

The flaws of magazine programmes

By Benson Idonije

The most convenient and common programme format on our television screens today, in terms of local production, is the magazine. Apart from the fact that no professional attention is paid to the production of these programmes, the situation is further compounded by the indiscriminate use of music videos.

The apparent reason for putting on these videos is to fill viewing time, elongate the programme, for want of any concrete material, for lack of creative ideas, as these fillers come up after every item, usually an interview, as if it is a "music - and-chit-chat-show?"

This practice is common with almost all the magazines, be they specialised or general interest - oriented: and the music is usually foreign.

Actually, it is out of place enough to fall back on music videos because there is no other way to continue with a programme. It is worse still to employ foreign music when the issues under discussion have to do with happenings in our own local environment.

I can excuse a programme like "Friday Night Live" which is more of a chat show, an entertainment package in which, even the serious issue gets reduced to light heartedness. There is no doubt about it that it is a good show because the producer-presenter puts a lot into it as he defies the rules of the interview by deliberately using the knowledge of research and the subject matter to establish controversies, set up his guests, for the purpose of rattling them on the hot seat. On the other hand it is the only programme that generally patronises our local artistes, except that he should begin to find a basis for using them, some criteria for determining the quality of the music so that it is not just an all-comers affair that can affect the image and beauty of the programme.

"Morning Ride" is a general interest magazine, and it is perhaps the longest so far, with different interviewers coming in at various points, a situation which can, in itself, confuse the viewer and hamper the logical progression of the programme of the programme. As if this is not enough, this rag bag is usually fragmented with music that has nothing to do with the stories.

I watched the programme on February 8,1997, and the quality of the interviews was quite good. Some of the interviewees were heavy weights, highly placed people in government who should have a lot to say in terms of briefing the people about the activities of their ministries, and giving account of their stewardship. The interviews were interspersed with beautiful music by the likes of Tracey Chapman, a grammy award winner and singer of message music, a creative artist to watch and listen to, Kayode Olaide, a new saxophone and Afro beat act who is breaking new grounds; a graphic artist-turned-musician from Etsako area of Edo State who called himself 'Charlimo', with some

beautiful, rock-oriented music that is bound to go down well because of its tremendous potential, among others.

These videos were all absorbingly entertaining enough to capture the attention of the viewer and dominate his focus, to the point of relegating main objective of the programme to the background.

I saw a really ridiculous one in "Expressions," a specialised magazine with an excellent concept, currently enjoying prime viewing on NTA 10 on afternoons. By the definition of the programme's objective. It is "a magazine that lends its voice to art and culture." But the very first guest had nothing to do with this brief, he turned out to be an 'Afro Links' executive who had come to advertise the objectives and strategies of his 'American Lottery Visa' business. The other guests were relevant but from their inputs, they did not sufficiently justify their appearance on the programme. Chief Eddy Ugboma, a veteran film maker who had something to say, and who should have come first in terms of item placement, appeared at the tail end of the programme only for him and the presenter to start negotiating and fixing another appointment for next Saturday.

The programme however had forthcoming contributors, the previous week, but its success was narrated by a prolonged, irrelevant music video, a boring, repetitive calypso which did not even sound musical enough.

One of the most educative and informative programmes on TV for today's woman is perhaps "Body Care TV," another weekend special on NTA 10. The quality of its items is usually good, the presenter communicates effectively well and the programme is interesting. But the focus of the magazine is usually shifted by the unnecessary display of the latest in foreign music videos, like the colourful one I saw last week in which Michael Jackson was allowed to go to town, as if the show belonged to him.

The magazine is an assembly of many and varied items or issues packaged into one showcase. The viewer cannot keep too many different things in his head at a time, and so they should be presented without any distractions in such an interesting, logical manner that they all can be easily appreciated, and remembered, even long after the programme. To achieve this objective, a thread should be provided with speech links and presentation to tie all the items together into one whole story, the continuity of which should not be allowed to be broken by music videos which sing about all kinds of themes.

Music should be made to play specific roles in magazines, and not used just for the fun of it. It could stand on its own as an item for its entertainment value, because there is something special about it, and presenter should say what.

It could be used to reinforce a point of view in the magazine in terms of relevance. For instance, one expected 'Morning Ride' to establish transition into that exciting interview with Rev. Patric Awuzie of ZOE ministries two weeks ago, with a bit of gospel music, but it did not come. Instead, different types of music were being unnecessarily displayed in other areas of the programme.

Music could also be used as a bridge for transition, in which case the music is saying nothing, just instrumental, to establish the passage of time.

How ever, music is not a complete necessity in magazines. A magazines. A magazine that is well scripted and presented, with all the ingredients of production in place, does not need music to recommend it. After all, 'News Line" in the hands of Frank Olize, is perhaps the most interesting, popular and successful magazine on TV today; and it does not accommodate music videos.