

Yo! Wake Up and Think!

A funky music-video channel gets semiserious

By EDWARD M. GOMEZ

How do you create a provocative television show emphasizing serious social issues for the music-video generation? How do you grab an audience whose attention span is notoriously short? Cut! Flash! Zap! Stun! *Buzz* is the answer. A hyperkinetic new program from New York City-based Music Television, or MTV, *Buzz* focuses on such subjects as racism and censorship. The show made its debut on Britain's independent Channel 4 early this month after premiering in the U.S. Negotiations are under way to broadcast the new show elsewhere in Europe and in Australia.

Created in London by the 24-hour pop-music channel's technowizards Jon Klein, 29, and Mark Pellington, 28, the half-hour program is MTV's high-energy attempt to raise viewers' consciousness about timely topics on a global scale. Observes Klein: "It's a show that says, 'Yo! Keep watching. Wake up and think!'" *Buzz* has no host, no special guests, no narrator and no script. Gone is the meet-the-press lineup of pundits and politicians volleying questions and answers over headline news topics. Instead Pellington, an experienced music-video director, and Klein, a former U.S. network-news assistant and punk-rock band member, serve up a barrage of images and topical phrases propelled by a multilayered voice-and-music



Producers Mark Pellington and Jon Klein in a London studio

Topical issues have never before looked as dizzy as this.

sound track. "We use videotape, film stock, found footage, Polaroids, anything," Klein explains. The duo's objective: present as many points of view on a subject as the show's open-ended format can accommodate.

Each dizzying episode of *Buzz* is anchored by a central theme. "Cultural stereotypes," snarls gravel-voiced U.S. author and counterculture hero William S. Burroughs at the outset of *Buzz*'s first installment. The show then coughs up a hodgepodge of sounds and images intend-

ed to expose prejudicial preconceptions. In man-on-the-street interviews from around the world, a youthful respondent asserts categorically that Germans are "blond and brave"; a black African calls Japanese "yellow men with cameras . . . who are taking over the world." In a sequence of unlikely vocal overdubs, a Chinese woman "speaks" unnaturally in a heavy Scandinavian accent—a pointed reminder that speech is often used to measure a person's race and class. In a segment on women, U.S. artist Sarah Tuft stitches together a music video from TV commercials. "I must get free of the messages being fed to me!" she declares in *Don't Make Me Up*, her own rap song protesting advertisers' image-shaping of women.

Pellington and Klein have earned reputations as graphic innovators for their work on MTV's clever station-identification logos and promotional spots. At times as sleek as Benetton clothing ads, their *Buzz* images can also appear as grainy and crude as home movies. For television, theirs is a quirky, radical aesthetic. Some viewers may find it too incoherent or superficial to serve as effective issues-oriented programming, even by the medium's already lowbrow standards. Replies Pellington: "We're not trying to be news, art or public affairs. We're creating a new visual language. If *Buzz* gets viewers to be more active than passive, then it will have succeeded." And even if it doesn't, *Buzz* will persist. At least the furiously energetic show offers a smorgasbord of notions about the future of an increasingly problem-ridden world. What could be more serious? ■

Milestones

MARRIED. Paul Hogan, 50, Australian hunk who created the Outback hero in "*Crocodile Dundee*;" and Linda Kozlowski, 32, his co-star in the two "*Crocodile*" films; he for the third time, she for the first; in Byron Bay, Australia.

APPOINTED. Hau Pei-tsun, 70, retired four-star general and for eight years Taiwan's highest-ranking military officer; as Premier of Taiwan by the country's President, Lee Teng-hui. Hau's promotion from Defense Minister, a portfolio he held for only six months after leaving his army job, caused an immediate uproar in Taiwan, where no military man has held such a top post since the 1975 death of Chiang Kai-shek. Hau insisted that "political participation by a soldier does not mean military intervention in politics."

RECOVERING. Soviet political maverick Boris Yeltsin, 59; after emergency surgery for acute sciatica; in Barcelona.

SENTENCED. Zsa Zsa Gabor, seventysomething, Hungarian-born prima donna who hit the headlines last June when she slapped a traffic cop; to 60 additional hours of community service for violation of probation; in Beverly Hills.

DIED. Antoine Vitez, 59, French theatrical actor, director and teacher whose erudite style mixed, he once said, "daily life with grotesque contemporary politics"; of a brain hemorrhage; in Paris. After two decades with the Théâtre National de Chaillot and the Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique, Vitez spent the past two years as administrator of the Comédie Française,

expanding the troupe's repertoire to include works by Bertolt Brecht and Paul Claudel.

DIED. Sergio Franchi, sixtyish, Italian-born tenor and actor; of a brain tumor; in Stonington, Conn. Franchi recorded more than two dozen albums, including *O Sole Mio*, *Memory* and *Volare*.

DIED. Patriarch Pimen, 79, politically accommodating head of the Russian Orthodox Church who presided over the faith's revival after decades of repression; in Moscow. As Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Pimen led millions of believers in a country that was officially atheist. After a historic meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988, Pimen praised the Soviet leader's efforts to grant more religious freedom.