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Business Media

Gideon Spanier



THEY look like the cool older kids in the playground, inviting you to share in their fun. Six fashionably dressed teenage presenters stride confidently onto a stage in a studio in BBC Television Centre – to a chorus of screams from the over-excited audience of 100 or so children, aged between eight and 14.

Soon the presenters and the audience are jumping and singing along together to Pixie Lott's hit Kiss The Stars Tonight. Watching in the studio, the sense of innocent fun is infectious.

Welcome to a recording of Friday Download, the hottest new children's show on TV, a mixture of live performances and chat, with segments dedicated to the latest pop music, films, video games and gadgets. There are fashion tips, jokes and that karaoke-style singalong too. The idea is that it is billed as "the instant download for the week ahead".

The hour-long magazine show, which airs on CBBC on Fridays at 6pm and is repeated on BBC2, has become essential viewing for the target audience of under-12s. The first series debuted a year ago and was shortlisted for a Bafta, helping it to get recommissioned. The third began last month. As many as 400,000 watch. It has been among the most popular CBBC shows on iPlayer, and often trends on Twitter – proof that it attracts older teens.

Record labels and games manufacturers are taking notice. In a sign of Friday Download's pulling power, the three most recent number-one artists in the singles chart – Tulisa, Carly Rae Jepsen and Rita Ora – have sung in the past month. The fact this young audience loves music is giving hope to the record industry, even as CD sales dive.

"Not since Top Of The Pops has a TV show featured number one artists week after week," says Jeremy Salsby, founder of production firm Salt Beef TV, who created Friday Download.

But it is the six presenters, aged between 14 and 16 when they began, who are key because they are barely older than the viewers. "It's akin to a



Teenage stars: Friday Download's hosts Richard Wisker, Georgia Lock, Tyger Drew-Honey, Dionne Bromfield, Ceallach Spellman and Aidan Davis

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The hottest kids' show on TV giving hope to music industry

nine-year-old hanging on to the word of their 14-year-old cousin," says Salsby.

The presenters – two girls and four boys, with backgrounds from across the UK – include familiar faces: Tyger Drew-Honey acted in TV comedy Outnumbered. Singer Dionne Bromfield, god-daughter of Amy Winehouse, has released an album. And dancer Aidan Davis was a finalist on Britain's Got Talent. The others are Georgia Lock, Richard Wisker and Ceallach Spellman.

None had presented before but they had credibility in music, acting, dance and so on. Salsby, a former producer of The Big Breakfast and creator of kids' show Sorry I've Got No Head, believed that was vital as he wanted the show to have a free-flowing, authentic feel. That is why, even though the show is carefully planned, it is unscripted. "Thirty

years ago, the kids would all be from stage school, with scripts written by producers like me," says Salsby, a 44-year-old father of four. "I couldn't script it and know how they'd use a phrase like 'sick' or 'swag'."

Salsby, who set up Salt Beef in 2009, credits old shows such as Why Don't You? and Janet Street-Porter's Def II for inspiration. But unlike some "yoof" shows of previous generations, Friday Download doesn't use bizarre camera angles and fast-paced editing.

Presenters are given time to talk about the latest electronic gadget or discuss what's "hot or not" – with visiting pop stars invited to join in. At the end of each segment, they declare: "Download complete." Salsby likens it to an iPod, as the show shuffles from topic to topic. As this is a BBC show,

there are strict editorial rules – something that should appeal to parents who know their pre-teens are discovering the world but don't want them to be bombarded with commercial or sexual messages.

The girl presenters don't wear heels or heavy make-up, and it's been known for pop stars to be told to change their outfit. "We have to be very careful to have age-appropriate lyrics and video," says Melissa Hardinge, the executive producer for CBBC. "We won't allow some of the lyrics that even day-time Radio 1 has allowed."

Commercial plugs are banned too. So while Friday Download will road-test a new video game each week, viewers aren't told the price or that they should go out and buy it.

Even so, the exposure is influential.

"We do see a sales lift when artists appear on the show," says Ruth Parrish, media director at Island Records, part of Universal Music, Britain's biggest record company. "We love Friday Download. They are great with artists – probably as they have talented artists within their own rights, presenting."

Salsby says it's easy to forget what a risk CBBC boss Damian Kavanagh took. "Why on earth would you want a programme with six 14- to 16-year-olds who have never presented before, and then put it on for an hour for 13 weeks? It's insane but here we are. It's a great indicator that risk can work in TV."

Friday Download suits the social media age, says Salsby. "Everyone wants to be the first to know things and to be the first to share." The happy faces in the studio suggest he's right.

IN THE AIR

BY GIDEON SPANIER

Coulson's sleepover chez Rebekah

ONE intriguing detail to emerge from Andy Coulson's witness statement to the Leveson Inquiry: He said he spent New Year's Eve 2010 at Rebekah Brooks' Oxfordshire home. The significance is twofold: first, Coulson was David Cameron's director of communications at No 10 and Brooks was chief executive of News International – just as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation was bidding for BSkyB. And Coulson's stay chez Brooks came after she had two social meetings with Cameron, on December 23 and on Boxing Day. The phone-hacking crisis was also mounting as Ian Edmondson, then a news executive at the News of the World, had just been named in court in connection with the hacking of actress Sienna Miller's phone. Coulson quit in January 2011,

a mere three weeks after staying with Brooks.

■ REBEKAH Brooks told the Leveson Inquiry that Tony Blair and his circle were "a constant presence in my life for many years", and she had meetings with him at least 19 times during his premiership. Number of mentions of Rebekah in Tony Blair's memoirs, *A Journey? Zero*.

■ HOW much was Rebekah Brooks paid as chief executive of News International? Accounts just out for NI Group for the year to July 2011, when Brooks was still in charge, do not name the highest-paid director but his or her annual pay package was £1.9 million.

■ SENIOR figures at the top of the BBC are unhappy about expensive talent show *The Voice*, which has seen ratings slide since the "blind" auditions stage. "It feels too much like other talent shows," warns a leading BBC executive.

■ EX-BBC director-general Greg Dyke has dismissed Boris Johnson's call for the next D-G to be a Tory. The former BBC boss believes the Mayor is aggrieved at his treatment by BBC London, whose well-regarded political editor Tim Donovan

clashed with Johnson during the election campaign. "All politicians think the BBC is against them," Dyke tells *In The Air*. "The idea that you put in a Tory and you expect him to change what happens in a local newsroom is ridiculous. The job of the BBC is to be an impartial broadcaster and ask difficult questions of all the candidates in elections, particularly when they're in power. I have no idea who's going to be the next director-general. Ask the Trust chairman, he'll tell you." Not yet, he won't. Many have tried.

■ THE Sun's reporters are renowned for their aggressive approach to stories, and it seems this extends to the football pitch too. The newspaper recently fielded two teams at a corporate tournament held at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium. The first match, involving *The Sun 2*, featuring editor Dominic Mohan, against a

team from Microsoft, had barely started when one of Microsoft's players had to be stretched off having had his leg broken in two places by a crunching tackle. Team Microsoft avenged its fallen colleague by inflicting a 3-1 defeat on Mohan's luckless maulers, who might have had one or two other things on their mind.

■ THE BBC is to have a new viewers' advocate under a revamp of NewsWatch, the weekly news show in which viewers get to confront programme-makers directly. Ray Snoddy is moving on after eight years and handing onto ex-Channel 4 presenter Samira Ahmed. Doubtless she will give BBC bosses a grilling but it would be interesting if she could quiz her former employers from C4 News. Ahmed quit after clashes with her bosses over her "scruffy" appearance, with friends claiming she had been treated in a "sexist" manner.



Attack on the BBC: Boris Johnson