

Swift at this year's Grammy Awards where she picked up the award for Best Music Video

Associated Press / Alamy Stock Photo

Written and Directed by Taylor Swift

Since the release of Taylor Swift's 10th studio album, *Midnights*, she has dropped three music videos: 'Anti-Hero', 'Bejewelled' and 'Lavender Haze'. Charlie Winward considers how these videos show Swift leaning in to the creative control she has now established over her music and what this might mean for her next creative move.

Taylor Swift's *Midnights* was released on October 21st 2022. In the months since then three music videos have been released, all of which include the credit 'Written and Directed by Taylor Swift' within their opening titles. Since the release of her 7th studio album, *Lover*, in 2019, she has had full ownership of her work, subsequently rereleasing earlier albums as 'Taylor's versions', the rights over which she has full control. It now seems as though Taylor Swift is enjoying full creative control over her work, both musically and visually. After co-directing music videos of the *Lover* era with Dave Myers and Drew Kirsch, Taylor's first solo directorial debut came with video for 'The Man' music video, the final single from *Lover*, released in 2020. She maintained her solo directorial status with the music videos of her career that followed: 'Cardigan' and 'Willow' from the 2020 albums *Folklore* and *Evermore*, and the recent Grammy Award winning music video

All Too Well: The Short Film from Red (Taylor's Version), released in 2021.

Midnights marks Taylor's first album to include multiple self-directed music videos. She explores a playful creativity in her writing of the music videos. Both 'Anti-Hero' and 'Bejewelled' include large sections of dialogue, separate from the song. The 'Anti-Hero' dialogue interrupts the bridge of the song. We see a depiction of Swift's funeral where her children find out that they have been left nothing in the will. Taylor playfully constructs the spoiled rich kid archetype in all three of her bratty blonde children -it's both witty and self-deprecating to choose to portray her future children in this way. The 'Bejewelled' opening dialogue sets a medieval scene offering an intertextual reference to the classic Cinderella fairy-tale, with a wicked step-mother played by acclaimed Hollywood actress Laura Dern, and mean step-sisters picking on 'House Wench Taylor'. Within both videos' dialogue, Taylor's

writing shines in its ability to not take itself too seriously and build genuine moments of humour.

Taylor's directorial aspirations extend beyond music videos. In December of 2022, she made a (controversial) appearance in *Variety's* Directors on Directors series, engaging in discussion with playwright and director, Martin McDonagh (whose film, *The Banshees of Inisherin*, won Best Screenplay and Outstanding British Film at the BAFTAs this year). In the discussion she states that after directing 10 music videos and a short film she is 'sort of inching [her] way along towards taking more responsibility'. At the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival, where she screened *All Too Well: The Short Film*, she stated, regarding her directing: 'I'd love to keep taking baby steps forward, and I think that I'm at a place now where the next baby step in not a baby step.'

Around the same time the *Variety* video was released, it was reported that she was set to direct her first feature-length movie. She has written an original script, and the film will be produced by Searchlight Pictures.

Casting

Taylor's creative control extends to the casting of the actors in the music videos. As well as casting famous actresses and music artists, another notable casting choice is Laith Ashley, a trans man, and model, as the love interest of the 'Lavender Haze' music video. In Swift's 2020 Netflix documentary *Miss Americana*, she vowed to no longer remain silent on political issues that were important to her, including her allyship to the LGBTQ+ community. Her 2019 'You Need To Calm Down' music video, featured countless LGBTQ+ celebrities cameoing through a song telling homophobes everywhere that they 'need to calm down'. This music video was met with mixed reviews among the LGBTQ+ community; while some were thrilled with the representation of so many queer people in one video, others accused Taylor of placing herself, a straight woman, at the centre of a LGBTQ+ narrative.

The 'Lavender Haze' video shows a sophisticated growth in Taylor's

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Model, actor and activist Laith Ashley

Ovidiu Hrubaru / Alamy Stock Photo



The many eras of Taylor Swift



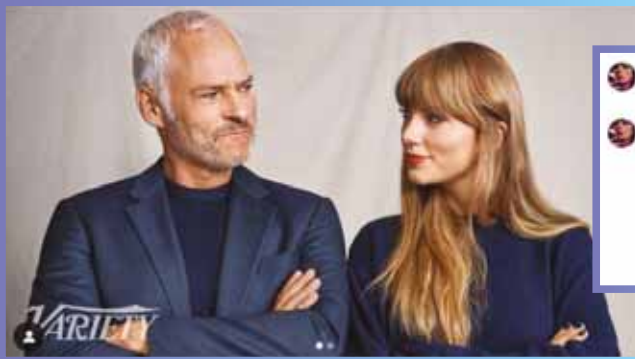
taylorswift The Lavender Haze video is out now. There is lots of lavender. There is lots of haze. There is my incredible costar @lath_ashley who I absolutely adored working with. This was the first video I wrote out of the 3 that have been released, and this one really helped me conceptualize the world and mood of *Midnights*, like a sultry sleepless 70's fever dream. Hope you like it 🌸

taylorswift All Too Well: The Short Film (BTS)

taylorswift The first seeds of this short film were planted over ten years ago, and I'll never forget the behind the scenes moments of the shoot. I owe everything to @sadiesink, Dylan O'Brien, my incredible DP @the_jrayang and my producer @saulysaulysauly. I also want to say thank you to our wonderful background actors and crew who made this story come to life so naturally. I loved every second of it and I will always remember it. All. Too. Well. The behind the scenes footage of ATW the short film is out now!



On Swift's Instagram, she is positioning herself as much as an up and coming director as she is a music artist



taylorswift • Following

taylorswift Had the honor of speaking to Martin McDonagh about his brilliant film *The Banshees of Inisherin*. This is one you HAVE to go see in theaters, so full of heart and will and darkness and humor. Check out showtimes and go support this incredible film 🍷❤️ @variety @banshees_movie @mschwartzphoto

TaylorSwift / Instagram

directing while maintaining the importance of representation. Casting a trans man as the sexy love interest of the video, a role that would typically be cast as a cis man, is significant for the usually under or misrepresented transgender community. The representation was far more subtle, with many fans not noticing the actor was trans which helps normalise the representation of transgender people in the eyes of the public. This casting is an extension of Taylor's allyship, this time without the drama of making it about her own advocacy.

The 'Bejewelled' video casts many notable celebrities. Iconic burlesque performer, Dita Von Tease, and famous makeup artist Pat McGrath make perfect additions to the glitz and glamour of 'Bejewelled'. While Laura Dern's casting as evil 'stepmommy' shows Taylor establishing an affiliation with the great actors of the film world.

Aligning herself with The Haim sisters, who recently appeared in *Liquorice Pizza* (2021) further supports Swift's intentions to extend into the world of film and cinema.

Easter Eggs

Taylor is no stranger to being self-referential and is famous for planting hidden Easter eggs, hinting to fans what is coming next. Through her career this has led to many wild fan theories of potential releases and speculated release dates – often met with disappointment. She pokes fun at the perception that everything she does has secret cryptic messages in the 'Anti-Hero' music video with one of her children speculating 'there's probably a secret encoded message that means something else' and her will ending with the post script 'P.S. there's no secret encoded message meaning something else'.

That said, there are certainly plenty of secret encoded messages in the *Midnights* music videos. The big question on any Swiftie's mind at all times is – what album is Taylor re-recording next?! In her campaign to reclaim ownership of her work from her former record label, she set out to re-record her first six albums. With two already released in 2021, *Fearless* (Taylor's Version) and *Red* (Taylor's Version), fans are anxious to find out which one is coming next. The 'Midnights' music videos offer many clues that *Speak Now* (Taylor's Version), will be her next release.

A clear Easter egg appears in 'Bejewelled' where the buttons of the floor numbers in the elevator are colour coded to match her albums. She then presses the third-floor button which matches the purple of the dress on the cover of her third album *Speak Now*. She then ends the video on the 13th

floor which is also shown as purple in the elevator, hinting that *Speak Now* (Taylor's Version) will be her next/13th album. The purple motif is also seen in 'Anti-Hero', as when she is shot by an arrow she bleeds in a glittery purple, and similarly after drinking shots she vomits a glittery purple. And unsurprisingly there is lots of lavender in the 'Lavender Haze' music video.

The 'Lavender Haze' music video also offers nods to several of the tracks on *Midnights*. As she sits on the floor surrounded by vinyl records, the cover sleeve of one reads 'Mastermind' – which is the name of track 13 on *Midnights*. Similarly, the weatherman on the TV is seen reporting rainfall at midnight, a reference to 'Midnight Rain', track 6 on the album. However, these references seem slightly unnecessary months after the album came out. This led some fans to theorise that she had initially planned for 'Lavender Haze' to be the lead single ahead of the album's release. This makes a lot of sense as the track list hints would be clever Easter eggs. The album ultimately had no true lead single, with the 'Anti-Hero' music video being released on the same day as the album. Such a marketing strategy could only be successful

with an artist of Taylor's status. It is also speculated that the 'Bejewelled' music video was released earlier than originally intended (just days after the 'Anti-Hero') to boost its streaming numbers to help her secure the entire top 10 of the billboard hot 100 – which she ultimately succeeded in doing.

This perhaps shows how Taylor's creative control has grown to cover the marketing and roll out of the album as she has been able to be responsive in her approach. I doubt there are many artists who would have the liberty to change their minds about releasing a single – especially after a music video had been filmed. But Taylor Swift is not simply one of 'many artists' she is *the* artist. She is known for a phenomenal work ethic: with four more re-recorded albums, a world tour, and feature-length film lined up (and that's just things we know about!), Taylor Swift remains an exciting creative force seemingly capable of anything she puts her mind to.

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Charlie Winward is studying Linguistics at Kings College London

Casting a trans man as the sexy love interest of the video, a role that would typically be cast as a cis man, is significant for the usually under or misrepresented transgender community.



from the MM vaults
All Too Well: an Artist Lost and Found
 – Matt Taylor, MM79