

WHEN HE JOINS the revamped **Whistle Test** this Tuesday for the start of its five-month run, Andy Kershaw will be the only member of the on-screen team the supple side of 30. 'I'm sure they think I'm young and dangerous,' he says through a self-deprecatory grin. Well is he? 'No. I'm 24 and I'm not dangerous. I suppose I'm their way of saying hallo to the 80s.'

For a programme once dubbed by cynics 'The Old Grey Woolly Jumper' because of its colourless sincerity, Kershaw is seen as a token of rejuvenation. Its earlier, longer slot plus the decision to go live are all part of the plan. 'No longer old and grey, the *Whistle Test* is back,' says the programme's producer Trevor Dann.

It was Dann, formerly a Radio 1 producer, who came across Kershaw working as a roadie for rising punk-folk solo singer Billy Bragg. He felt the Rochdale-born lad was a 'complete natural' for TV and saw his jaunty Northernness as a potential antidote to 'the professional Cockneys of this world'.

It has to be said, though, that Kershaw was no street urchin picked out from behind the guitar cases. As entertainments secretary at Leeds University he'd booked over 50 major rock acts over a two-and-a-half year period ranging from Duran Duran and the Pretenders to Iron Maiden and UB40.

After leaving Leeds without a degree ('I was too much of a music fan') he produced and presented his own three-hour rock show, *Uneasy Listening*, on commercial local radio. It was here that his fierce commitment to 'honest music' developed.

He talks about 'rooting for the underdog' and of his interest in grass-roots activity. The qualities he admires are commitment and sincerity whether in his favourite blues artists, Muddy Waters and Bill Broonzy, or in a little-known Manchester band called Mark Riley and the Creepers. He credits Radio 1's John Peel (also likely to make the occasional appearance on the new *Whistle Test*) with developing this appetite, 'getting me interested in all kinds of music'.

In local radio he discovered that music was programmed according to different criteria. Success itself, rather than quality, guaranteed airplay. 'If it wasn't Duran Duran or Michael Jackson they threw the albums in a box and gave them away at roadshows,' he recalls. 'I used to do my whole programme of alternative music from those records.'

He came across the music of Billy Bragg in the same box; six of his unplayed copies. 'I went home, listened to the album and thought it

Whistle Test
Tuesday BBC2

No longer old or grey, Whistle Test returns in a new format. Here the show's new presenter Andy Kershaw and producer Trevor Dann talk to Steve Turner

Whistling a new tune



New 'Whistle Test' presenter Andy Kershaw (right) with his 'soul brother', Billy Bragg

was the best thing I'd heard in three years.' The upshot was that he contacted Bragg, had him play live on his show, and, after being made redundant by the station, accepted the singer's offer to 'come and join the Bragg empire'.

From then on he became 'soul brother, tour manager and roadie' for the man whose music typifies the simplicity and directness he championed. 'It's really important for me to travel with Billy,' he says. 'I need to be involved at that level. I like to get my hands dirty. I'd be very upset if TV commitments ever kept me off the road.'

The fresh-faced Kershaw is young and friendly rather than young and dangerous. His background is solidly middle class - his father a headmaster, his mother a headmistress - and this is some-

thing he feels might be resented by those who believe rock'n'roll is the property of the proletariat.

Although he likes his music 'exciting and provocative', he doesn't associate these qualities with driving a wedge between the generations. 'Age has got nothing to do with musical credibility,' he insists. 'Rock itself is over 30 years old. Why should it be the exclusive property of the young?'

Such ideals seem entirely appropriate - Trevor Dann is determined that *Whistle Test* should be neither a rock'n'roll party nor a 'youth programme' but a music magazine with a trans-generational appeal. The first show, with newly-discovered US trio Violent Femmes live, a clip of a new Talking Heads film and irreverent Kershaw interviews with heavy-metal merchants

Van Halen, AC/DC and Motley Crue, seems to reflect this eclectic hope - as do future exclusives with Bruce Springsteen and Jimmy Page.

The new placing of the show, on Tuesday evenings, will also enable *Whistle Test* to include an up-to-the-minute look at the new singles and album charts, which are issued at lunchtime on Tuesday. Radio 1 DJ Richard Skinner will present this segment of the show.

Meanwhile, Kershaw, whose first musical memory is as a four-year-old in a plastic Beatle wig standing on his Auntie Brenda's kitchen table singing 'She loves you', is happy to pitch to that wider audience.

'I love music from the 20s to the present,' he says. 'I'm in the business because I'm a complete fan. The day I'm no longer a fan I'll leave.' ●