

WHEN A BRAND NEW pilot show, *Buzz*, was aired on MTV last year, more than 200 gobsmacked viewers wrote in with comments such as: "Give us more. How did you know what I was thinking?" The result is a 26-part series, just started on Channel 4, which no one knows how to describe.

"We really haven't a clue," laughs Jon Klein, *Buzz*'s co-creator, writer, director and producer. "We started off saying it was a current affairs show for the 90s. Then we thought of calling it a pop/culture blender. Neither of them really fit."

Mark Pellington, Klein's partner, who also co-created, writes and directs the show, comes no closer. "*Buzz* is not 'youth television', if that means features on the latest trends in designer footwear from Milan, the acid house craze, or profiles of the new chart-topping act in the States," he says unhelpfully.

How about Stephen Garrett, Channel 4's commissioning editor for youth programmes? "We have real trouble too," he shrugs. "We started with 'a pop promo of ideas' and then moved on to 'a documentary with music', but that wasn't quite it, either."

Whatever it is, *Buzz* is the most exciting new programme for young people since... well, ever. Forget *Network 7*, *Reportage*, *Club X* - this show is mind-blowing.

Essentially *Buzz* is a presenterless collage of sound and vision. Each half-hour episode asks a fundamental question like, "What is your philosophy?" or "What are your greatest fears?" of people around the world, both celebrities and members of the public. Their answers are edited together around several off-the-wall features about things that are relevant to the weekly theme. But it's a lot more fun to watch than to describe.

"It's a combination of extraordinarily visual imagination and real serious purpose," says Garrett. "It is a very interesting examination of rather complicated ideas you'd usually see on programmes

BUZZ!



Directors: Pellington (top) and Klein

FACT FILE

Cost per 30-minute show: about \$100,000 (£60,000)
Average no of edits: 2,200
Average length of audio tape used: 8,750 feet
Person hours: 1,200
Number of people working on *Buzz*: approx 50
Countries filmed in: 31
Countries seen in: eight, rising
Cups of coffee per show: 80
Silliest question asked globally: would you rather be deaf or have your genitals numbed?
Most popular answer: deaf

like *Everyman* or *Equinox*, but presented in a rather unusual and distinctive way."

Klein is a former MTV newsman and part of the launch team of MTV Europe. His background in New York punk bands is coming in useful as he and his young team - average age 22 - put together the soundtrack for show five.

Last year he had come up with the idea of a show which

Fast, groovy and global - a new series let loose on Channel 4 aims to suck you into the screen. Can you cope with Buzz?

he'd called *Buzz*. MTV colleague Mark Pellington - director of pop videos for the likes of Malcolm McLaren and De La Soul - had a similar idea for a show, which he'd called *Sign Of The Times*. MTV bosses put their heads together and told them to get on with it.

"We both wanted to make something that mattered and that would last longer than 30 seconds," enthuses 29-year-old Klein, talking as fast as he edits. "That's all we want to do - affect people. We want to make them think about what's going on around them."

"*Buzz* is concerned as much with emotional information as traditional journalistic detail," adds Pellington, 28. "We want our viewers to know why they should care, not just know."

Just exactly who their viewers are going to be is open to question. In America, it's being shown on MTV, a channel built on the anarchic language of pop videos. In Britain we're seeing it on Channel 4, which may be more experimental than the BBC or ITV, but not so different that it can prepare you for the shock of *Buzz*.

"First of all, we're not making it with an imaginary 16-year-old audience in mind," says Klein. "All we're doing is pleasing ourselves, friends and people we

respect. I'm sure a lot of people won't like *Buzz* but as long as they either love it or hate it, that would be fine."

"On TV there's always someone standing there between you and what's really happening," adds Pellington, "explaining things. We just want to suck people in."

"*Buzz* changes the channel for you, compressing the images and sound of the world into a version of reality that is more real and more emotional than the untampered-with version."

And if you think *Buzz* is only for young people, think again. Eighty-year-old American novelist William S Burroughs loves it and has asked Klein and Pellington out for dinner.

"He thought it was too slow," laughs Klein. "Everyone else is running from the screen, screaming, and Bill thinks it's too slow!"

This might sound a bit arty, but *Buzz* is essentially a fun show. "It's simple, really," explains Klein. "In our own way we syphon an aspect of the world down into half an hour!"

"Once you start watching *Buzz*," says Garrett, "it's very hard to stop. It has a way of locking you into its pace and when it stops it's like climbing off a big dipper - you feel exhilarated." EDWIN J BERNARD