

MTV's innovations stifled by commercialism

By WINSTON LLOYD
Staff Writer

Whatever you think of the music, you must admit that Music Television is doing something interesting. Critics usually point to "Moonlighting" or "The Wonder Years" when they talk of nonconventional television, but the most abstract and avant-garde TV is on cable — specifically MTV.

MTV began back in 1981. Remember Adam Ant and Flock of Seagulls? Yes, some of what they started with is long gone, while other groups have flourished under the power of MTV. Years ago MTV could give unknown bands an audience. It was the place to go for alternative music. When you were tired of the radio, you turned on MTV.

To its credit, MTV was responsible for the early success of Madonna, Duran Duran and, to some extent, the Talking Heads. But now, the cable channel seems to merely complement the tunes already well known from G-105.

During its existence, MTV has added new programs to its lineup and is no longer a visual radio station. The earliest attempt at disproving the notion that MTV was just visual radio was MTV Music News. In a program consisting of a few minutes every hour or half hour, a video jockey announced the latest concert or recording information. Movie news was later added. Now the news briefs are anchored by Rolling Stone writer Kurt Loder. All stories are put together for the

half-hour program "The Week in Rock," which airs several times during the weekend. Expect a lot about Bon Jovi on this show.

The network has relegated its alternative, experimental non-mainstream music to a mere "120 Minutes" a week, late on Sunday nights. Here you find everything from The Dead Milkmen to R.E.M. And you can find the "classic" videos from MTV's early years on weeknights at 12:30 a.m., on "Deja Video" with VJ Martha Quinn. Remember Big Country and The Human League?

Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. is "The Big Picture" hosted by "Premiere" editor Chris Connelly — all the movie news in 30 minutes. And the weekend brings "The MTV Top 20 Video Countdown." Expect more Bon Jovi.

Then it gets weird.

"Remote Control" is the network's version of a game show. Contestants, usually college students, are strapped into recliners and answer questions about television or music. A typical category is "Brady Physics." For example, if Cindy and a bowling ball are dropped from the top of the World Trade Center, which will hit the ground first? Another is "Dead or Canadian." Contestants are given a name and must decide if the person is dead or from Canada. There is no loss of points for wrong answers, thus adding to the fun.

Some of MTV's best shorts are the 30-second commercials for MTV itself. Probably the best of these short films is the series "That

Was a -----'s Life." In these computer-animated shorts, we see life from the point of view of an animal. The film ends with the death of the animal, followed by laughter and the logo.

Then there are the regular MTV commercials. One from the past went something like this: Amidst scenes of Mayan ruins the voice-over says, "The Mayans had the greatest civilization known to man. But they had no MTV... and they died. Don't let this happen to your family." A classic.

Now they have equally interesting commercials. One fills the four corners of the screen with the names of various world cities. In each corner the city is written in a different language. After flashing several names and playing sound typical from the city (i.e. gunfire for Beirut) you get the words "ONE TIME" "ONE PLACE" "ONE WORLD" and the MTV logo. Then there are the commercials with the MTV symbol fighting its way down a corridor, reminiscent of "Altered States" or the one full of hellish claymation figures and a tentacled, breathing MTV logo. Some are sick, but all are interesting.

How about the videos themselves? We used to get performance videos (Springsteen), sexy-girl videos (ZZ Top), and exotic-location videos (Duran Duran). Now we seem to have nothing but pseudo-intellectual black-and-white videos. Everyone's doing them. It seems it started with the Police's "Every Breath You Take,"

but now if a band wants to look serious, reflective, brooding or epic, they ditch the Fujicolor and load up the black and white. Bon Jovi, Metallica, Lou Reed, Guns N' Roses, U2... everyone is using it. You may also have noticed the prevalence of heavy metal acts. That is pretty much their format these days. It is kind of disconcerting to see R.E.M. sandwiched between Europe and White Lion. There's a show called "Head-bangers Ball," which has so many metal acts it looks like "Satan Comes To TV." It's a shame they don't keep much of the metal confined to that show.

It also seems that videos have gotten into a rut. They often have the same lighting, the same camera angles or even the same "experimental" types of shots. Only when the images are put together to convey a certain feeling does the video work. For instance, Def Leppard's "Rocket" is cluttered with televisions showing footage of Nixon, headlines and the space program. These are integrated with shots of the band

which would seem formulaic, but the camera movement creates more of a feeling for the song and stimulates you to think about the visuals. However, R.E.M.'s "Stand" seems to be just images slapped together, no matter how different they may be or whatever worldwide importance they try to convey. "Stand" is very unlike the overlapping and apocalyptic visuals in "The One I Love," which helped give the song the "brutal" feeling that Michael Stipe intended.

Everything on MTV could be experimental, visually fascinating and thought provoking, but some bands unfortunately use videos simply as commercials for themselves. Not everything can be as creative as "They Might Be Giants" and "Ana Ng" or as interesting as Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror." But if you're going to spend any time with MTV, be prepared for a lot of boring stuff in between the too few moments of creativity. And watch the commercials — they are often better than the videos.

Wisdom, Joe Bob and addiction

By JOE BOB BRIGGS
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It's a horrible thing to behold when your best friend keels over on the sidewalk, grabs his stomach and screams out "Betty-Ford me! Betty-Ford me!" But, unfortunately, we live today in an addictive society where these scenes are all too common, especially at the corner of Elm and Akard in downtown Dallas. I'd advise you to avoid that area. It doesn't have to happen to you, though. You can save your friends from suddenly flopping around on their stomachs like headless gators, frothing at the mouth and screaming out Judas Priest lyrics. You can be alert to the telltale Signs of Addiction.

Have you or a loved one done any of the following things? If so, you might have a junkie in your house.

1. Your teenage daughter hasn't eaten solid food in three weeks and hasn't slept in six. She insists she's "just dieting and studying for a midterm."

2. Every time you pass a bar, your co-worker wants to stop in because "I love peanuts in a plastic bowl."

3. Your wife is convinced the elementary school PTA has a con-

tract out on her.

4. Six guys come up to you after church and say, "Will you be bringing your wife to any more parties?"

5. Your best friend tells you he has a computer program that's figured out what the point spread should be on the 1992 Super Bowl.

6. The same best friend asks you to loan him \$74,000 — "just till next Thursday."

7. When you take your secretary to Denny's, her only decision is whether to order from the left side or the right side of the menu. Later, she orders the Nacho Plate "for the road."

8. A female co-worker orders "The Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker Story" to read on her coffee break, and starts talking about how "mean" you are because "I don't think Tammy looks that bad, when you see her in the right light."

9. Someone you dated three months ago calls to ask "Did I leave my car over there?"

10. When the cop asks "Do you know why I pulled you over?" you answer "You're depressed and you needed to talk to somebody."

11. When the cop asks "Do you know why I pulled you over?" you

answer "No, my radio only gets AM."

12. When the cop asks "Do you know why I pulled you over?" you answer "I'm pulled over?"

13. When the cop asks "Do you know why I pulled you over?" you answer "Does this count on the final?"

14. Your friend tells you he's licked his drinking problem because he figured out "it's that twelfth Scotch that does it — I'm stopping at eleven tonight."

15. Later that night, the same friend says, "I know, I know — it's the twelfth one, but who said I can't get drunk once every day or so?"

16. One morning a co-worker says he's found a new drug that is absolutely non-addictive. Later that day he tells you that some time during the night he lost his ability to operate a Coke machine.

17. A co-worker is reading this column over your shoulder and laughing too hard.

18. A co-worker is reading this column over your shoulder and saying "I don't know what he means."

19. A co-worker is reading this column over your shoulder and saying "Hey, man, I been there."

General College

By ANDREW LAWLER
Staff Writer

The first new show of the National College Television (NCTV) generation premiered this week, and here's a peek at the spicy goings-on. Reconciliations abounded this week.

Lisa and Joseph flew off to Nashville to find the truth about Sarah.

Billy finally admitted his love for Paige. Big kiss. Billy goes off to break up with Trisha and inadvertently reminds her of her plans for revenge on Alex and Jack.

That other Davenport, drug dealer Tessa (sporting a new "do"), forced Trevor and Anne into the woods at gunpoint. Trevor admits he was going to betray Tessa because he loves Anne. Trevor makes a grab for the gun and in the ensuing struggle is shot. Anne tries to flee the scene but trips and hits her head on a rock.

Waking with amnesia, Anne is convinced by Tessa that she killed Trevor. Tessa further convinces her not to go to the police, leaving Anne no chance but to rely on the person who hates her the most — TESSA.

Courtney gets grabbed by Randy, who warns that her estranged love, Jason, is about to get beat up again by the Tri Psi's. Unbeknownst to them, Darrell, Courtney's ex-fiance and current football star, hears all. Darrell and his teammate Doug go to confront the Tri Psi's, Ed and Mark.

In reality, Ed and Mark had planned to beat up Courtney in front of Jason and were waiting to snatch her. But the

appearance of the football players changes things. Proving that racists really are incredibly stupid, the slight Mark takes a poke at Darrell. Doug and Darrell begin to disassemble Ed's and Mark's bodies when Courtney arrives and stops the fight.

A stunned Mark asks why Courtney saves them after all they've done. The response? "You're still a person," she says.

Brendan awakes to find Mary Catherine gone. He finds a note from her saying that she loves him, but needs time to think about everything. Brendan is bummed.

Alex discovers that she has not missed Jack after all. He gets off the plane and rushes to her. He abandons his recording contract to stay with her. Reconciliation.

Meg learns from nurse Rabinowitz that Kyle's stomach was pumped in time to save him from his overdose of sleeping pills.

Courtney thanks Darrell for what he has done and finally gets back with Jason. Love conquers all. BIG kiss. The happy couple wanders off and just happen to trip over Trevor's body just as their old friend Detective Hooper arrives to investigate the shooting. Hooper begins to arrest the two for the shooting when Jason yells "Run!" which they do.

Will Anne realize the truth? Will Trisha get her revenge? Will Courtney and Jason ever get a moment of peace? And just what is the truth about Sarah? The answers to these questions and many others may be answered in next week's episode of the world's only nationally broadcast, totally student produced soap: GENERAL COLLEGE!