

'BUZZ'

ROB DEACON MEETS JON KLEIN AND MARK PELLINGTON, THE INSPIRATIONS BEHIND CHANNEL 4'S INNOVATIVE NEW POP CULTURE PROGRAMME WHICH STARTED ITS FIRST RUN LAST FRIDAY.



LAST Friday marked the opening shot in a new series that could revolutionise television. It wasn't pop programming in the sense of endless disposable promos linked by puerile effects. Nor was it "Youth TV", with arrogant hipsters disparagingly telling you what's going down. And it was definitely not a pompous DJ desperately seeking another controversial subject in a farcical attempt to improve the ratings. Every Friday at 6pm on Channel 4 for a planned 26 weeks, you'll find "Buzz", a regular 30-minute mind revolution.

"Buzz" hurtles you through a trip around the planet. Cultures, languages, attitudes, questions, information, suggestion: each show takes a theme and blows it wide open, bombarding you with expressive imagery, people's opinions, prophecies, facts, and maybe the odd lie. There is sound to accentuate the observation, link the information and create the constant flow. But this soundtrack leaps through a gamut of musical styles: Bad Brains, Edelweiss, Elvis, KC Flight, Les Negresses

Vertes, My Bloody Valentine, N.W.A.; sampling from every available source. "Buzz" is the harmonious marriage between sound and vision — neither play the dominating role, everything is important.

It's been created by two blokes who took my last tinner to cover brunch. They've been let loose in a studio and editing suite, with libraries of footage, a team of 12 accomplices and the freedom to let their imaginations run riot. They're enthused by their creation, excitedly discussing the shows they'll be making over the next few weeks. They talk more than the average 180 words per minute, and constantly finish each others sentences as I fire questions at the ketchup.

"TV does not have to suck," they claim in unison. Jon Klein was once in a New York punk outfit called The Method. He was a desk assistant at ABC Network News and then a writer/editor for WABC, ABC's big brother in New York. In '85, he joined the MTV news team and was one of the gang of five that moved to London to launch MTV Europe.

"A presenter will introduce a band, then maybe tell you his opinion before you get to see anything. That wastes time and annoys us. Why be lame?"

Mark Pellington specialises in post-production collage and sound/image juxtaposition. He joined MTV in '83 and worked his way up to senior producer/director of their "On Air" department. He's made promos in his spare time, among them Malcolm McLaren's "Waltz Darling" and De La Soul's "Say No Go". He also has a box full of gold, silver and bronze awards for his work that could easily rival Seb Coe.

"One of the intentions of the show is to get a message out. But we don't want to preach or tell people how to run their lives. We want to excite people and show them a broader view of the world."

"Buzz" takes the alien view. It's like, look at these humans, look what they do. There's a piece in the fourth show which covers ecstatic music which has everything from African trance music, Acid House, gospel and

muzak: here's how people sing, dance, praise God and exist."

"They started working together on the outline for "Buzz" 18 months ago. They convinced Initial TV and Channel 4 to back the idea and set about forming a young production team, concentrating on enthusiasm before experience. They made a list of themes they wanted to cover (creation, cultural stereotypes, memory), then started researching, hunting and filming. The minimum of commentary is provided typographically ("So that you read it in your own voice").

The few pieces that are spoken are a filmed reaction to the same question, put to people of all ages in contrasting cultures. The crowning exception is the occasional verbal barrage from William Burroughs, a strong influence on both directors.

"We met Burroughs at an art opening, along with JG Ballard and Ralph Steadman. We were totally in awe of them, but there we were talking to them on kind of our own level, albeit with a great amount of respect for them. Buzz tries to capture that feeling, reflecting our influences, but portraying the information on a natural level."

"At the very beginning of starting on the show we sent Burroughs the themes. He read texts that we'd prepared and he also recorded some original pieces, words and ideas which we try to integrate into every show."

"Buzz" is archetypal both in its approach and execution. Its creators are more in line with an excited new group about to release their debut album than TV directors working on a new slot.

"We want a direct line between the inside of the TV set and somebody's brain and if that means shaking them up a bit then fine," Klein claims. "Whatever works, whatever portrays the point and feels right is what we do. We've been given 30 minutes to show the world something new, and there's too much we want to cover to waste any time."