

Global 'Buzz' premieres Sunday

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In other words, MTV now customizes platforms, whether it's *MTV Unplugged*, an oasis of acoustic music with such guests as Sinead O'Connor and 10,000 Maniacs, or genre shows like *Headbangers Ball*, *Yo! MTV Raps* or *Club MTV*, with barely clad dance diva Downtown Julie Brown. Other fine-tuning:

► **A world beat.** MTV now has affiliates in 33 countries, including Japan, Australia and Israel.

MTV's most sophisticated series premieres Sunday at 01:00 GMT: *Buzz*, a hyperkinetic global magazine. Imagine *60 Minutes* cut up into bite-size info-chunks and served to the viewer at a mind-blowing pace. The debut episode of *Buzz* — at \$50,000-\$75,000 a show, the channel's costliest venture — tackles the touchiest of subjects: stereotypes.

Buzz is a heady rush of sights and sounds — and one of the few MTV shows allowed to go video-less.

And starting April 29 at 01:30 GMT: *Earth to MTV*, an international video show hosted by Italy's Jovanotti, 22, proud owner of 9,000 rap records ("I learnt my English from them," he says).

► **Cult of personalities.** MTV is pushing its own band of with-it celebs, many showcased in half-hour "vidcoms" (23:30 GMT Monday-Thursday) that weave videos between the antics.

Besides vidcom *Just Say Julie*, starring whacked-out henna-head Julie Brown (yes, there are two Julie Browns on MTV), there's Colin Quinn's *Manly World* and Kevin Seal: *Sporting Fool*. While both exude an intoxicating *eau de locker room*, they have nothing on the self-mocking comic prowess of *The Ben Stiller Show* (23:30 GMT Thursdays and 18:00 GMT Sundays).

Stiller, 24, son of Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara, puts his comedy genes to good use. So far, he has captured the essence of Eddie Munster, U2's Bono and Tom Cruise in *Born on the Fourth of July*.

► **Deja viewing.** Then there's Martha Quinn, from MTV's prehistoric days.

After being canned with the rest of the original VJs in 1985, she's back with *Martha Quinn's Greatest Hits* (midnight

and 04:00 GMT, Monday-Thursday) — a classic rock radio format applied to videos.

Quinn, 30-ish, realizes the cable stakes are much higher these days — MTV is now seen in 50.4 million homes compared to a mere 2.5 million when it began on Aug. 1, 1981. "At first it was appropriate for us to take a back seat to the videos and the channel. It's more personality-driven now."

► **Ship of fools.** MTV rocks the comedy boat every Friday at 7 p.m. with *Pirate TV*, supposedly transmitted from a barge off Manhattan.

The crew presents such warped fare as *The Stevie Wonder Years* and *Dungeons and Drag Queens*.

Video addicts may be concerned that MTV is becoming too much like a regular network. Not to worry (though *TV Guide* just took the unprecedented step of adding MTV shows to its grids and listings).

Herzog stresses, "We play videos 90 percent of the time. People still watch us in small bits, zipping in and out. It's our strength and our weakness."

"Ratings are down a bit," which translates to 345,000 prime-time viewers on average during 1989's fourth quarter, compared to 356,000 in 1988. "There's more competition out there for viewing eyeballs."

That competition includes the suddenly hot Fox network, which is going after the same 12-34 age group with *The Simpsons* and *21 Jump Street*. And all three major networks are adding music-based series next fall, including ABC's *Cop Rock*, an NBC sitcom with rapper the Fresh Prince and CBS' *Shangri-La Plaza*.

But advertisers continue to be high on MTV. "The demos are absolutely superb," says Bill Croasdale of Backer, Spielvogel, Bates ad agency.

Croasdale, citing research that finds 85 percent of all TVs in college dorms and study halls are tuned to MTV, has firsthand knowledge of the fierce loyalty the music channel inspires.

"When I visited my kid in college, I saw signs on TVs in study areas saying, 'This set tuned to MTV, change under penalty of instant death.' That says more than any survey."



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