

Philips will switch to the much discussed Video CD format for films and music videos over the next few months. But what does this actually mean? Andy Clough unravels the mystery of...

VIDEO CD

CDI owners may well have felt a little baffled of late. First there was Full Motion Video, then came Digital Video and now (fanfare please) we have Video CD. So what, as they say, is going on?

It's quite simple, really. Philips was the first company to produce a commercially available system for playing films and music videos off a standard five inch compact disc. Any CDI player fitted with a DV cartridge can do this.

The first films and music videos on compact disc were produced to the so-called Green Book standard for CDI. This means they will play on a CDI machine with DV cartridge, Amiga CD32 with cartridge and a PC fitted with the ReelMagic MPEG board. Obviously, this limited the size of the potential market for films on CD to those people who owned one of the above systems.

Now several of the big consumer electronics companies have agreed a new, multi-platform standard - Video CD - which will enable future films and music videos to be played on a much broader number of multimedia systems. Video CD is based on the White Book Karaoke CD

standard agreed between JVC, GoldStar, Sony, Matsushita, Commodore and Philips.

Video CD won't make any discernible difference to how the films play on a CDI machine. What it will mean is that any Video CD title can be played on Philips's CDI system, an Amiga CD32 with DV cartridge, a 3DO player with cartridge, 386 PCs and Apple Macs equipped with CD-ROM XA drives and special MPEG video playback boards, and dedicated Video CD players.

Technics is already gearing up to produce its own Video CD players. Three prototypes were unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas last January: a five disc multi-player, a mini system with Video CD player and a portable player with flip-up LCD screen.

The broader choice of hardware will open up a much bigger

market for CD films and videos. It is estimated there will be one million systems capable of playing Video CDs by the end of 1994. However, it should be noted that the Video CD standard only applies to linear, non-interactive software. Computer games will still only play on the system for which they were designed (ie CDI games will only work on a CDI player).

The basic premise of Video CD is the playback of MPEG (Moving Pictures Experts Group) data. This is a set standard for the conversion and data compression of an audio and video signal into digital data capable of being stored on disc and then de-coded so it can be played back as standard video and stereo audio signals. (See technical feature on pages 30-33). Video CD is a worldwide standard. It will play on all televisions

fitted with the correct playing device, including PAL, NTSC and SECAM.

What this means for the CDI owner is that you can buy any Video CD compatible software and play it on your system.

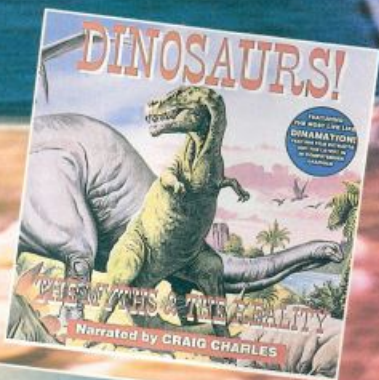
This should really expand the choice of software. To date, CDI owners have only been able to buy software sold by Philips specifically for the CDI platform. Now, a number of other companies are planning to release Video CD titles.

The first company in the world to manufacture a Video CD disc commercially is Discronics. This British company has teamed up with Castle Communications to produce the world's first three Video CD titles, which are due for release this month.

Castle's three titles are Pavarotti, Nessun Dorma; the



Top: David Bowie's Video Collection will be released by PMI on Video CD this spring. Left: Tina Turner, Simply the Best, and Iron Maiden, The First Ten Years, will include additional elements on Video CD such as album covers



History of Aviation; and Dinosaurs, Myths and Reality.

Electronics is also working with the Arts Council and Pascavision in France to produce a Video CD version of the Opera Imaginaire VHS video which went on sale six months ago. Opera Imaginaire comprises 12 different opera arias brought to life by state-of-the-art animation, including Tosca, Carmen and Lakme. It runs for 52 minutes and will cost £19.95.

Disctronics general manager John Metcalf reckons there could soon be 50 Video CDs available.

It is the music industry which is leading the way in adopting the new standard. BMG Records and Picture Music International (part of EMI) have announced they will release a selection of their best selling VHS music videos on Video CD. Six titles from EMI's top artists are due out in April. These will comprise straight reissues of existing videos, and three updated versions of the VHS versions. The straight reissues are: Queen, Box of Flix (three discs); David Bowie, The Video Collection; and Pink Floyd, Delicate Sound of Thunder.

There will also be three updated titles: Tina Turner, Simply the Best; Iron Maiden, The First Ten Years; and Pet



Top: one of the first titles to be released by Castle Communications will be *Dinosaurs, Myths and Reality*. **Above:** Queen, *Box of Flix* will be available in a three disc set for £24.99 from Picture Music International (part of EMI)

Shop Boys, Videography. These will include additional elements such as album covers and track lists. Two disc sets will cost £19.99, three disc ones £24.99.

PMI managing director Martin Haxby says: "Video CD is one of the most significant software developments this year, bringing CD-ROM into a much greater number of homes. This format will help the consumer overcome an inbuilt prejudice towards new technology by showing that the five inch compact disc can be

seen and heard through a variety of machines connected to a TV or hi-fi system."

BMG is planning to release five Video CD titles in the UK, but these have still to be announced.

BMG and PMI's Video CD music titles are being produced by OmniMedia, which specialises in the development of multimedia software. According to OmniMedia director Allen McCaskill, each disc will contain up to 65 minutes of video with

full CD quality stereo audio. However, it is important to note that the audio track contained on a Video CD disc cannot be played through a standard audio CD player. Video CD discs will come in single, double or triple packs. They will also include full CD functionality - such as instant track access, fast forward, skip and random play.

Philips says it will start manufacturing all its films and music video discs to the Video CD standard this spring.