniversary of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, '2001 A Space Odyssey'. The images in the AV were accompanied by the music featured in Kubrick's film.

Dr Google also explained that 'Monoliths' are machines built by an extraterrestrial species. They are in the shape of the vertical panel which displayed the author's images in the centre of the screen. The images began with a series of very competent night-sky patterns. Some of these included foregrounds and some didn't. Was this just for variety? I didn't detect a sense of going somewhere. The clusters of stars did vary in shape and colour, but I felt three minutes was a bit long to dwell on them. We were then taken in closer and shown the circular shape of planets, and variations in their colour. Some of the colours and patterns were dramatic. But all the while, the monolith shape in which these images were shown was flanked on either side by a red pattern that I found somewhat distracting. I awarded the AV, Merit.

5. Spring at the Lake

The opening title moved a bit too quickly down the screen, in my opinion. I also thought the title should perhaps mention birds - because that is what I felt the AV was essentially about. It told a story of birds nesting, chicks arriving, preening, bathing and finally taking off. Yes, these are things that happen in Springtime, but we saw little other evidence of Spring at the Lake.

I felt the quality of the nature images varied. It is, of course, extremely hard to make pictures of birds on their nests without having a lot of distracting sticks and things in the background. Some of the images of feeding were strong. I thought there were a few too many of birds diving. I do, however, applaud the author for avoiding unnecessary zooming in this AV.

I found the music, by Canadian Ian Tamlyn, a little bit aggressive, perhaps? . It didn't, to my mind, capture a feeling of Spring. But the addition of bird sounds in the background was an excellent feature that I very much appreciated. Merit.

6. That's How the Light Gets In

To my understanding, this AV did not meet the brief in the 2018 Competition Guidelines. They say a sequence should have an introduction, an interesting development of the storyline or theme, and a closure. This AV did not, in my view, have a storyline. Rather, it took a powerful, philosophical song by Leonard Cohen and sought to 'match' the words with images.

The author drew on a wide range of images - such as thunder clouds, bells and close-up impressions of half a wedding ring. Some of the matches was excellent. I particularly appreciated the profile of the young girl, looking towards the light. The night shots of a guitar player at a camp fire also fitted well. Slow dissolves fitted the pace of the music. However, the way birds appeared to be 'pasted on' to trees and a light pattern in the opening sequence, jarred with me. The slow shutter-speed light patterns - particularly around the two-minute mark - to my mind did not 'fit' the mood of the sequence. And the ending was rather 'cut off'. I have not given an award to this one.

7. The Best Place

This was a very easy AV to watch and appreciate. The opening told us that Aberaeron was voted the best place in Wales in 2017. Appropriately starting with an overview of the town, the author then showed us its features, with gentle musical accompaniment I found the AV well paced. It took us from the harbour to the town centre, and showed the architectural style and colour of the buildings before returning to the harbour at the close.

Most of the images were made in relatively low light, which gave a richness to the colours. The frames were well filled. I felt some scenes - for example, when noting how the town caters for tourists - needed a few more people. Much of the town looked rather empty. Between the first and second minutes there was a lot of vertical panning. I felt this was a bit over-done and the movement too rapid. Text was superimposed on several images to add information. I thought the text could be tidied up a bit. Several pieces began with the word "and"; and the word "now" was repeated. Some was a bit lengthy. I've awarded this one Highly Commended.

8. Time

The author of this AV chose to use one of the world's most beautiful pieces of orchestral music - the Adagietto from Mahler's 5th Symphony. Against this background, they presented a series of images, ranging in quality and subject matter. The images were presented within a circular 'porthole' in the centre of the screen. In my opinion, this reduced the potential impact of many of the pictures. And I found the surrounding gold colour-plating effect, distracting.

The title of the sequence, 'Time', led me to expect a storyline about passing time. A stark picture of the sun opened the sequence, followed by darkness, This was followed by scenes on a beach in low light - either at the end or beginning of the day. These were followed by heavy clouds and the moon. Then birds; before we returned to the beach. Was this the next day? As the sequence progressed, the pattern was repeated. Did the appearance of a house symbolise going home to sleep, I wondered? I tried to gauge whether the sun was rising or falling in the images presented, but couldn't detect a clear pattern. Suddenly the sun returned, full size, then sank in the sea. It was followed by the moon - and the music stopped. That was the end. While I adore the piece of music used, I did not find a coherent storyline in this AV. I was therefore not able to give it an award.

9. Transfiguration

From the title, I understood that the author's intention was to draw comparisons between graceful swans and a young ballerina. The story began with swans coming together and presumably courting. I enjoyed these images. The tall grasses in the background were a bit more intrusive than they would ideally be, but I thought the white vignetting was appropriate in the context of the story.

A major transition marked a change in the story, with the swans swimming off together. I thought the images in this section were slightly repetitive. After another major transition we were introduced to a ballerina. She was presented in a good variety of poses. Some of the images would ideally have been a bit sharper. Finally, the ballerina and a swan emerge side by side. It was a good attempt to tell a story. I awarded this AV, Merit.

10. Virginia Lake

This AV was full of surprises. It began with Swan Lake and some views of Virginia Lake, leading to close-ups of swans. I was sorry so many of the images were seemingly made around the middle of the day in fairly flat light. After one-and-a-half minutes the music changed dramatically and we were introduced to a family of coots. The transitions were much faster, and the effect was quite amusing. In less than a minute, however, there was another sharp change of music and we went back to Tchaikovsky to view a range of different birds and their offspring. A minute later, we returned to Coots. and their music. Some of these images were let down by insufficient sharpness.

At the fourth minute, the story and the music went back to Tchaikovsky. This time we were shown conflict on the edge of the lake involving a swan and a goose, before returning to the peace of the outer lake. I felt this AV made a genuine attempt to tell a story, but the story was over-complicated. The frequent changes of music, in my view, broke up the piece. I also felt the amount of panning and zooming was unsettling. I'm sorry but I did not give this one an award.

11. Virginia Lake's Charm

The title page of this AV says, Virginia Lake's Charm: Springtime to Autumn. And that's exactly what I saw. The AV clearly ran from Spring to Autumn. While there was a major focus on the birds, we also saw the beauty of the lake in different seasons. It was good that the author avoided panning and zooming.

The quality of many of the bird images was outstanding. There were revealing close-ups and also informative actions. Some of the pictures of chicks were quite emotional. The background music was fitting - particularly at the point where we moved into Autumn. I'm not sure that I would have included the two images featuring children. I think this AV was possibly a bit more coherent as a totally nature piece. But I have no hesitation in awarding it Honours.