



THE GREAT BEYOND
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McCloskey says. "But prospectively, what Parson and his colleagues have done is the best science we have at the moment."

McCloskey is setting up a group to systematically analyse changes in seismic stress in the immediate aftermath of future large earthquakes. The goal is to forecast within 12 hours the likelihood of big aftershocks, and map the high-risk 'red zones'.

"We have the methods to say strong things about what might happen days, months or years after the main shock," he says. "Aftershock forecasts will never be perfect. But in the absence of knowing something definite we're still able to advise people on the balance of probabilities."

McCloskey hopes that a scientific journal, such as *Nature*, will provide a forum for rapid dissemination of information such as daily hazard maps after a major quake.

But Philip Campbell, editor-in-chief of *Nature*, thinks such information would be better placed elsewhere because the peer-review process can slow things down. "Rushing the publication of such studies would not be good, as they usually improve quite a bit during peer review," he says. ■

Quirin Schiermeier

1. Parsons, T., Ji, C. & Kirby, E. *Nature* Advance online publication doi:10.1038/nature07177 (2008).
2. McCloskey, J., Nalbant, S. S. & Steacy, S. *Nature* **434**, 291 (2005).
3. Burchfiel, B. C. et al. *GSA Today* **18**, 4-11 (2008).

explanation, it's going to be strongly verified in the next 6-12 months," he says.

"Theoretical and phenomenological papers are always very useful," says Rita Bernabei, a physicist at the National Institute of Nuclear Physics in Rome, who heads the DAMA experiment and stands by its findings.

But other experimentalists remain sceptical. Smaller experiments using sodium iodide have failed to see the channelling effect, says Timothy Sumner, a physicist at Imperial College London. And the theoretical solutions that require lighter-weight particles do not fit with the favourite versions of supersymmetry theory. "I suspect it will be necessary to get additional data to bring the community around," he says. ■

Geoff Brumfiel

1. Petriello, F. & Zurek, K. M. Preprint at <http://arxiv.org/abs/0806.3989> (2008).
2. Foot, R. Preprint at <http://arxiv.org/abs/0804.4518> (2008).
3. Feng, J. L., Kumar, J. & Strigari, L. E. Preprint at <http://arxiv.org/abs/0806.3746> (2008).

Boyz 2 pipettemen

In a dreary, lonely lab a young female postdoc puts down her pipette to massage her aching latexed hands. Sounds like the perfect set-up for a hot new music video. Well at least it does to Tyler Kay, creative director at Compare Networks Production Group (CNPNG) in San Francisco, California.

A recent release from CNPNG features a group of five winsome young men singing the praises of a new automated pipetting system called epMotion, made by international biotech company Eppendorf. As the lab heroine is whisked to a beach under the Golden Gate Bridge, the band members gyrate around her and her glasses are shed along with her inhibitions, just before the chorus. "Girl you need epMotion" (whispered: "yeah girl it's time to automate.")

Stefanie Noehren, online project manager at Eppendorf in Hamburg, says the company was looking for a 'viral marketing' campaign that would spread the word about the epMotion product rapidly through the Internet. And CNPNG, the video production company of online biotech marketers Biocompare, was the obvious choice. In January, it created a minor internet sensation with *The PCR Song* by the mock group, Scientists for Better PCR — PCR (the polymerase chain reaction) is a lab technique used to amplify DNA. This advertisement from Bio-Rad Laboratories, based in Hercules, California, was styled after megastar group recordings of the 1980s like Band Aid's chart topping *Do They Know It's Christmas*. In *The PCR Song*, crooners mawkishly sing their way through lyrics like: "PCR, when you need to find out who the daddy is (who's your daddy?)" In the finale, one singer lovingly smooches a thermal cyclor.

"That thing took a life of its own," says Kay. It attracted more than 700,000 webpage views and spawned several homage videos from fans, singing or lip-synching the words. At Eppendorf, says Noehren, marketers decided in March to try out the music video format, this time aping one of

the prototypical manufactured male pop groups known colloquially as boy-bands — standard-bearers include 'N Sync, Take That, 98° and the Backstreet Boys.

Kay, a self-taught film-maker with Biocompare since near its inception, wrote the song with a list of product features and intense background research. "I had to listen to a whole lot of boy-band songs," says Kay. "I started to gain an appreciation for it. Those guys really know how to crank out the hits on a few chords." The result is *It's Called epMotion*, a saccharine-sweet parody of songs like 98°'s *Because of You*. Next they



Could these five men persuade you to buy their automated pipette?

COMPARE NETWORKS; EPPENDORF

needed a band to sing it.

In the true tradition of boy-band manufacture, the members represent a variety of races and styles: the tough-looking Asian, the Latin lover, the bad-boy surfer, the African American with a winning smile and an odd-looking skinny one with a surprisingly deep voice. The result is a

slick, if inexpensively produced video. The cost to Eppendorf for the video was just US\$50,000, says Noehren.

But does it sell the product? Amy Wagers at Harvard's Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, Massachusetts, says "It didn't tell me much about the product, if that's what they were going for, but it's working in that now I've gotten two of these videos via e-mail." YouTube shows nearly 22,500 views and counting. More may have found the video through other sites, and Noehren says a comparable number has clicked through to the website since the video was launched in early June. "We are quite satisfied," she says. ■

Brendan Maher

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