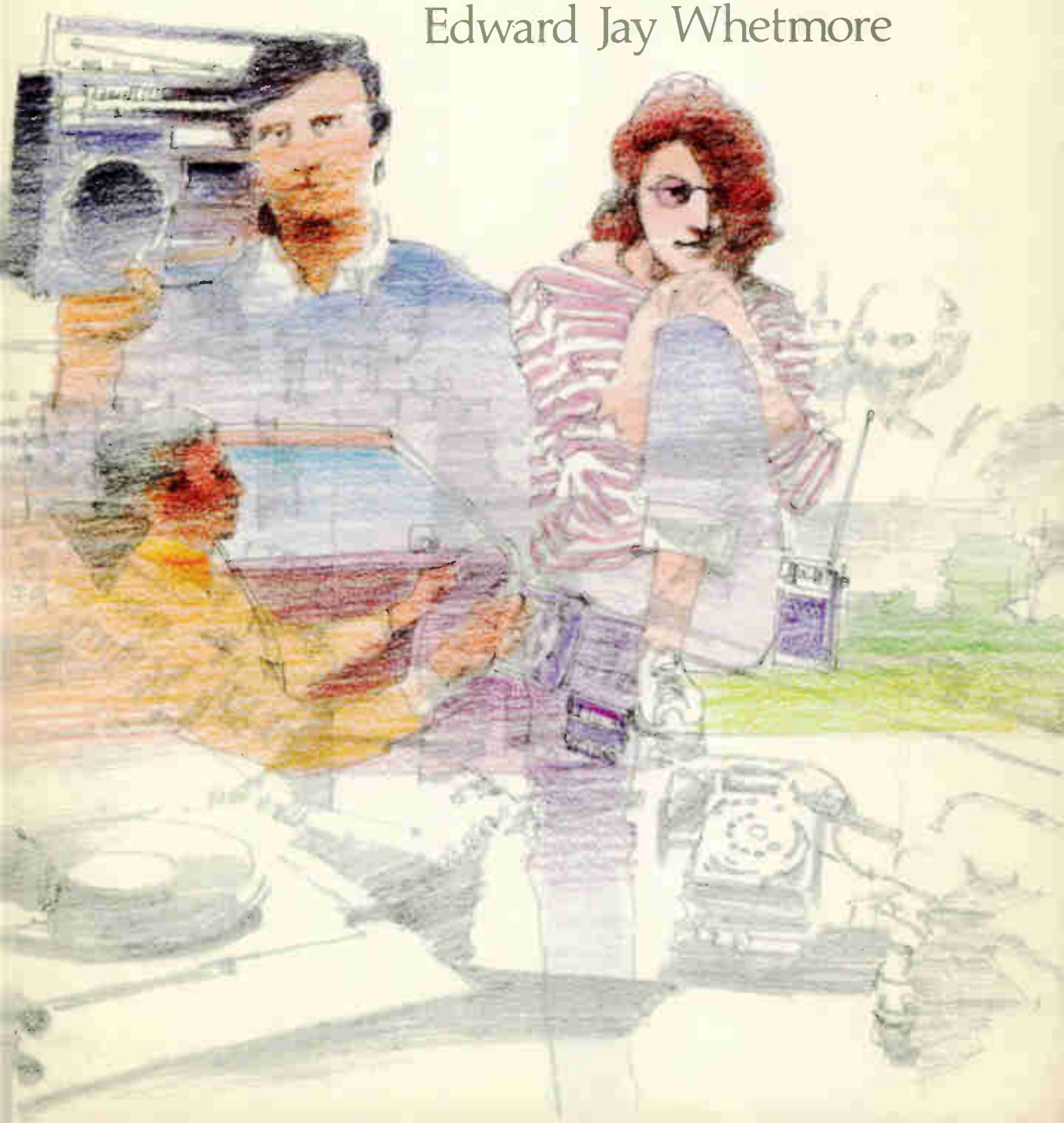
# The Magic Medium: An Introduction to Radio in America

Edward Jay Whetmore



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For **James E. Whetmore,**
who knew about the magic before I was born.

# Preface

How do books happen? This one was born out of the frustration I experienced while writing *Mediamerica*, an introduction to mass media text. In that book, I was confined to about fifty manuscript pages to cover radio in America. My original draft was about twice that long, and cutting it was a painful editing process.

When I talked to the folks at Wadsworth about doing this book, I thought it would be easy by comparison. After all, a few hundred pages on radio alone! It hasn't been quite as easy as I'd thought. There is much to say about the medium. But the major areas are at least touched on here, and I hope along the way I've been successful in reproducing some of the magic of radio, that special something that makes it the favorite medium of most of my students.

From the time I put together my first "cat whisker" radio set until I found myself behind the mike in a Los Angeles radio station, spinning records and talking to listeners, radio has played a major part in my life. I know this is true for a lot of you, too. The central purpose of *The Magic Medium* is to try to help you understand the experience of radio and its meaning in your life.

The opening chapters deal with the history of the medium, both the fondly remembered golden age and the contemporary radio program. I'm especially pleased to be able to include materials on popular music, from both the consumer and business perspectives. Too often this important area is neglected in courses on radio. Then it's on to the news and information programming that makes radio the great information exchange. Audience research and its relation to the business of radio is also covered at length.

Two chapters deal with radio production, how the magic is created, and how to evaluate those countless bits of audio information we get from radio each day. There is also a chapter on radio as a profession, and a final look into radio's amazing possibilities for the future.

If I occasionally sound enthusiastic about radio, you must forgive me. After so many years of involvement with the magic medium, I'm afraid my bias is bound to come through. I believe in radio, and I believe in its special ability to reach out and touch the audience, to make a difference in their lives. Of course that doesn't mean the medium is perfect—far from it. In the text I've raised a number of questions about contemporary radio practices; perhaps some of you will end up providing the answers.

Corresponding with readers about their reactions to my books has

been one of the most gratifying things about being an author. Please don't hesitate to drop me a note if you want to comment. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

## Acknowledgments

There are a number of people who've contributed to *The Magic Medium*, and I'd like to take a moment to award their prizes. For believing in me: one shiny "Ya Gotta Believe" button to Becky Hayden, senior editor at Wadsworth. "Pain and Suffering" certificates to Autumn Stanley and Mary Arbogast, who did their best to make sense of my muddled prose. The "Lost Weekend" award goes to Linda Woodrich, who spent many a sunny Saturday and Sunday typing the manuscript and trying to guess exactly what it was that I *meant* to say.

Several people reviewed the text at various stages, and I'd especially like to thank them: Burrell Hansen, Utah State University; David E. Kennedy, Bowling Green State University; Ed LaFrance, Santa Rosa Junior College; Paula M. Olson, Illinois State University at Normal; Philip E. Paulin, Oklahoma State University; Michael Stanton, at my old alma mater, California State University, Fullerton; John C. Weiser, Kent State University; and Donna R. Williams, Eastern Kentucky University. All of them provided excellent suggestions that helped make *The Magic Medium* a better book.

Finally, I'd like to thank all my USF students in Communication Arts 180, Radio Broadcast Theory. They let me use them as guinea pigs to try out a lot of the materials you'll find here, and their feedback was vital in putting together the text. After all, it is the students who take the course, and it seems only fair that a book like this should be especially tailored to their needs.

Edd Whetmore

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# The Magic Medium:

# An Introduction

## 2 The Impact of Radio

The chances are very good that some time today you have flipped a switch and joined the millions who are tuned in to radio, the magic medium. You probably gave it very little thought; yet this simple act linked you into a vast process involving virtually everyone in American society.

According to a recent *Broadcasting Yearbook*, there are currently about 7,500 commercial radio stations in the United States, broadcasting an estimated 135,000 hours of programming each day. In one recent year alone, advertisers spent about $2.25 billion to reach listeners. In addition, over 900 noncommercial radio stations broadcast for some part of the day. More than 70 million homes are radio-equipped with over 300 million receivers. There are about 115 million more receivers in our cars and elsewhere outside homes.

These statistics, though impressive, do not even begin to measure the real impact of radio in our "mediated" environment. Together, radio, television, print, and other media form an intricate network that affects and alters virtually all of our daily activities. For many of us, radio is not just an informational medium, but a way of life; as clear a measure of who and what we are as our occupations, life goals, or interpersonal relationships. That's one reason it is truly "the magic medium."

According to authors Joseph S. Johnson and Kenneth K. Jones, although large metropolitan areas may offer fifty or more radio stations, most of us listen to just two or three. We have very specific needs and choose our stations carefully to fill those needs. In fact, since we are all different, we all use radio in different ways. Each of us has a *radio profile* that reflects our specific needs, tastes, personality, and lifestyle.

As I write this, I am sitting in my office; the radio is on, tuned to one of our local "beautiful music" stations. I find this a pleasant but uninvolving background sound, which entertains without distracting me from my writing. However, on the way here, I drove through the San Francisco fog to the "solid gold" sounds of "Stayin' Alive" on one of the Top-40 stations. This morning while making breakfast I tuned in to the local all-news station to find out just how foggy it was going to be, and who won last night's baseball game (it was the Dodgers). I generally awake to the soothing sounds of a station that bills itself "easy rock-FM."

Most of my listening is confined to these four stations; they make up my radio profile. I *use* them at different times of the day and for different purposes. Obviously, I am not unique in this respect. Each of us seeks one or more *gratifications* from radio. At various times we want to be informed, entertained, soothed, or shaken up, and we choose our sta-

tions accordingly. Music makes up the bulk of programming for most radio stations; everything from punk rock to Mantovani is available in most markets. This music is our "sound track for life"; we use it to match or change our mood at will. When critics dismiss most popular music as inconsequential, they overlook the tremendous audience involvement with the music that is played on the radio each day.

For the last ten years or so, I have spent at least some time each year as an "on-the-air personality" or DJ at a number of radio stations. When you're on the air, you learn immediately that audiences are fiercely loyal to "their" stations and "their" kind of music. A personal and intimate bond is formed between the audience and the DJ. So close is that bond that many listeners call me to discuss personal problems. More than once on an all-night shift, I have let the album play while I tried to calm a potential suicide who wanted to talk about the meaning of life, and death.

Although this may be an extreme example, it does point out that, for many, radio is a powerful and intimate medium. This seems particularly true for young people. The 18–25 age group spends more time with radio than television. And that doesn't even count the hours they spend listening to records, which in a way are an extension of radio as their sales are largely determined by the amount of radio airplay they receive.

## Form, Content, and Consequence

To evaluate the impact of radio and to examine its function in our society, we need to look at three separate aspects of the medium: *form*, *content*, and *consequence*. This approach can be used with any medium. In radio, form involves *format*, or the type of information found on a given station. Remember, "information" is not only news, time, or temperature—music also provides us with its own kind of information. The compelling beat of a rock song or the crashing violins of a symphony have the capacity to move us, perhaps more profoundly than time or temperature. Radio's content is the *meaning* of the information we receive. Whereas form involves *how* we receive information, content is *what* the information means. We might describe the form of the typical Top-40 newscast as a staccato barrage of words thrown at the listener by a station announcer. The content of the news is the meaning of the stories: There's trouble in the Mideast; inflation is getting worse; somebody robbed a bank.

Much more difficult to define is the consequence of radio information. In 1938 Orson Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* broadcast "War of the Worlds" (see Chapter 2). There were a number of immediate conse-


1.1. Orson Welles directs the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* in its famous production of "War of the Worlds." Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

quences. Some people panicked and acted irrationally; police departments were flooded with calls. Later, more subtle consequences could also be felt. People began to regard radio as a more powerful, and potentially more harmful, medium. A congressional investigation brought new regulations on radio to ensure such a panic would not happen again.

But seldom are the consequences of radio so obvious. It's easy to see the immediate impact of, say, President Roosevelt's declaring war on Japan, but not so easy to understand the long term social significance of disco music or a current Top-40 hit with a love-related theme. Yet each of these radio events affects users directly in important ways we have yet to understand.

One of the difficulties with understanding radio is that it is part of what media analyst Marshall McLuhan calls "the invisible environment." Radio, like the house we live in or the air we breathe, is so much a part of us, so constantly surrounding us, we pay little attention to it. Yet it is a vital part of our environment. To understand its influence upon us, we must step back and examine it in some way, but as with the house we live in, this is not always an easy task. Often we are too wrapped up in radio to stop long enough to understand it.

## Approaching the Magic Medium



The study of radio, and of all mass media, is a relatively new pursuit. Media are part of our *popular culture*, but most college curricula are based on our *elite cultural* heritage: literature, the arts, the sciences, history. Thus college classes tend to be preoccupied with what has been rather than what is, with old information rather than current information. As a part of popular culture, radio is usually thought of as what we do, not what we study. Yet it can be argued that what we do, no matter how silly or trivial it may seem, is worthy of study. Therefore, we'll deal primarily with radio as popular culture.

All of us would like to make some changes in radio. Most of my students hate commercials. Others would like to see Top-40 stations widen their play lists. Some would prefer softer rock music; others like it "industrial strength." Still others long for some "decent classical music" or show tunes or more soul music or more jazz or more . . . well, the list goes on and on. The point is that while each of us would change radio if we could, we would do it to suit our own subjective tastes, or because we think that others would be "better off" if they listened to the kind of music or programming we prefer.

This book is designed to give you some background in most areas of the magic medium. Armed with this background, you may choose to mount a one-person campaign to change radio. But until then we'll examine radio primarily the way it is, rather than the way people might like it to be.

Of course, no book about American radio would be complete without a look at where radio has been. The following two chapters deal with the history of the medium. From its technical beginnings in the nineteenth century to the radio formats and personalities of today, I have tried to give equal time to two distinct eras.

Chapter 2 concerns radio programming during what is generally called the "Golden Age." From the 1920s to the mid-1950s radio programs were quite similar to those found on television today. Some argue that these were the best years of the medium and that radio today is little more than a glorified jukebox.

Since the advent of television, radio has become primarily a purveyor of music, so the story of radio since the mid-1950s in Chapter 3 necessarily involves that music. In Chapter 4, we'll examine popular music as it is played on the radio and on countless millions of stereo systems all over the country. The *genres* of popular music reflect their audiences: rock, country, soul, jazz, disco. Another concern is the *content* of popular music. Each song, like any other piece of media content, is actually an

editorial, extolling some overt or implicit point of view. Debby Boone found "true love" in her hit "You Light up My Life," and that's something we can all identify with. "Good-time boogie music" by groups like KC and the Sunshine Band also carries a message. According to one member of that group, "Our music urges the audience to get up and dance . . . have a good time . . . no sense in worrying. Fun is what life's all about." In its own way, this is a very persuasive message.

Chapter 5 examines news and sports. The recent emergence of all-news radio underscores our tremendous dependence on radio for the up-to-the-minute facts. I was reminded of this a few years ago when the mayor of San Francisco was assassinated. Rumors flew up and down the halls on my campus about what had happened. I turned on the radio for details and found that a local station had interrupted all other programming to give information about the shooting. Radio is our first line of defense against rumor; it can calm a frightened audience or frighten a calm one. Such is the power of radio news.

We have spent millions upon millions of dollars to find out how many people are listening to the radio; we have spent much less to find out why. As you'll see in Chapter 6, this difference in spending results from the commercial nature of American broadcasting. Quantitative information (number of listeners) relates directly to advertising income. Qualitative information is often of less direct financial benefit.

For better or worse, America has a *commercial* radio system, with all that it entails. Rather than ignore this fact or launch into a personal tirade about "tasteless" commercials, I have chosen in Chapter 7 to examine the function of the radio commercial and the economics of radio as necessary and vital parts of the present American broadcast system.

In Chapter 8 you'll learn about the business of popular music. Most of us think of music as a source of pleasure and entertainment, but it involves an economic empire that is much bigger than radio itself.

Chapter 9 explains how commercials and other radio materials are produced and provides a basic introduction to the production studio. Of course, whole books have been written on the subject of radio production, and some of them are recommended at the end of the chapter. Still, there are some things that everyone interested in radio should know about production.

Until now, I've ignored *aesthetic criteria*, or the problem of defining what "good" radio programming is. Aesthetics can be quite subjective; however, we do know that certain kinds of radio information appeal to certain audiences. With that knowledge we can, theoretically at least, create radio programming designed to meet the needs of these audiences. This is critical, since the radio audience is far more diffuse than the television audience (a major metropolitan market like San Francisco may


*"Frumble, there's only one cure for what ails you. Get up and boogie."*

Drawing by Florian; © 1979 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

have fifty or sixty radio stations, but only half a dozen TV stations). In Chapter 10 you'll be given audience/aesthetic criteria to evaluate radio commercials and programs, and to help you create more effective ones, if that is your desire.

Chapter 11 is designed for those who are interested in a radio career, but is also of interest to those who want to know what goes on "behind the scenes" at a radio station. Few jobs are harder to get than an entry-level position in radio. As with many professions, newcomers experience a "Catch-22": They can't get a job because they have no experience, and they can't get experience because they can't get a job. Most of my radio students would eventually like to be on the air in a major market. This is a long and difficult road to follow, but it can be done.

Since I have faced the job problem as both employee and employer, I've had a chance to see it from both sides. Along the way, a number of people have been helpful to me, and I've tried to pass their valuable advice along to you. Though I also teach classes in journalism, television, and film, it is radio that interests most media students and radio that seems to draw most toward a media career. With that in mind, I'd like to help as many of you as possible get that first "station break."

In the final chapter we'll take a glimpse into radio's future. Like most peeks into the crystal ball, this one is personal and speculative. By that time, you might have some pretty well defined ideas about the evolution of radio yourself.

Throughout the book you'll also meet people who have contributed, for better or worse, to the phenomenon we call radio. Their stories are often as fascinating as the medium itself.

A final word about the purpose of this book: In all the research I did before beginning *The Magic Medium,* I could not find another work that dealt with all the issues I've outlined in this chapter. There are history books, technical books, books on audiences, books on radio's Golden Age, and books on popular music. This book attempts to deal, at the introductory level, with each of these things. It is my hope that you will use the bibliographical information at the end of each chapter to explore more completely those areas of most interest to you.

The potential for radio in this country is fascinating and exciting. Radio does so much for us now, but we have only scratched the surface. Technology, coupled with a better understanding of the social functions of radio, can lead to unlimited possibilities. Unlike those who feel the best years of radio have come and gone, I think radio will continue to play a vital part in our culture, and its impact will continue to change and grow. That's one more thing that makes the magic medium truly magical.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Make up your own *radio profile* by briefly describing the stations you listen to regularly. Indicate the times of day you listen and your "uses" for each wherever possible.

2. Take a radio poll of your class to find out which local stations are most popular. How much agreement is there? Venture some guesses as to how the most popular stations got to that position.

3. What percentage of the stations in your market are primarily music-oriented? Why do you think music plays such an important part in radio programming?

## Readings and References

**Joseph S. Johnson and Kenneth K. Jones**
*Modern Radio Station Practices* (2nd ed.). Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1978.
This is a management-based book that can be quite helpful to the beginning student. Descriptions of individual stations at the end of the book are especially useful.

**Marshall McLuhan**
*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
This book, which was rather revolutionary when it first appeared, is the cornerstone of McLuhan's media theories. The controversial author calls radio "the tribal drum" and discusses the intimate nature of the medium in Chapter 30. (Also available in paperback.)

# 2

# The Sound and the Fury:

# A Brief History

## 1895: The Shot Heard around the World



On a warm September day, near Bologna, Italy, a small procession slowly disappeared over the hill. There were a farmer, a carpenter, and Alphonso Marconi, son of a well-to-do Italian gentleman. The three were carrying a large, awkward, odd-looking piece of metal that Alphonso's brother Guglielmo Marconi called an antenna. It was Guglielmo who watched the group disappear over the hill until neither the antenna nor the shotgun they were carrying was visible.

Several minutes later, Guglielmo began manipulating the Morse key he kept in a small black box. Almost at the instant his fingers touched the key, a shot rang out. Marconi knew that his "wireless" message had been received over the hill, a distance of well over a mile. This was not the first successful demonstration of Marconi's "black box," but it proved to be the turning point. From here on, his father would begin to take the young man's experiments seriously. Just the year before, Guglielmo and his half-brother, Luigi, had taken a vacation trip to the Italian Alps. There, Guglielmo happened to read an article on Hertzian waves. These radio waves had been discovered in theory by James Clerk-Maxwell, in 1873, but Heinrich Hertz, a German scientist, had proven their existence by 1888. Nevertheless, Hertz felt they could not be used for practical communication. Marconi disagreed, and became totally preoccupied with proving that such waves could be utilized for wireless communication.

Despite the hillside experiments, the Italian government expressed no interest in funding experiments involving Marconi's black box, so his father sent Guglielmo and his mother to England to contact the British government. The customs agents, suspicious of the black box with its wires, batteries, and dials, smashed it upon Marconi's arrival. The political climate of Europe was very unstable, and they were taking no chances. A determined Marconi went back to work at once and reassembled his invention.

The British government became interested, and Marconi's experiments continued uninterrupted in England. By 1897, his wireless had proven successful over a distance of nine miles. Marconi was as canny a businessman as he was an inventor. In 1897, the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, Ltd., was formed, and shares of stock were sold. Marconi became one of six directors at the age of 23. Within four short years, he proved that wireless not only could go through fog and over mountains, but could, using Morse code, span the Atlantic Ocean. In 1901 a successful England-to-Newfoundland broadcast added to his growing reputation as an inventor and discoverer. Wireless was more than a toy;

## 2.1. GUGLIELMO MARCONI: INVENTOR EXTRAORDINARY

According to a family story, Guglielmo Marconi was destined at birth to his fame and fortune. Within hours after he was born in 1874, the family servants arrived at his mother's bedchamber to pay their respects. When the old peasant gardener remarked on the largeness of the infant's ears, his mother replied, "He will be able to hear the still, small voice of the air."

The son of a wealthy Italian landowner, Marconi grew up as a delicate, solitary student, fascinated by the worlds of Greek mythology and electromagnetic wave theory. Educated by tutors, he spent most of his time on the family estate. His father was a strict, gruff man; Guglielmo became very close to his mother, who encouraged him in his scientific studies.

Even as a youngster, Marconi was mechanically minded. Once he took apart his cousin's sewing machine, but in response to her protests, he reassembled it in complete working order. While in his teens, he learned telegraphy from a blind neighbor to whom he read aloud.

In the summer of 1894, at the age of 20, he learned about Hertz's experiments in wave transmissions and set about conducting his own research. After a few nearly sleepless months, the young inventor sent the longest-distance wireless communication in history: one-and-a-half miles.

In March 1899, Marconi sent the first wireless message across the English Channel (85 miles). Within the year, Marconi's emergency signal system, a new

it was a reliable and miraculous form of communication with many possible uses.

Though earlier inventors such as Oliver Lodge, Alexander Popov, and others had experimented with Hertzian waves, it was Marconi who focused attention on the possibilities of wireless, leading a worldwide communication revolution. Wireless, the forerunner of today's radio, was first thought of as an experimental oddity. However, before long governments began to realize its potential in war and peace. Here was a way

procedure using wireless, saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in marine property and priceless human lives.

By the time he became the president of the Royal Italian Academy in 1930, Marconi had developed frequency differentiations (1900), sent messages across the Atlantic to Newfoundland (1901), invented the horizontal directional aerial (1905), and received a Nobel Prize in physics (1909), commanded the Italian Wireless Service in World War I, transmitted from England to Australia (1918), and been made a marchese by the Italian government (1929).

He has been described as an indefatigable businessman and a socialite diplomat, shy but in command, he also dressed like a dandy and spent remarkable time and money on women other than his wife. He was mercurial but a dependable ally. Not always particular about the topic for a speech he may have been asked to give, he was nevertheless meticulously accurate and able to capture his listeners' attention.

The careful attention Marconi paid to his health he considered a personal and universal investment. Nevertheless, he died on a hot July night in 1937, the victim of a series of heart attacks. After the world was told of his demise, the airwaves were silent; for two minutes it was as if he had never been. When the silence ended, it was never to return again.

to communicate without the wires or cables that could be destroyed by an enemy. The very thought of communication without wires seemed a miracle. Until Marconi's transatlantic experiments, some people still believed that the entire wireless craze was nothing more than a fraud, just as there are people today who believe we did not actually send men to the moon. But the skeptics were few after 1901. Marconi had proven that wireless communication using Hertzian waves was more than a dream.

## 14 1906: Lee de Forest and the Songs of the Century

Excited by the achievements of Marconi, the American experimenter and scientist Lee de Forest had earned a Ph.D. in 1899 with a dissertation titled *Reflection of Hertzian Waves from the Ends of Parallel Wires*. For de Forest, wireless was more than a way to transmit Morse code. He envisioned a day when actual voices could be sent through the air for many miles and be received by listeners. While working for Western Electric and living in a sparsely furnished rented room, he wrote, "What finer task than to transfer the sound of a voice of song to one a thousand miles away." At the time, this seemed an impossible task, yet it was this vision which led de Forest to invent the Audion tube. The audion, or vacuum tube, as it later became known, opened an entire new field in electronics, and freed inventors from having to use moving parts. This was a great technological breakthrough and a considerable improvement on Marconi's black box. For all practical purposes, it enabled the sending of voice by wireless. Perhaps the most memorable event of the early years of wireless was a broadcast by Enrico Caruso from the Metropolitan Opera in New York, on January 13, 1910. For opera buff de Forest, this was a crowning achievement of wireless and the Audion tube.

Though he did not have Marconi's business genius, de Forest had been involved for almost a decade in various business schemes related to wireless. The success of Marconi, Ltd., and its American subsidiary, American Marconi, had prompted the formation of a number of competing wireless companies. De Forest survived some earlier business disasters of his wireless company, and in 1907 he formed the de Forest Radio Telephone Company to exploit the possibilities of the Audion tube. This was to become one of his few most successful ventures.

Within a few years, de Forest's invention had made it possible for a small but growing network of wireless amateurs to communicate with each other by voice. Initially, their experiments were crude, and their equipment could not broadcast a voice more than a few miles. Yet as early as 1908, de Forest's broadcast from the Eiffel Tower in Paris was heard some 500 miles away. Lee de Forest was to become known as the father of radio in America. His interest in radio extended far beyond its business aspects. He saw the day when wireless receivers would be commonplace across the country and predicted, somewhat naively, that voices over wireless would turn out to be the cultural salvation of the country. Though there is a lot more rock 'n' roll than opera on radio today, the faithful reproduction of music via wireless was made possible by Lee de Forest.

De Forest's Audion tube also opened up the possibility of long-distance telephone communication and ultimately helped lead to the invention of sound in motion pictures and even to guided missiles. Marconi had proved that wireless could be harnessed for practical purposes, but it was de Forest's Audion tube that helped realize the dream of voice communication via wireless.

## 1912: Big Brother Is Barely Watching

Over a thousand amateur radio stations had begun operating in the United States before Congress finally passed the first radio act in 1912. Since war was threatening at that time, the greatest concern was for ship and land stations being used for maritime communication. If war came, radio would obviously play a key role in military communication with ships at sea. Among other provisions, the act required that on-board wireless stations be attended 24 hours a day.

The possibilities of wireless were graphically demonstrated in 1912, when the supposedly unsinkable *Titanic* set out across the North Atlantic. For several days, the world's only contact with the ill-fated ocean liner was through radio telegraphy. Interestingly, it was young David Sarnoff, working as an operator, who picked up the fatal message relayed from the *S.S. Olympic:* The *Titanic* had run into an iceberg and was quickly sinking. Although radio saved only 712 of the *Titanic*'s 2,224 passengers, it could probably have saved them all if the radio operator of the nearby liner *Californian* had not been asleep. In any case, the drama of the event put wireless communication into the public mind once and for all.

Sarnoff, a mere 21 at that time, was already enthusiastic about the possibilities of wireless. But even he could not envision the future giants that would rise in the field—the Radio Corporation of America and the National Broadcasting Company—or that he would head them. As fate would have it, however, Sarnoff was witness to the event that brought wireless to the forefront. The tremendous publicity radio received during the *Titanic* incident dispelled whatever doubts people may have had about the important role the new medium could play in American life.

Ship-to-shore communication became even more critical with the events leading up to World War I. As in other wars, major battles would be fought at sea, but for the first time those on land would have immediate information about the outcome. During this time, little attention was paid to radio for nonmilitary purposes.

## 2.2. LEE DE FOREST: FATHER OF AMERICAN RADIO

When Lee de Forest was born in 1873 in Council Bluffs, Iowa, his father hoped that the youngster would follow in his footsteps. The elder de Forest had been active in promoting civil rights for blacks and was eventually head of Talladega College, one of Tennessee's first black universities. Yet despite Lee's admiration for his father, he had ideas of his own.

The young de Forest fancied himself an inventor. He spent his childhood trying to build locomotives and electric motors. At age 15, he announced (rather prematurely) that he had discovered the secret of perpetual motion. Even then, early failures could not dissuade Lee. He entered preparatory school in 1891 and went on to the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale two years later. In 1899, he earned his Ph.D. with a dissertation on Hertzian Waves—those rather mysterious, invisible waves that could carry sound.

De Forest's Audion tube was the most successful of his 300 patented inventions. It is famed for making voice transmissions a reality, but it also helped make international telephone calls and talking motion pictures possible. De Forest was also active in early television research.

Despite his obvious genius, de Forest was never able to capitalize completely on his inventions. He went through a couple of bankruptcies and lost several critical court battles to those who claimed his patents for themselves. He always seemed to be short of money and often raised capital by signing over rights to his inventions for a fraction of their actual worth.

De Forest was also frustrated in his attempts to influence the development of radio. Originally, he had seen it as a great opportunity for the dissemination of opera and classical music and for education through "over the airwaves" classes. Though radio eventually did all those things, this was not to be the major focus of its programming. De Forest's "cultural dream" was never to come true.

Eventually the largely forgotten Father of American Radio moved to California, where he lived quietly with his wife. De Forest refrained from alcohol, cigarettes, and coffee all his life, contending they "dulled the keen senses needed by an inventor." His death in 1961 received little fanfare. De Forest was remembered as a decent, if exacting, man who possessed few of the eccentric behaviors so often associated with famous American inventors.

Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

## 2.3. MR. RCA: DAVID SARNOFF

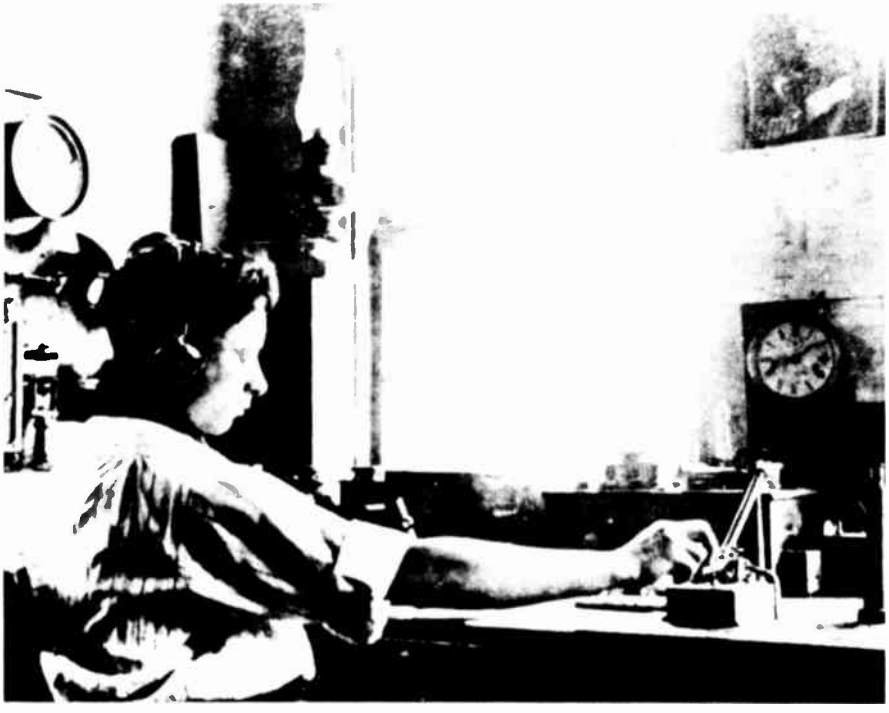
David Sarnoff was originally known for his role in America's response to the *Titanic* disaster of 1912, but he had far more lasting fame as a prophet, pioneer, and entrepreneur in radio and television.

The young Russian immigrant started work as a messenger boy for the Commercial Cable Company of New York in 1906, at the age of 15. There he taught himself Morse code. Fired for asking time off for the Jewish holidays, but undaunted and confident in his telegraphic skills, Sarnoff applied to the Marconi Company for a position. He was hired on the spot—as an office boy. This ambitious young man would have gone places even without the *Titanic* episode. He had worked and studied constantly after his father's death in 1906. Extremely conscious of his role as the responsible eldest son, he usually held two or more jobs at a time. He had an extraordinary sense of whom to know and how to elicit positive responses from those in positions to help him. He was always full of plans and helpful suggestions.

But the *Titanic* incident, during which he spent 72 hours at the receiver coordinating rescue efforts and broadcasting the survivor list as names became known, was a boon to his career. It got Sarnoff his first in a series of promotions in the American Marconi Company, and by 1919, when the Marconi Company merged with the Radio Corporation of America, he was the commercial manager of Marconi's American operations. In 1921, Sarnoff became general manager of RCA. Only a year later he was vice president of the company at the age of 31.

When Sarnoff first suggested using wireless for entertainment in 1915, in his "radio music box memo," (see text) he was ignored. But the communications genius could not be stifled. In 1921, Sarnoff managed to broadcast radio's first major sports presentation, the Dempsey-Carpentier world heavyweight championship fight. He was also responsible for RCA's purchase of the Victor Talking Machine Company. Sarnoff helped found the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) as a program service designed to encourage people to buy RCA radio receivers. Though some of his superiors were skeptical, David Sarnoff led the way for the industry.

He foresaw the advent of television in 1923 and eventually did even more for television than for radio. His 60-plus years in media covered the development of broadcasting from an infant to a giant. Described by some as a "ruthless businessman," Sarnoff was able to overcome constant skepticism and inaction on the part of his associates. He succeeded in being the first and perhaps the greatest corporate executive to see and act upon the marvelous possibilities of the world's airways for entertainment and human development. Sarnoff died in 1971 and is remembered as one of broadcasting's most important pioneers.



Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

Though World War I stunted the commercial growth of radio in America, it stimulated technological growth, and when the war was over in 1918, some commercial potential could readily be seen. The main problems in developing a home radio system at this time were the conflicting patents held by de Forest, American Marconi, and several other inventors, including Edwin Armstrong, whose feedback circuit had greatly improved on de Forest's original Audion tube. Although lawsuits over patents would continue through the courts for decades, the formation in 1919 of the Radio Corporation of America, with its cross-licensing agreements which allowed experimenters to combine several patented components, led to the creation of a complete and compatible broadcast and receiving system.

Aside from David Sarnoff, no one had yet realized that the real money was to be made not in the sales of sets or equipment, but in broadcasting music and other entertainment. It remained for Sarnoff to envision a "radio music box" in each American home. His vision is what finally led to home radio receivers and commercial radio as we know it today.

## 1920: Who's on First?

There is some dispute about who actually put the first radio station on the air. Some sources give credit to Dr. Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse engineer whose amateur station, 8XK in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, haphazardly broadcast news and other information to fellow radio amateurs in much the same way as CB communicators do today. 8XK was not a commercial venture, but it was broadcasting more or less regularly in early 1920. It was Conrad's bosses at Westinghouse who suddenly realized that it might be practical to sell commercial radio sets to listeners who had no real electronic expertise but simply desired to hear radio information. Westinghouse provided the necessary personnel and funds for a new station more powerful than 8XK, KDKA. The first program, aired November 2, 1920, was the Harding-Cox presidential election returns, read on the air as they came in via telephone.

No matter who gets credit for being first, it was KDKA that proved the first continuing success. KDKA also pioneered in broadcasting new types of programs and its success proved there was a large market of potential listeners who would be willing to buy sets to hear music and other offerings on a regular basis.


2.4. An early KDKA broadcast. Note the sign identifying the station as the farmer's pioneer station. There was promotion, even in the early days. Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library and KDKA radio, Pittsburgh.

Licenses to operate a station were obtained through the Department of Commerce, which was responsible for administering the Radio Act of 1912. Within two years, over 200 stations had been licensed; that number would grow to nearly 600 by 1923. The rush to start a broadcast station for whatever commercial or ideological reason was such that there was virtual chaos on the airwaves during this period. Since there was no control on band space, power, and other key factors, the airwaves were littered with conflicting stations. Listeners could not always count on receiving their favorite stations, nor did many stations maintain a continuous broadcast schedule.

The next major event came in 1922 from an unexpected source. The American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) had been experimenting with its own station in New York. WBAY began with daily weekday programs from 11:00 A.M. till noon and 4:30 to 5:30 P.M., but its antenna location was undesirable, and many listeners could not pick up the broadcasts. Undaunted, the people at AT&T made arrangements to use another antenna and changed the call letters to WEAF. These early stations were unlike the great commercial giants of today—they were

relatively small and were competing with hundreds of amateurs whose antennas were all over the city. Radio had been seen as everything from a plaything to a great cultural savior, but it was AT&T that saw a new possibility for the medium. AT&T charged people a toll for talking on the telephone, so why not do the same thing with a radio station? Thus was born the idea of *buying* radio time.

This new idea was not universally well received. Trade publications condemned the practice as mercenary. However, AT&T pushed forward and was successful in selling its first commercial time to the Queensboro Corporation. This real estate company offered country living near the heart of the city, and some sales resulted from their ads. Still, it was touch-and-go for WEAF for the next six months or so until a number of successful accounts were brought into the station. Such *toll charges* (now known as *rates*, see Chapter 7) were to become the backbone of the American commercial radio system. By the end of the 1920s, WEAF was grossing almost a million dollars a year in toll charges.

Marshall McLuhan has often said, "We always make the new medium do the work of the old," and AT&T saw the new medium of radio in the old mode of the pay phone. WEAF was helped by a U.S. Commerce Department action responding to a request by AT&T. AT&T contended that most individuals were using their stations selfishly to talk on and on, but after all, WEAF was open to anyone (anyone who could pay the price, that is) and as such deserved special treatment. They finally got an expanded license that allowed more broadcast hours per day.

There is always some speculation as to what might have happened had WEAF not entered the picture. Would broadcasting have stayed noncommercial? Would Lee de Forest's great cultural dream have been fulfilled? Sooner or later, someone probably would have come up with the idea of making radio commercial. Radio—in fact any medium—does not exist in a political or social vacuum but tends to take on the cultural and moral values that prevail in society at the time. In the 1920s, America was a country up to its ears in the free enterprise system, and it was quite natural that the new medium would become a vital part of that system.

## 1923: Keeping Cool with Coolidge

A staunch defender of free enterprise, and the first president to use radio effectively, was Calvin Coolidge. Coolidge's role in radio came quite by chance. He had been elected vice president with President Warren G. Harding. Harding's 1923 inaugural speech was to have been the first

coast-to-coast broadcast. AT&T had planned to link up KPO in San Francisco with WEAF in New York as well as several stations along the way. In July, Harding became ill, and he soon died. Coolidge was sworn in as president, and in December an extensive network of cooperating stations carried his message to Congress as far west as Dallas.

Perhaps you know that Coolidge does not have a reputation as one of our most flamboyant presidents. Indeed, it was said that he slept 10 to 11 hours a day, and there were rumors that he slept at his desk as well. In any event, his voice did have a curious resonant quality that came across better on radio than in person. This resonant quality enhanced Coolidge's image and his credibility as president. The Coolidge personality became the topic of the day. After he won the 1924 election, Coolidge's 1925 inauguration became the first coast-to-coast broadcast, thanks to a special 21-station hook-up. In retrospect, we recognize this chain was the twentieth-century wireless equivalent of the driving of the golden spike that marked the completion of the transcontinental railroad. With it, we became a truly United States of America, linked from coast to coast by the magic medium.

Coolidge's special role in radio also led him to add his voice to those expressing concern about the general chaos on the largely unregulated airwaves. In a message to Congress in 1926, Coolidge noted, "The whole service of this most important public function has drifted into such chaos as seems likely, if not remedied, to destroy its great value." Coolidge was asking for the passage of the special new radio act that Congress had finally written to deal with radio's many problems. The final version became known as the Radio Act of 1927.

## The Radio Act of 1927

The new act was a sweeping set of regulatory laws that changed forever the development of broadcasting and established the system we have today. It has remained more or less intact over the last 50 years (a 1934 revision made some minor changes, but the basic philosophy remained). Only in the late 1970s did Congress begin to consider a new communications act.

Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover had hoped that the new radio industry would do what was best for the public and become a model for self-regulation of industry with little or no government interference. But passage of the 1927 act meant that Hoover's dream was over. The act

## 2.5. CALVIN COOLIDGE: THE RADIO PRESIDENT

When asked, during his tenure as Massachusetts governor, about his well-known reticence, Calvin Coolidge replied, "I've usually been able to make enough noise to get what I want."

Coolidge was indeed a man of few words. Those that he did utter showed much common sense and a dry wit. He was labeled a solemn man for the times, and yet he was a popular president during the Jazz Age.

As vice president under Warren G. Harding, Coolidge was uninspired and showed minimal enthusiasm in the Senate and the Cabinet. But when Harding's death in the summer of 1923 put the taciturn New Englander in the limelight, Coolidge returned to the post the aura of respectability it had lost under his predecessor's corrupt administration.

That winter Coolidge spoke to the nation on the radio, becoming the first president to effectively use the medium as a unifying force. He was much aware of the power of radio, and in his first annual message to Congress, he called for the revision of the laws regulating radio.

The thirtieth president of the United States was a strong believer in human perfectibility. He was of a progressive philosophy; he was always supportive of the people and their rights, yet he felt that government should maintain a helpful attitude without interfering in the lives of the citizenry. He worked diligently in all his political roles for economy in government, including budget trimming and reduced income taxes. He was strongly interested in land management, the advancement of aviation, and the future of broadcasting. For a reserved man who didn't talk much, he was certainly interested in communications.

created a five-person Federal Radio Commission (which in 1934 became the Federal Communications Commission, FCC). The commissioners were to have complete authority over broadcast licensing. The concept was simple: The broadcast spectrum belonged to the people; therefore, one station could never own space in perpetuity, but must be licensed to operate for a fixed period of time. In most cases, the license would be subject to renewal every three years.

He ran for the presidency in 1924 under the slogan "Keep Cool with Coolidge," and the rowdy rabble of the Roaring '20s gave him their support. There was a remarkable difference between the chief executive and his charges, but the country was having too good a time to notice that Coolidge wasn't a very effective president.

In 1927, Coolidge kept the country guessing about his political plans with the typically pregnant statement, "I do not choose to run for the presidency in 1928." Did he feel bound to run, or did he intend not to compete for reelection? In fact, Coolidge did retire in 1929 and spent the rest of his days writing for magazines and newspapers and making occasional speeches over the airwaves. Through his promotion of radio, he provided a means for the rest of us to speak our piece.

The importance of words was imprinted in the personality and work of Calvin Coolidge; though he spoke very little, he surely spoke with care and deliberation. His philosophy was even written above the fireplace in his Northampton, Massachusetts, home:

> A wise old owl lived in an oak
>
> The more he saw the less he spoke.
>
> The less he spoke the more he heard;
>
> Why can't we be like that old bird?

Since there were more requests for space than there was space available, the Congress charged the new commissioners with the task of deciding which applicants would best serve the "public interest, convenience, and necessity." This catch-all phrase looked good on paper, but it has proven difficult for broadcasters to live with. The phrase was so general that it has meant many things to many people.

The 1927 act meant that radio was no longer an amateur's medium, but an industry that, like all industries, was subject to a certain amount of federal regulation. During its first two years, the Federal Radio Commission emerged as a strong regulatory force. Over a hundred stations were taken off the air, and hundreds of others were assigned regular frequencies and designated hours for broadcasting.

In the early years, the FRC also withstood a number of court tests of its powers, the most notable being the KFKB case. KFKB was operated by one Dr. John Brinkley of Milford, Kansas. The doctor's programming included a *Medical Question Box*, where listeners could write in for help. Brinkley would read the letters over the air, and the "cure" for what ailed always seemed to be one of his patent medicines, available in drug stores or by direct mail. The FRC deemed Brinkley's activities not in the public interest, convenience, and necessity and refused to renew his license.

In considering the case, the FRC reviewed Brinkley's background. He had attained a questionable reputation for a controversial "goat gland" operation, which he claimed would renew virility in his male patients. He prescribed drugs for thousands of listener "patients" without ever seeing any of them. The "diploma mills" from which the doctor had gotten his medical degrees were also being exposed. The American Medical Association was trying to revoke his license and he was retaliating with anti-AMA attacks on the air. At one point, he referred to them as the "American Meatcutters Association."

Yet Brinkley argued that the FRC had no right to use information about his past to take his license away. What's more, he said, the FRC action clearly smacked of censorship—his freedom of speech was being denied. The courts ruled otherwise, and in 1931 they upheld the FRC decision. Brinkley moved to Mexico to continue his broadcasts out of the reach of the FRC and American medical authorities.

## An Eye Is Born

While Brinkley and KFKB were important factors in determining the power of the FRC, something much more significant was happening that would change forever the nature of broadcasting. The Radio Corporation of America (RCA) had moved into an enviable position. As one of the main manufacturers of radio sets, they had formed a subsidiary operation

called the National Broadcasting Company to provide radio programming for set users.

NBC had soon moved to link together a number of individual stations for several hours each day so their programs could reach the largest possible audience. As that audience grew, the revenues grew and NBC soon became a profitable business venture in its own right. Eventually the company consisted of two separate entertainment radio networks (called the red and the blue) which provided non-stop programming to *affiliates* all over the country. These networks were so successful that several speculators tried to imitate them by forming networks of their own. However, in the end, the competition proved too stiff for all but one.

The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was founded as a string of independent stations. The eventual driving force behind CBS for the half-century to come was the son of a cigar manufacturer, William S. Paley. Paley had taken a college degree in 1922, and within three years he was making $50,000 a year as a vice president and secretary of his father's cigar company.

However, Paley had a mind and interests of his own, and he became fascinated with the magic medium after his father began advertising on a Philadelphia station, WCAU. WCAU was affiliated with the fledgling United Independent Broadcasters Network (UIB), a chain operation set up to compete with NBC. But UIB was no match for the well-financed NBC, and the owners continually had to borrow money. The name Columbia Broadcasting System came about in 1927 as a result of a merger with Columbia Phonograph, prompted by a nagging lack of UIB funds. Meanwhile, the Paley cigar company, La Palina, had consistently increased sales, primarily as a result of successful radio program sponsorship. Feeling sure there was a future in radio, young William Paley got an advance on his inheritance and offered to buy into the troubled network. The CBS owners snapped up the deal, and Paley suddenly had his own radio network. He was 26 at the time. In 1928 Paley became president of the parent company, Columbia Phonograph, and thus consolidated his hold on CBS.

Paley's most important contribution to network operations was the idea of providing nationally known entertainment to affiliates in exchange for their giving up some of their best evening hours to CBS. Those evening hours would then be sold to national advertisers. The local station would gain the prestige of carrying top radio stars while eliminating costly program expenses, the advertisers would get a nationwide audience, and CBS would reap the profits. A modified version of this basic agreement is still in effect today between networks and their affiliates.

## 2.6. WILLIAM PALEY: FROM CIGARS TO CBS

When Bill Paley bought the failing United Independent Broadcasters Network in 1927, he was a 26-year-old cigar company executive with lots of money to throw around and plenty of ideas. He also recognized the cultural possibilities of radio. Through his belief in education, art, and show business, and his entrepreneurial savvy, he produced an entity very much in his own image.

The young Paley worked long days, kept a fast pace, and surrounded himself with other young and energetic executives. Described as having a real joy in being alive, he always approached his business with zest not untouched by caution. His philosophy of the duties of radio was clear in some shows aired on CBS radio and TV. There were *The American School of the Air;* symphonic broadcasts; *America's Hour,* which editorialized on life in the United States; *Playhouse 90;* and Edward R. Murrow's documentaries *Hear It Now* and *See It Now.* CBS has continued to be regarded by many as the Tiffany or "class act" of broadcast networks.

Paley loves show business and artists, having discovered such talents as Bing Crosby, the Mills Brothers, and Kate Smith. He also has counted among his friends Truman Capote, Pablo Picasso, and Frank Sinatra.

He enjoys physical and social activity. His pleasure in being on top has often come through in a strong distaste for opposition, conflict, and controversy. Although a photograph of Edward Murrow remained in Paley's office long after the newsman's death, their professional relationship was fraught with tension. Murrow's *See It Now* TV program was a forerunner of shows like *60 Minutes.* Paley himself

## The Golden Age of Radio

The 1920s had brought tremendous technical development and change to radio, plus a new regulatory structure to deal with its technical growth. The 1930s brought major developments in radio programming. The major genres of broadcast entertainment—soap operas, quiz and audience-participation shows, action-adventure shows, westerns, domestic comedies, and so on—were developed at this time; with minor variations, they are still with us today. This creative programming era has become known as radio's Golden Age. In fact, television's critics contend TV has

had given its producers creative autonomy, but the political heat it generated was more than the chairman of the board could take."I don't want this constant stomachache every time you air a controversial subject," he complained. Soon after, *See It Now* was dead.

Beginning in the 1960s, Paley stepped increasingly into the shadows, became less accessible to his employees, and delegated responsibility to the new breed of business executives interested in profits and security. Somehow Paley's idealistic integrity faded or was distorted in the CBS broadcasting fare.

Fred Friendly, former director of CBS News, remarked that during the 1960s the balance between quality programming and rating and stock market points had been altered for the worse. Another network employee, upset about Paley's insistence that decisions to downplay Watergate coverage were in the interest of reasonable journalistic caution, quipped, "Fortunately for Paley's nose, the Blue Fairy isn't dealing as harshly with him as she did with Pinocchio."

As CBS entered the 1980s, its octogenarian chairman sat in his office, periodically making his wishes known through directorial edicts, running the store through hand-picked subordinates. Surrounded by post-Impressionist paintings and a cigar store Indian, he was often reminded of the days of La Palina cigars and the foundering chain of radio stations that became the powerful Columbia Broadcasting System.

done little to develop new genres of entertainment, preferring instead to coast along on the creative inventiveness of these early radio years.

## More Music, More Music

During this Golden Age, about half of all radio programming was music. The musical programs came from live orchestras and musicians in the

studio and occasionally by transcription or recording. Typically, a station would contract with a transcription company that would deliver about 100 recorded musical selections each month. It was not possible to simply go out and buy a record and put it on the air. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) insisted that no records designed for home use could be played on the radio; they feared if listeners could hear records for nothing they would never buy them. No one realized yet the potential symbiosis between these two industries that would eventually produce the situation we have today. Record companies now compete fiercely with one another to get their "product" on the air, realizing that air play is vital for any large sales.

While network affiliates had the bulk of their programming, including music, provided to them by the networks, independent stations had to rely more heavily on transcriptions. Often these made up as much as 80 percent of their programming.

For network stations, "live" programs included the music of big-name bands like Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Russ Morgan. Most popular of all the music shows was *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour,* initially heard on NBC-Red. Prime-time musical programs were usually 15 minutes long and featured colorful and often sponsor-related titles like the *Cliquot Club Eskimos* and the *A&P Gypsies.*

Popular music was the most frequently played. During the 1920s, something called "potted palm music," with bland and rather inoffensive tunes, was dominant. Jazz became increasingly accepted during the late 1920s, helped along with the backing of established musical stars like Paul Whiteman. 1930s radio offered music enough for everyone. Perhaps it was this "something for everybody" philosophy that helped radio become widely accepted, and seldom criticized, during the decade.

Some of the most listened-to music shows offered traditional classical music. Especially popular was Arturo Toscanini conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, first aired in 1930. Later, Toscanini was persuaded to come out of retirement to conduct NBC's own symphony orchestra. That arrangement continued into the 1950s, and the NBC program was acknowledged to be the most popular and critically acclaimed classical music program in radio's history.

## When Comedy Was King

A 1935 audience survey indicated that 65 percent of all radio listeners preferred comedies to any other type of program. Comedians like Jack


2.7. Major Bowes emcees an early version of *The Gong Show* titled *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour*. It was one of radio's most successful early ventures. Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

Benny, Ed Wynn, Fred Allen, and Jimmy Durante had originally developed their art as vaudeville and stage show performers in what had traditionally been thought of as "show business." In fact, one writer in

*Variety* magazine complained, "Show business is helpless against radio." Many old vaudevillians were quite successful at making the transition to radio; those that weren't disappeared. The new medium quickly acquired existing famous comedy names and began developing new talents of its own.

Comedy, because it was so successful, was also big business. Name comedians like Eddie Cantor earned up to a hundred dollars a minute, and they were paid in those marvelous Depression dollars that could buy 10 gallons of gas or 20 loaves of bread.

Most profitable and popular of all the early radio comedies was *Amos 'n' Andy*. The black domestic comedy was the brainchild of white writers and performers Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll. It premiered as a reconstituted vaudeville act on Chicago's WGN. The first national show came in the summer of 1929 on NBC's Blue network. It was an instant success. Unlike "stand up" comedians Cantor and Allen, who relied primarily on one liners and no real story line, *Amos 'n' Andy* was a situation comedy centering on the activities of the Fresh Air Taxi Company. It was so successful that the nation interrupted its usual activities for 15 minutes each night to hear the latest episode. The President, it was said, did not wish to be disturbed during the show. *Amos 'n' Andy* quickly became a national institution, proving to any doubters that radio, and radio comedy, was changing the American lifestyle.

## Drama, Day and Night

Though music and comedy seemed like naturals for the new sound medium, drama took awhile to find its audience. At the beginning of the Golden Age, only one successful dramatic series, *Rise of the Goldbergs*, was on the air. Soon it was joined by others, most aired during the day. These 15-minute serialized dramas gave the audience the chance to listen in to the trials, tribulations, victories, and defeats of various families. Soon there were *Vic and Sade, Helen Trent, Ma Perkins, Our Gal Sunday, Just Plain Bill, Pepper Young's Family,* and the enormously popular *One Man's Family.* These daytime dramas became known as soap operas because so many were owned and produced by soap companies, who recognized that the largely female audience presented a great opportunity to sell household products. Of course, this tradition continues on television today.

Radio soap operas, like most radio programming, had an aura of sameness about them. There was an organ opening, and the announcer

2.8. Amos 'n' Andy, two white men who performed in black face, hit the jackpot as radio's first domestic comedians. Their success not only created a genre of programming, it helped convince many of the power of the young magic medium. Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

would recap the story for those who might have missed an episode or two. Then the action would begin. About halfway through there was a commercial break. Stories involved romance, of course, and many career and family problems. Seldom did "happy" daytime serials succeed. It seemed that the public wanted problem after problem, so that's what they got.

Daytime radio dramas dealt with a surprisingly large number of con-


*"Here is a summary of the programs you will hear over this station immediately following this announcement. At twelve-fifteen, 'Big Sister;' at twelve-thirty, 'The Story of Helen Trent;' 'Life Can Be Beautiful' comes on at one and 'Ma Perkins' at one-fifteen; 'Young Doctor Malone' is presented at one-thirty, followed fifteen minutes later by 'Road of Life' . . ."*

Drawing by Robt. Day; © 1946, 1974 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

troversial themes. According to Russel Nye's *The Unembarrassed Muse*, these included "adultery, divorce, illegitimacy, forgery, greed, possible incest, arson, murder, robbery, suicide, alcoholism, mental illness, bigamy, embezzlement and accidental death." This was unusual, given radio's squeaky-clean image at the time. In 1934, for instance, CBS had decided not to carry a speech by the U.S. surgeon general because it

referred to venereal disease. However, although the soaps depicted adultery and alcoholism, they did not condone them, and they were thus considered acceptable fare.

The king and queen of soap opera producers were Frank and Anne Hummert. By far the most prolific of all writer/producers, the Hummerts once had 67 episodes on the air in one week. In 1938 they and their staff produced a total of over five million words. That's a lot of soap! At one point during the decade, daytime listeners could tune in seven consecutive hours of drama.

The success of the soaps prompted new dramatic series for prime time as well. These included detective series (*The Shadow, I Love a Mystery*), westerns (*The Lone Ranger*), and other variations. There were also successful attempts at more "serious" drama, represented by shows like the *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. It was the latter that broadcast the most famous single radio program of all time. Young Orson Welles had assembled his *Mercury Theatre* cast and sold the idea of a series to CBS for the 1938 fall season. On the night before Halloween, Welles scheduled an adaptation of H. G. Wells's classic science fiction thriller, "The War of the Worlds." The plot seemed rather preposterous: Martians landing on earth in a mysterious spacecraft and destroying earthlings with a deadly heat ray.

But it was the form, not the content, of the broadcast that was to create havoc. Welles chose to tell the story as a series of simulated radio broadcasts, complete with orchestra music, occasionally interrupted by "bulletins" about the invaders. At first it was a meteorite, then a spaceship, then the heat rays began. The national guard was supposedly called out to Grover's Mill, New Jersey, to combat the invaders. The story action came suddenly from legitimate-sounding radio announcers and news broadcasts. While the cast in the upstairs studio at CBS created their fantasy, millions of listeners across America thought it was for real. An estimated six million people heard some part of the broadcast, and about a third of them believed the invasion was actually happening. The next day headlines read "Radio Listeners in Panic" and "Many Flee Homes to Escape Gas Raid from Mars." Welles seemed amused by the reaction. CBS apologized. Congress held hearings, and new regulations were made to govern the use of simulated news bulletins. There has never been another radio panic.

In retrospect, we can see that timing played an important part in the incident. Hitler was on the move in Europe, and many Americans believed war could break out at any moment. A nervous country tuned in and heard what it expected, an invasion. More important, radio had a great deal of credibility. If you heard it on the radio, *it was so*. This tradi-

## 2.9. THE MAN WHO PANICKED AMERICA

The young man who orchestrated the audio invasion from Mars that left a nation panic stricken was Orson Welles: magician, circus clown, director, producer, actor, artist, and perhaps America's only multimedia genius.

Welles was born in 1915 into a family of notorious eccentrics. His grandfather met his demise on an ocean voyage after falling overboard while drunk. Not one to doubt the wisdom of his ancestors, young Orson took his first ocean trip at the tender age of 11 and is rumored to have run up a liquor bill of several hundred dollars during the voyage.

During his childhood, Welles found himself being shuttled back and forth between a curious yet distinguished collection of relatives. He was treated as an adult, and he responded by acting like one. He read with ease at age three and gave a stirring solo performance of King Lear for relatives at age seven. Shakespeare's tragedies have always been Welles's first love.

While still in his early 20s, Welles and John Houseman founded the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. Among the show's players were many soon-to-be-famous actors and actresses, such as Joseph Cotten and Agnes Moorehead. CBS was looking for a "class act" to oppose the popular *Edgar Bergen* show in the fall of 1938, and Welles's *Mercury Theatre* seemed to fit the bill. Within a few weeks, the young, unknown director would astound the nation with the "War of the Worlds." His name became a household word.

The publicity value of Welles's instant fame was not lost on George Schaeffer, then president of nearly bankrupt RKO Pictures. At the urging of Nelson Rockefeller, a major RKO stockholder, Schaeffer signed Welles and his *Mercury* players for three major motion pictures. In the contract, Welles was guaranteed autonomy along with the right to be actor, director, scriptwriter, scenarist, and anything else he wanted. After surveying RKO's lot and getting a look at his budget, the 25-year-old Welles was reputed to have said, "This is the biggest choo-choo train a kid ever had."

The young eccentric did not let RKO down. Within a year, he produced *Citizen Kane*, a film many critics feel is the finest American film ever made. Significantly, the film's use of sound, carried over from Welles's experience with radio, helped convince many critics of his innovative genius. Despite critical acclaim, however, *Citizen Kane* did not do well at the box office, and soon Welles was feuding with RKO. Finally, RKO executive Charles Koerner told the *Mercury Theatre* players to

Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

be out of their offices in 24 hours. He told the press, "All's well that ends Welles."

Welles moved to Europe and eventually made several more films, many of them brilliant, but none with the universal recognition of *Citizen Kane*. Critics have noted sadly that Welles's greatest accomplishments were completed by the time he was 26. Since then, they say, he has "failed to live up to his expectations." Yet after producing the most famous radio program in America, and perhaps the finest American film, where was there to go? Now married for the third time, Welles still lives "in exile" in Europe, occasionally visiting America to perform a magic trick on the *Tonight Show* or film a TV commercial for a California winery.

tion continues with our reliance on radio for up-to-the-minute news today. In October 1938, everyone came to realize the magic medium was far more than a vehicle for entertainment or even for news—it had the power to influence their lives in a very direct way.

## And Now the News

Increasingly, people were coming to rely on radio to give them the news. Radio could do what print could not: give listeners the feeling of "being there" as history was being made. By the end of the 1930s, almost half of those surveyed would say they actually preferred radio news to newspapers. This shift in public loyalty was anticipated by the newspapers as early as 1933. That year, the American Newspaper Publishers Association decided radio news constituted a real threat to their industry. A resolution was passed urging members to print radio program logs only as paid advertising. Almost simultaneously, the Associated Press voted to suspend service to radio stations, in effect cutting them off from their news supply. The other wire services followed suit. Once again, radio's only source of news would be what was already in print.

CBS and NBC responded by starting their own news-gathering services, and broadcast journalism, as we know it today, was born. But by the end of 1933, a compromise was struck that promised to end the "press-radio war." The networks would quit their attempts at news gathering. A national Press-Radio Bureau was set up to supply radio stations with brief bulletins, about enough copy to make two five-minute newscasts each day. Radio commentators were not to use any news that was not at least 12 hours old.

This compromise did nothing to quench the public's thirst for instant radio news, however, and the more prosperous stations ignored the agreement and went on as before. Several large companies, such as the Esso oil company, felt that sponsoring newscasts was good for their image. By 1935, all pretense of stopping radio news was finished. The networks rebuilt their news-gathering staffs to face the biggest news story of the decade—the war in Europe.

Radio featured a number of newscasters whose distinctive voices and mannerisms would soon make them household words. These were men like the ultimately credible H. V. Kaltenborn and rapid-voiced Lowell Thomas, as well as Gabriel Heatter, Edwin C. Hill, Cedric Foster, and Fulton Lewis, Jr. By the end of the decade, a young network commentator named Edward R. Murrow was in London. His broadcasts during the

German air raids of the 1940s were to become the most famous war newscasts of all time. Eventually, Murrow would be regarded as a hero of broadcast journalism. To today's broadcast journalist, Murrow is the equivalent of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Joseph Pulitzer all wrapped up in one.

## Roosevelt and Radio

With radio's increasing role in shaping public opinion through news and commentary, it was only natural that politicians would try to use the medium to their advantage. Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, Churchill, and dozens of other world leaders would broadcast to the people. But perhaps none was as skillful or as subtle as America's Franklin D. Roosevelt. His first inaugural address, carried by all the networks in March 1933, offered hope to Americans in the face of economic depression. Just nine days after he took office, Roosevelt returned to the airwaves, not to make a speech, but to "chat" with the American people, to calmly assure them that steps were being taken to turn the economy, and the nation, around. Roosevelt's calm and friendly voice seemed to help stop the panic. Again and again he would return to the air for these "fireside chats" that were to become his trademark. This was something entirely new, and very unorthodox. Roosevelt was going over the heads of Congress, newspaper reporters, even radio commentators; he was taking his story directly to the people in a way never before possible. For the most part, it worked.

## Armstrong's FM: A New Kind of Radio

While radio broadcasts during this period were received widely, they were not without their technical problems. Because all broadcasts at this time used *amplitude modulation* (AM) to transmit their sounds, they were subject to a great amount of static and interference. Put as simply as possible, amplitude modulation relies on the amount of energy transmitted, so energy sources in the atmosphere between the sender and the receiver can distort or weaken the original signal.

This problem was finally solved by Edwin Armstrong, a young man


2.10. Franklin D. Roosevelt had a special way with radio and, like today's Presidents, commanded time on all major networks for any speeches directly involving an American crisis. Courtesy, Historical Pictures Service, Inc., Chicago.

who had studied at Columbia University and invented the feedback circuit that had greatly improved AM radio performance. David Sarnoff, at that time a friend of Armstrong, had idly mused one day, "I wish someone would invent a little black box to eliminate radio static." The reference, of course, was to Marconi's little black box that began it all. Over the next ten years, Armstrong was to work on the problem, financed largely

by money he'd made selling the rights on earlier inventions to Sarnoff's Radio Corporation of America.

In 1930, Armstrong applied for patents, not for a way to eliminate static, but for an entirely new broadcast system, *frequency modulation*, or FM. FM eliminated the reliance on amplitude and all that went with it. This new radio system, he predicted, would solve the static problem forever. When he approached Sarnoff with the invention, RCA was interested, but over the next few years Armstrong began to fear the company was not prepared to invest the money necessary to promote FM. No wonder—RCA and NBC had their fortunes tied up in AM. To change systems now would mean the potential loss of millions of dollars in revenues. What's more, RCA was running tests to develop something new, a broadcast medium that could transmit pictures as well as sound: television.

Disappointed and disgusted, Armstrong broke with RCA in 1935 and proceeded with his own plans to develop FM. He held startling demonstrations of the obvious superiority of the FM channels. In 1939 his W2XMN became the first FM station. He gained backing from an eastern independent network, and as interest in FM grew, it appeared that FM dominance may be imminent. The FCC also dictated that TV sound would also be in the FM spectrum, where it remains today.

But just as the future of FM seemed assured, the country began preparing for World War II. In 1939, Armstrong himself gave permission to the military to use his various FM equipment innovations without any compensation. The patriotic gesture probably cost him millions, for soon almost all military radio communication was FM. Armstrong turned his attention to military communications problems. Meanwhile, public reliance on AM during the war years gave it more prominence than ever. In addition, the quality of the AM signal improved steadily. By the time the war was over, FM's role as a new broadcast vehicle had taken a back seat to television.

## The End of the Golden Age

As the Golden Age of radio drew to a close, AM was stronger than ever. Americans were listening more than ever before, and CBS and NBC were locked in a battle for listeners. In fact, CBS's William Paley was to stun the radio world by "buying off" a lot of high-priced NBC talent. Major Bowes was the first defector, in 1936. In the 1940s, Bing Crosby, George Burns


2.11. One of Jack Benny's favorite jokes involved a stick-up attempt: When the robber said, "Your money or your life," Jack said, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking." Actually Benny was a very generous man, and on his salary he could afford to be. Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

and Gracie Allen, and, finally, the number-one rated Jack Benny would all come to CBS, succumbing to the magic of Bill Paley's checkbook. Shrewdly, Paley arranged "keeping money" for the stars by developing a

new system of buying "production companies" whose sole assets consisted of the stars themselves. Since profits from such companies were taxed at a much lower rate than salary income, it meant hundreds of thousands of dollars more in net income for performers of Benny's stature.

For the most part, however, the innovative programming, creative manipulation, and inventive genius of radio's Golden Age came to an end with the decade. Perhaps it was inevitable. In 1930, radio was a new, dynamic, and unpredictable industry; ten years later, CBS stock was being sold on the New York Stock Exchange. The vitality of those hectic early years had created the corporate giants that eventually held a firm grip on the industry. There would be little room to try something new as long as something old seemed to be working so well and continued being so profitable.

## The 1940s: Meet the DJ

Several events around the turn of the decade would contribute to a new trend, the rise of the disc jockey, or DJ. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) had long held a stranglehold over the kind of recorded music that could be played on the air, because they represented virtually every popular recording artist of that time. Trying to raise their fees, they withheld as much music as possible. This increasingly irritated broadcasters, and in 1939 Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) was formed to rival ASCAP. BMI began to sign musicians, whose recorded music became immediately available to radio stations for air play.

A 1940 court decision made it possible for certain records intended for home use to be played on the air without any special licensing agreement. In 1941, ASCAP demanded a huge increase in royalties, and many stations quit playing ASCAP music altogether, relying instead on the scant BMI catalog and other music in the public domain. Few records were produced during the war years because shellac and vinyl, two necessary ingredients, were scarce, but after the war, new music began to be recorded. ASCAP and the broadcasters finally settled. All the necessary components were now in place for the rise of the DJ.

DJs were not a completely new phenomenon of the 1940s. As early as 1932, Al Jarvis had broadcast recorded music from a small studio in Los Angeles, referring to it as the "world's largest make-believe ballroom." In

New York, Martin Block's own *Make-Believe Ballroom*, begun in 1935, was a tremendous commercial success. Though the idea may have begun with Jarvis, it was Block who made it work. When his bosses at WNEW refused to sponsor the show, Block went out and sold it on his own, then bought the time from WNEW. He thus became the first DJ entrepreneur. So successful was the make-believe ballroom that in its heyday it drew an average of 12,000 fan letters per month. Bob Poole hosted *Poole's Paradise* on New Orleans's powerful WWL and became the first big-name disc jockey for many southern and midwestern listeners.

The attitude of most people in the music industry toward these early efforts was decidedly negative. The DJs, they reasoned, were not artists; they contributed nothing, simply "stealing" musical recordings and playing them for an unsuspecting audience. But the tremendous listener response kept the idea of the DJ alive. In addition, it was an economical and easy-to-program kind of radio that held special appeal for the station without a network to provide the 15 or more hours a day of needed programming. Alternatives like drama and live music were expensive to produce at the local level, and they usually paled by comparison to the network offerings. The DJ, on the other hand, could play a recording that sounded exactly the same as a live performance, perhaps even better.

But it was more than the rise of the DJ that spelled the end of network radio as it had existed in the 1930s and 1940s. Enthusiasm for the vast possibilities of radio had waned considerably. In 1945, J. Harold Ryan, the new president of the National Association of Broadcasters, said in a keynote address celebrating radio's twenty-fifth anniversary:

> American radio is the product of American business. It is just as much that kind of product as the vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the automobile and the airplane. . . . If the legend still persists that a radio station is some kind of art center, a technical museum, or a little piece of Hollywood transplanted strangely to your home town, then the first official act of the second quarter century should be to list it along with the local dairies, laundries, banks, restaurants, and filling stations.

Two years later, Lee de Forest wrote that radio, "a potent instrument for culture, fine music, and the uplifting of America's intelligence," had become "a laughing stock . . . ," a medium that appealed primarily to the intelligence of a 13-year-old.

Though 1948 was radio's highest revenue year, the first television "season" of 1948–49 marked the beginning of the end for network radio. Although few dared predict such a rapid end for the radio networks that had so dominated American entertainment for two decades, within five

years they had lost much of their audience. Television would be bigger than ever, with the three major networks (NBC had been forced to sell the Blue Network to the new ABC in 1943) scrambling quickly to make the transition. In their wake they would leave radio broadcasters with a lot of time to fill.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Pick one of the historical personages mentioned in this chapter and do a "personality profile" like those on pages 18–19, 28–29, or 36–37. No fair picking someone who has already been profiled in these pages!

2. What if network radio as it existed in the 1930s and 1940s had continued to flourish despite television and other factors? What kind of programs would the networks carry today? What arguments would network advertisers use to sell the virtues of radio vs. TV?

3. You are appointed a federal radio commissioner. It's 1927, and you can solve the problems that confront radio any way you want. What would you do? Why?

4. How do the current President's media policies stack up compared with those of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his hearthside manner? What are major differences? How much can be attributed to personality and how much to the way the media have changed since FDR's time?

## Readings and References

**Erik Barnouw**
*A Tower in Babel.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
Barnouw's three-volume history of broadcasting is easily the most quotable and usable work on the subject. This first volume covers broadcasting from the time of Marconi's black box to 1933. According to one reviewer, Barnouw is a master of on-point anecdote. Especially useful are the Chronology and Bibliography sections at the end. A must for even the briefest historical research. Good index.

**Erik Barnouw**
*The Golden Web.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
The second volume of the history (see above), covering the 1933–53 period. Includes coverage of radio's Golden Era, the demise of the radio networks, and the rise of television.

**Sydney W. Head**
*Broadcasting in America* (3rd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.
This is a survey of radio with ample historical material. The most widely accepted text in the field, it includes a thorough treatment of many important broadcast issues. The beginning student may find it difficult going at times. Extensive index.

**Robert Metz**
*CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye.* New York: Signet Books, 1976.
Here it is, the "inside story" of all the sordid goings on at CBS, from the UIB days to the present. The writer is part historian, part gossip columnist, and totally interesting. Probably the most readable book on the history of broadcasting. Chapters are brief and to the point, though their titles may confuse the beginner. Fair index. Highly recommended.

**Russel Nye**
*The Unembarrassed Muse.* New York: Dial Press, 1976.
This is a reissue of a book first published in 1970. There has been some rewriting, and this newer edition is preferable. Nye is the "grand old man" of the study of American popular culture. Radio as an integral part of popular culture gets a short but significant treatment on pages 390–406. Lots to think about. Good index.

**Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross**
*Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1978.
A solid, readable, and up-to-date history of broadcasting. Radio is covered primarily in Chapters 3–7. The table of contents and bibliographical materials are most helpful. The authors use boxed inserts containing actual documents, scripts, etc., to create a "you are there" feeling.

**Edward J. Whetmore**
*Mediamerica: Form, Content, and Consequence of Mass Communication.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1979.
This survey book includes material covering all mass media, with an emphasis on radio in Chapter 6. Many of the materials in this book first appeared in *Mediamerica* in considerably more condensed form.

# 3

# Modern Radio:

# Formats and Formulas

## 48 Play It Again, Todd

In the late 1940s there was nothing much good on the radio in Omaha. Young Todd Storz spent a lot of time at a local bar, shooting pool and drinking beer with the guys. The "entertainment center" of this particular establishment, and others like it all over the country, was the jukebox. Night after night, customers would wear a path from their barstools to the music machine, putting in nickels and listening to their favorite tunes. The thing that amazed Storz was the redundancy of it all. The machine had a 40-record capacity, but the same patrons seemed to play the same 2 or 3 songs over and over again.

The lesson he learned in that bar did not escape Storz as he pursued a career in radio. In 1949, he persuaded his father to help him buy Omaha's ailing KOHW for $75,000. Why can't a station be like a jukebox, he reasoned, simply playing the same 40 songs over and over again? The concept made sense. After all, radio at that time performed the same function as a jukebox. It was not meant to be listened to carefully, but simply kept listeners company in their homes or cars.

Such simple lessons are often the stuff of media genius. Todd Storz anticipated the needs of an audience and programmed to meet those needs. He picked his 40 songs very carefully, making sure to include popular vocals, country and western, and rhythm 'n' blues hits in order to obtain the largest possible audience. A large audience was the key to success in radio then, just as it is today.

Storz's "Top-40" formula was an overnight sensation. He used his station's profits to buy WTIX, and soon it was number one in New Orleans. Before long, there was a Storz chain and a Storz formula, and Todd was on his way to becoming a radio legend. In retrospect, his discovery seems simple. During the first half of the 1950s, radio had been languishing. The only network shows left were a few soap operas and morning variety programs like Arthur Godfrey and Don McNeil's Breakfast Club. These succeeded because they were part of radio's new "companion" function.

Radio needed something new, and Top-40 was it. Sandwiched between the Top-40 were jingles singing the praises of the station, light DJ patter, and, of course, commercials. All of these components were organized in a very deliberate way to keep the pace moving as rapidly as possible. Storz DJs were not the knowledgeable musical hosts of the Martin Block make-believe ballroom era; instead, they were relegated to delivering name, time, and temperature. Storz insisted that his jocks keep chatter to a minimum. Comedian George Carlin, a one-time Storz jock, described the policy as "shut up and play the music."

DJs were also denied any say in which songs were aired. Whereas DJs

3.1. "The Old Redhead" Arthur Godfrey could strum only a few chords, and he wasn't much to look at, but his affable speaking style won him a devoted radio audience. Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

from the old school had spent hours picking out the music, Storz jocks would simply arrive five minutes before air time and play the records according to a provided list. The personality jocks, such as New York's Block, Los Angeles's Ira Cook, and Detroit's Ed McKenzie were soon losing rating points to young, enthusiastic, screaming jocks whose voices seemed interchangeable. For the next decade, Top-40 would be the absolute, unchallenged leader in radio. And despite the changing trends and the new competition of the 1980s, many major markets are still dominated by Storz descendants.

Storz was also a pioneer in radio giveaway. His stations did not originate the idea—in fact, the quiz show *Stop the Music* had offered large cash prizes to its listeners and had helped knock long-time comedian Fred Allen off the air in the late 1940s—but it was Storz who made the giveaway an integral part of his Top-40 formula. One of his more famous

giveaways involved a DJ who threw away thousands of dollar bills from the roof of a downtown building. When the hapless DJ was arrested for creating a traffic jam, hundreds of listeners showed up to bail him out, thus giving the station even more publicity.

Meanwhile, there was criticism of the Top-40 formula from every corner. It is true that Top-40 was, and is, a dehumanizing, materialistic, uncreative, and methodical approach to radio. It's true that the Top-40 jocks seemed to have little to say but, "It's 10:16 right now; outside it's 55 degrees. You can win $1,000. And now back to the music . . ." Yet, in market after market, *it worked*. It still works today.

## The Young and the Restless

One of the reasons Top-40 succeeded was that radio's audience, like that for film, was getting younger and younger. While Mom and Dad were glued to their television sets, son and daughter turned to radio. They preferred the stations that played the most hits. In addition, they sought a station whose pace and approach reflected their own frantic and seemingly intense lifestyle. Top-40 did exactly that. Nevertheless, the success of Top-40 baffled those who were accustomed to the practices of the Golden Age.

In 1958, Mitch Miller, who had had success as a performer and record executive, stood before a DJ convention sponsored by Storz. As he looked out on those young, eager Top-40 jocks, he saw the face of the enemy, and he let them know it:

> You carefully built yourselves into the monarchs of radio and then you went and abdicated your programming to the 8-to-14-year-olds, to the preshave crowd that makes up 12 percent of the country's population and zero percent of its buying power—once you eliminate pony-tail ribbons, popsicles and peanut brittle. Youth must be served—but how about some music for the rest of us?
>
> Does the demand for the record come because you play it first, or do the kids demand it because they heard it first on Top-40? If Top-40 is an election, will somebody please blow a whistle for the Honest Ballot Association . . . The 75 percent of the nation over 14 years old is buying hi-fi record players in unprecedented numbers, setting them up in the living room, shutting off the radio, and creating their own home-made programming departments.

Miller grossly underestimated the buying power of the young audience, however. By the mid-1950s, over 150 million dollars was being

spent on records each year, and research indicated the vast majority of the buyers were young people between 13 and 19. Of these teen record buyers, two-thirds were female. This explained, to a certain extent, the preponderance of love songs on Top-40 radio. For the teenage girl of the 1950s, true love was the single most important thing in life.

Instinctively, Storz and other successful Top-40 programmers provided a soundtrack for life for their youthful listeners. The form and content of the hits appealed to the teenage audience. In the early 1950s there were love ballads, mostly by established crooner era stars like Nat "King" Cole, Teresa Brewer, Rosemary Clooney, Patti Page, and Tony Bennett.

It was inevitable that music itself would undergo a drastic change as more young people tuned in and took over the record market. That change began in 1954, when an obscure single by a hillbilly group, Bill Haley and the Comets, was released. Its throbbing beat seemed out of touch with the times, and the record soon passed into temporary oblivion. But it was picked up the following year by the producers of a youth-oriented film titled *Blackboard Jungle,* and "Rock Around the Clock" became the background music for the film about young people run amok in a high school. It seemed to reflect perfectly the restless mood of the nation's teenagers, especially the boys who identified with their counterparts in the film.

*Blackboard Jungle* and "Rock Around the Clock" became tremendous hits. In fact, the song was the best-selling single in 1955, topping all the crooners' love songs. "Rock Around the Clock" ushered in a new kind of music that was to dominate Top-40 radio, record sales, and the country in the decades to come. For the next few years, Top-40 radio played little but the new rock 'n' roll and the love theme ballads so appealing to teenagers. Soon there were combinations of the two. Popular record stars would release a rock 'n' roll song on one side of a new single, a slow love ballad on the other.

More than any other single factor, rock 'n' roll, with its quick pace and relentless beat, was responsible for the rise of Top-40. It matched perfectly the fast, frantic patter of Top-40 DJs. The format and the music quickly formed a symbiotic relationship that has never died. The soundtrack for life function of radio music (see Chapter 4) goes on.

## Multi-Mediamerica

TV's first season in 1948 had been called the beginning of the end for radio. Yet a 1958 survey revealed that in the decade since radio had

"died," the number of radio stations had increased from about 2,200 to over 3,700, a gain of over 60 percent. That summer, about 70 million people had watched some television each day, whereas about 75 million had listened to some radio. The proliferation of small, independent radio stations was phenomenal. For a medium that was supposed to have died, radio's economic future looked healthy indeed. Large companies with huge TV advertising campaigns backed them up with advertising campaigns on local radio stations.

Television would not put an end to radio any more than radio had put an end to newspapers. There was evidence to indicate that Americans were simply consuming more of all media. There was the newspaper with breakfast, radio on the way to work and on the way home, television for the evening hours, and perhaps a magazine before bedtime. What's more, the tremendous diversity of radio could not be matched by TV. The sheer number of stations, and lower overhead costs meant radio could successfully go after teenagers, young adults, older adults, various ethnic groups, and others in a way impossible for television. In many markets, radio stations could be financially successful even though they reached only a few thousand people. Such a small audience would not support a TV station. And by delivering a specific kind of audience, radio held out a special appeal to advertisers.

## The Big Payola

During the late 1950s, disc jockeys had been the absolute monarchs of a new, booming, profitable radio. They were adored by fans who saw them as stars, stars who saw them as hit-makers, and record companies who realized DJs held a stranglehold on the record industry. Records that jocks played might become hits; those not played would *never* become hits.

In the spring of 1958, in Miami Beach, the annual International Radio Programming Seminar and Pop Music Disc Jockey Convention was held. As always, the record companies were there to make the jocks feel at home. RCA Victor handed each of them a million dollars in play money and kept handing it out all week; then, at week's end, they auctioned off a trip to Europe and a new car to the lucky jocks who had accumulated the most. Record companies paid for the booze and the hotels, and even flew in hundreds of bikini-clad women to mingle with the pampered male jocks. Through all of this conspicuous consumption, record executives kept reminding jocks, "Without you, we're dead."

The convention marked the zenith of the payola days. With the rise of Top-40, fewer and fewer jocks were able to choose their own records. As rock author R. Serge Denisoff points out, "Bribing a Storz jock would be a waste of money, since he had no control over the songs he played." That control was left to program directors and owners like Storz himself. However, there were some personality jocks like Chicago's Howard Miller and New York's Alan Freed (who coined the term *rock 'n' roll*), whose fame forced owners to give them a free hand. It was common industry practice to give these men cars and gifts—with no strings attached, of course. In addition large numbers of DJs in smaller towns could play whatever they wanted, and thus were courted by the record companies. The practice became general public knowledge in 1959, at the same time as TV's quiz show scandals. Both the FCC and the Federal Trade Commission held hearings.

Seymour Lazar, a Beverly Hills attorney specializing in the music industry, told a Senate investigating committee that he personally knew of some DJs who padded their salaries with $300–$500 per month in unreported cash from record companies. One large-market DJ received more than $36,000 from eight record companies over a 15-month period. A 1959 survey revealed that over a quarter of a million dollars was paid to disc jockeys for "consulting and other services" in 23 major markets. The practice of paying a DJ for listening to records and predicting hits was widespread. Naturally if jocks had heard a record, they were more likely to play it. Record companies counted on this simple formula to woo the elusive jocks and turn their records into hits.

Far more subtle, yet every bit as lucrative, were the complicated practices of entrepreneurs like Dick Clark, whose nationally televised *American Bandstand* was the most desirable place to "break" a new record. Clark used his various publishing and record companies to search for records or songs with potential. Then the authors or artists would sign contracts with Clark firms, giving up a large part of their royalties in exchange for "management services." Other independent companies were "urged" to use pressing plants and other facilities controlled by Clark. In exchange, their records would be played on *American Bandstand*. According to R. Serge Denisoff, "Overall, 50.4 percent of the records available through the companies in which Clark had an interest were played on *American Bandstand*. Of these, 65.4 percent were played *before* they had appeared in the Billboard chart listing." Songs like "Sixteen Candles," "The All American Boy," and "Get a Job" were played first on *American Bandstand*. Some profits from these songs ended up going to Clark himself.

Many contended that the rise of the "indies" (independents) contributed heavily to the coming of payola. Before rock 'n' roll, six major record companies (Columbia, Capitol, RCA Victor, Decca, Mercury, and MGM)

## 3.2. WOLFMAN JACK: A HOWLING SUCCESS

Like everyone else who grew up anywhere near Turlock, California, in the early 1960s, I spent many an evening listening to "Da Wolfman." He played a curious combination of blues, rock 'n' roll, oldies, and novelties, and talked daringly about "cruisin'" and "makin' it" with the girls. His programs were punctuated with wild wolf calls and audio exclamation marks. The fact that his show came from XERB in Tijuana, Mexico, only added to his mystique. We all assumed the Wolfman was just too hot for American radio, and we loved him the more for it.

Wolfman Jack is actually Robert Smith, a New York born-and-bred high school drop-out who went south to seek his fortune in the late 1950s. After working at a few odd radio jobs, he settled into XERF just across the Texas/Mexican border. Since XERF was not licensed in the United States, it could exceed the legal power limit of American stations, and the Wolfman's howl soon carried across the Midwest. Later, he added XERB to his "network." Wolfman played his brand of rock 'n' roll and pitched a large number of novelty items that could be had by mail. "Just sit down and write a check for $4.98—send it to the old Wolfman and merrrcy . . . this collection of hits is gonna be yours. . . ."

Wolfman was already an institution when he was cast to play himself in the film

had dominated popular music. Between 1946 and 1952 there were 163 singles that sold a million copies or more. Of these, only five came from the indies. But the new sound was initially shunned by many of the majors, who thought it a passing fad. As a result, hundreds of small labels sprang up. It was contended that they used payola and other promotion gimmicks to try to carve out a niche in the marketplace. Even the rise of Elvis Presley appeared tainted with payola. Sam Phillips, who first promoted "The King," was accused of the practice.

However, it seemed the majors were guilty as well. In December 1959, RCA Victor records signed a consent order for the FTC in which it agreed to "cease and desist" giving payola, despite the fact that it never *legally* admitted it had done so in the first place. And there were problems over at Columbia, too. Frank Sinatra had testified before the House

*American Graffiti* in 1973. The movie was supposed to take place in Modesto, California (some 10 miles from Turlock), in 1962, and it was in California's fertile San Joaquin valley where teenagers—white, Mexican-American, and black—made up the bulk of Wolfman's XERB West Coast audience. The publicity from the film led Smith to Los Angeles's KDAY and eventually to New York, where he became WNBC's night howler.

Then came television—a syndicated Wolfman Jack show featured the latest rock 'n' roll acts. The Guess Who even wrote a song for him that promptly went to the top of the charts. The song promised young audiences if they would "clap for the Wolfman," he'd soon be "at their record hop."

Now a more respectable Wolfman has evolved into a sort of "hip" Dick Clark, yet he retains his enthusiasm for his audience and the power of the magic medium. Says Smith, "On TV you're as big as your budget. With radio, you're as big as the imagination of the listener." Even the most casual Wolfman Jack fan will tell you no mere TV mortal could ever measure up to their imaginary vision of the Wolfman, and the sounds of those old howls crackling through the night across the Mexican border.

Judiciary Committee that Mitch Miller, the famed sing-along leader, Columbia executive, and Top-40 critic, had taken "kickbacks" from writers for recording their songs.

Many DJs defended the practice, contending that payola was like a political contribution for a congressional candidate: It simply guaranteed a sympathetic ear, not a "vote," or air play. Stan Richards of Boston's WILD took this stand while admitting that he had accepted cash, clothes, and other amenities.

Public debate raged for over a year, doing untold public relations damage to the image of the DJ and the music business in general. Finally, Congress acted. In 1960, a bill was passed making payola a criminal offense, punishable by a fine of up to $10,000. The public entered the 1960s with a very dubious picture of the DJ.

Stan Freberg, a noted radio comedian, said it all with his hit single, "The Old Payola Roll Blues." In it, a young singer is dragged off the street and asked if he'd like to be a rock 'n' roll star. The manager then approaches a DJ with an offer of cash to play the record. The DJ refuses. Eventually, the manager is kicked out of the studio with a reminder that it's "all over for your guys." The DJ emerges as the hero, the record promoter as the bad guy. In the public's mind, it's been that way ever since.

## Small Is Beautiful

The invention of the transistor in the Bell Laboratories in 1948 had made a "tubeless" radio theoretically possible. Transistors did not heat up, would not wear out, and were smaller, more reliable and easier to work with than the cumbersome tubes they replaced. But it wasn't until the early 1960s that transistors became inexpensive enough to have real impact in the marketplace. When the boom came, it came all at once. In 1963, over 24 million radio sets were sold, and fully two-thirds of them were transistors. Most purchases were by those who already had at least one set. For the first time, there were more radios (some 214 million) than there were people in the United States. Radio had truly become a go-where-you-go medium, and the future looked bright ahead.

Owning a radio station was described as an ideal small business because it required only a small percentage down, could be run with a small staff, was easy to sell, and promised good return on investment. Stations in major markets began to fetch astonishing prices. In New Jersey, WPAT, sold for $300,000 in 1954, brought $5 million in 1965. New York's WINS, sold for $425,000 in 1952, brought an astonishing $10 million in 1964. That year two stations in Detroit and in Charleston, West Virginia, were sold in a package to Capital Cities Broadcast Corporation for $15 million.

The average family in the 1960s owned four radios and listened an average of three hours each day. There were 50 million car radios. Top-40 was still the order of the day in 1965, but it had been joined by an ever-increasing number of all-talk shows, whose hosts were as likely to insult callers as listen to them. No matter; the public was longing for something, and radio provided it. According to Peter Strauss, then president of WMCA in New York, "Most city people are lonely, so we've tried disc jockeys, news and editorials to make the listener feel involved." Involve-

ment was the key in the decade since rock had arrived, and radio revenues rose again. Radio programmers had finally found the key: *involvement*. A song must move the listener; news must entertain; a contest must offer excitement; a talk show must involve everyone, for better or for worse. This was what radio did best. While programmers scrambled to turn this realization to profits, critics complained vehemently (see 3.3).

## Boss Radio: A Contextual Series of Contrasts

In May 1965, KHJ was Los Angeles's seventeenth-rated station. Four months later it was number one. Never before had such an astounding programming coup been accomplished. The KHJ miracle was performed by a new general manager, a 28-year-old, self-professed Georgia bumpkin named Bill Drake. Drake had already performed similar miracles in California for San Francisco's KYA and Fresno's KYNO. But when he did it in Los Angeles, the industry was astounded.

The Drake sound was "Boss Radio," a streamlined version of Storz's original Top-40. Drake reasoned that Top-40 had become cluttered with gongs and gimmicks. What people really wanted was music. Drake's partner, Gene Chenault, described the Drake touch: "The old kind of Top-40 radio was a Model T Ford. Bill put in an automatic transmission and made it a beautiful car."

Drake also had the sense, or luck, to hire as Program Director Ron Jacobs, another radio whiz kid. It was Jacobs who came up with the idea of the "Boss" radio logo:

> So we had the jingle, "KHJ, Los Angeles" and then the guy comes in and says, "It's 6:30 in Los Angeles." I was standing there in the booth and said, "That's redundant." We just said Los Angeles. So I said, "Try saying, 'Boss Angeles.' " So he did the next time, and thereafter we did it every half hour, 168 hours a week, forever. . . .

Jacobs was a genius at promotion. His typical promos would last only a few seconds—just long enough to get the listener curious—then "back to the music." Many promotions were tied into Hollywood music celebrities themselves. Sonny Bono, Tiny Tim, and others were soon involved with "The All New KHJ—Boss Radio all over Boss Angeles." Again, timing was crucial. Just as the original Top-40 had capitalized on the

## 3.3. AMERICAN RADIO TODAY

The Listener Be Damned
by Desmond Smith

*During the mid-1960s, radio's profits were soaring, but not everyone was happy. Critics like Desmond Smith were finally realizing that the Golden Age was gone forever, and rock 'n' roll was more than a passing fad. These critics spoke for a sizable audience who felt their interests had been ignored in the rush to Top-40 programming and the tendency toward increasing commercialization. These excerpts are from a 1964 article that first appeared in* Harper's.

The merchants of trash who dominate the airwaves—and their powerful allies in Washington—act as if a public interest did not exist.

In the early days of radio, a president of the National Broadcasting Company could tell a Congressional committee: "Our policy is to give the audience one minute of commercials and twenty-nine minutes of good, solid entertainment." Three decades later, in 1963, a broadcasting executive advised another committee that the public could tolerate twenty-five commercials in an hour.

The American radio industry—in reality some five thousand small businessmen going their different ways—has done little or nothing to justify radio's survival as a listening medium. Last year the Federal Communications Commission's monitoring bureau logged dozens of stations which were crowding as much as thirty minutes of commercials into a broadcasting hour. Most of the fare which was served up to punctuate the commercials was as tasteless as the commercials themselves. The businessmen of radio need to get together and make a thorough review of current broadcasting standards and practices. Unfortunately, internal reform without outside pressure seems most unlikely. . . .

Apart from network news and the few discussion programs on the big city stations, most of radio today is grim indeed. A rock 'n' roll station in New York says, "We don't call it rock, we like to describe our stuff as 'memory tunes of tomorrow.'" To get listeners, so the theory goes, one needs a formula, an "identity." When radio-station owners get together they rarely talk in terms of programs, they talk about their stations' "sound"—"middle-of-road sound," "singin' sound," "good music sound" (meaning Mantovani). The Situations Wanted column in *Broadcasting*, a leading trade paper, is full of ads like this one: "Way-out jock needs work, record hop genius, real screamer and attention getter, experienced. Write the MOJO-man." Or "Las Vegas, Nevada's wildman is on the prowl. Catch

him while he's hot and be No. 1." On many stations, when a commercial comes along (after every "news flash" or after every record), the audio engineer is simply instructed to "jack up the audio." One station manager told me, "The teenagers control the sets, and to a large degree they influence the household spending. If they want a jukebox, that's what we'll give them." . . .

The FCC, under the aggressive leadership of its new chairman, has made it clear it wants to do something. But a diehard group of broadcasters, backed up by influential congressmen, has been baiting the board of directors of the National Association of Broadcasters to make life difficult for the FCC. For its part, the FCC has become increasingly concerned with the constant flouting of the public interest—particularly by overcommercialization. At present, the FCC and the radio industry are on a collision course.

Surprisingly, the FCC has never suspended a radio station on the sole charge of too many commercials, chiefly because its rules are exceptionally vague in this area. When the FCC announced last summer that it was thinking of adopting the National Association of Broadcasters' own recommended time limits on commercials (a generous eighteen minutes out of every hour, or three minutes in every ten), the broadcasters howled. Such an action, they declared, would mean financial ruin. . . .

"Radio is not to be considered merely as a business for private gain, for private advertisement, or for the entertainment of the curious," Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover said in 1922. "It is to be considered as a public concern, impressed with a public trust . . . primarily from the standpoint of public interest."

For the past several years, the station owners have expected the public to accept without question the kind of radio they have been given; there is no reason why the public should. The next time a particularly crass commercial offends you or a station is overloading on advertising time, write a letter to the president of the corporation which manufactures the product, or to the head of the company whose services are described. Tell him exactly how you feel about the station which broadcast his commercial. Tell him you may stop buying his product; send a copy to the local distributor. Something more than the usual tame dialogue of accusation and empty threats is going to be the test of whether we will eventually get the kind of radio—and television—that we, rather than the owners and the hucksters, deserve.

emerging rock 'n' roll, Boss Radio unconsciously tapped into a new interest in music prompted by the Rock Renaissance (see Chapter 4). In the summer of 1965 the number-one song was the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction." Before the year was out, there would be "Like a Rolling Stone," "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Along Comes Mary," "Eve of Destruction," "Turn, Turn, Turn," "Everyone's Gone to the Moon," and "Positively Fourth Street." All of these songs represented a significant change in the direction of rock music. All were popular, and all were helped by constant air play on KHJ. Though it isn't the largest in the country, the Los Angeles market is looked upon by broadcasters as the bellwether. The idea of Boss Radio, and the raw energy of the Renaissance, soon spread nationwide.

It should be stressed that the partnership between renaissance rock and Boss Radio was unconscious. In fact, it was Drake's very neglect of the renaissance sound and its aftershocks that led to the formation of underground radio as an alternative to the tightly formatted Drake sound. However, for several years KHJ and other stations like it, had the audiences for traditional songs and the new sound as well. The audience had no alternative but to listen to Boss Radio.

In retrospect, Boss Radio also capitalized on several other listener trends. The music literally never stopped—one song began before the last one ended. In between, the fast-talking DJ might fit in a live commercial, time, temperature, and a hello to everyone at the "boss beach." Boss Radio perfectly matched the Southern California lifestyle. It was fresh, clean, mobile, and always in a hurry.

KHJ also had a strict policy limiting commercials to no more than 12 minutes per hour. Drake and Jacobs reasoned, correctly, that an overabundance of commercials would force the listener to tune out. By keeping spots and patter at a minimum, KHJ was also able to claim that it played "more hits than any other station in Southern California."

Successful "boss jocks" were those who could emerge as personalities, despite the severe limitations of the Drake format. At KHJ, "Humble Harv" Miller, Robert W. Morgan, and "The Real Don Steel" all had this quality. According to Jacobs, it was Don Steele who best understood his role in Boss Radio as a "contextual series of contrasts," meaning that the format contained a lot of different things that were unrelated in content. Yet the order of presentation and the "form" brought them all together in a unique package. Steele felt that he was literally in the middle of a group of listeners and that the records, patter, promos, and commercials could be juggled in a way to keep the listeners always interested, always stimulated.

Despite the fact that music from new performers like Bob Dylan, The Byrds, and The Association had helped make Boss Radio a success, KHJ

was reluctant to try untested talent. Rather than play a large number of new songs and hope they became hits, KHJ played records with "momentum"—new songs by established stars that were already receiving air play and climbing up *Billboard's* Hot 100. Significantly, KHJ had the "Boss 30" rather than the old Top-40. Access to KHJ's play list became the most coveted prize in the industry. Once a record had been played on KHJ, its success was assured. KHJ's own momentum would keep it number one in Los Angeles for almost a decade. In recent years, more innovative programming, intense competition, and the rise of FM and album-oriented rock have gradually reduced KHJ's hold over LA radio. Today it has a new format, still no LA station has ever experienced the phenomenal instant success of the original "Boss Radio."

## Hipper Than Thou: Underground Radio

One of the "hip" jocks at San Francisco's KYA who had laughed at "country bumpkin" Bill Drake when he arrived on the scene was Big Tom Donahue. For a while in 1964, Donahue had the opportunity to work for Drake as one of his boss jocks. But Donahue was uncomfortable in the role and felt increasingly that Drake's methods were wrong. Despite his success as a jock at KYA, Donahue left early in 1967 to become program director at the fledgling KMPX-FM. Here was his chance to program his own station without Drake's restrictions. KMPX was the first of many FM (and later some AM) stations to offer a musical alternative to rock enthusiasts.

Donahue's format was antiboss radio. Where Drake played no record longer than three minutes, Donahue and his DJs would often play album cuts running ten minutes or more. There was none of the tightly formatted, hyperactive chatter; instead, KMPX offered "mellow" folk who talked at a normal pace and discussed a number of controversial political and social issues over the air. Drugs were always a favorite topic. And why not? The year was 1967, and with the summer would come the "flower children." San Francisco was fast becoming the center for a new youth movement, fueled by the Rock Renaissance as much as the war in Vietnam. Already there were groups like the Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead, and Big Brother and the Holding Company, forming the nucleus of a "San Francisco Sound." Just as the South had given birth to rock 'n' roll (see Chapter 4), San Francisco would be the birthplace of acid rock, as different from formula rock as KMPX was from KYA.

KMPX was an overwhelming success. At one point, Donahue enjoyed a larger portion of the 18–34 audience than KYA or anyone else in the market. KMPX could justifiably say it was number one, a then unheard-of state of affairs for an FM station. The sound quickly moved east. Hugh Foley, general manager of Houston's underground KFMK-FM summed it up this way: "We're looking for an audience that has grown out of the Monkees." Detroit's WABX-FM was also in the black for the first time in years, thanks to its new underground format.

In New York, Murray the K, self-appointed "fifth Beatle," who had promoted the group during their first U.S. tour, emerged from two years of semiretirement to head the staff of WOR-FM, New York's new, experimental free-form rock station. Gone were his Top-40 ways: "teenie language" and ear-splitting shouts. Now it was Murray the Hip, wearing mod clothes and telling *Time* magazine, "Most deejays are just plastic screamers who come at you with the gimmicks and sweatshirts and a lot of noise, but it's all just diversion to hold the kids' attention to do a pitch."

Underground radio also opened up a whole new avenue of exposure for music that did not fit the Drake-type format. Record company promo people flocked to fill the libraries of free-form jocks with every new album. One DJ told of joining the staff of Los Angeles's KPPC-FM and being amazed by the freebies. "Even though, at first, I only worked weekends, I could expect anywhere from 30 to 75 albums waiting for me each week, compliments of the various record companies." By 1970, KPPC, LA's first underground station, was well-entrenched in the market. In a market as volatile as Los Angeles, even a weekend DJ's support could make the difference between a gold album and another flop.

Underground radio successfully tapped a huge audience, hungry for Rock Renaissance music, but put off by the "hype" of the Drake format. This untapped audience had turned off the radio, preferring to listen to long album cuts on their own records. This audience typified the "60s" generation. They were politically active, and their favorite songs were those that spoke to these issues in some way. Underground radio brought them back into the fold, and as they grew and grew up, they became a sought-after group of consumers. This seems ironic since a pronounced anticonsumerism was part of what "the movement" was supposed to have been about.

Yet for all of its chaos and lack of structure the underground era was one of the most exhilarating times to be in radio. There was tension and excitement in the air, and a feeling that radio could be more than another corporate money making mechanism. Underground DJs were self-proclaimed artists, creatively putting together "sets" of renaissance rock tunes to match their mood and that of their audience. Underground jocks

3.4. The Monkees, criticized by many as being the commercialized answer to the Beatles, were actually created by a major record company. In fact, Michael Nesmith (seated) was the only real musician in the group, though David Jones (far left) could play a tambourine. Courtesy, Columbia Pictures Industry. Copyright © 1977 Columbia Pictures, Inc.

were not limited to rock tunes. Bach cantatas, sitar ragas, and folk music were also heard in abundance. Unlike Drake radio, where the listener always knew what to expect, the underground listener never knew what was coming and apparently preferred it that way.

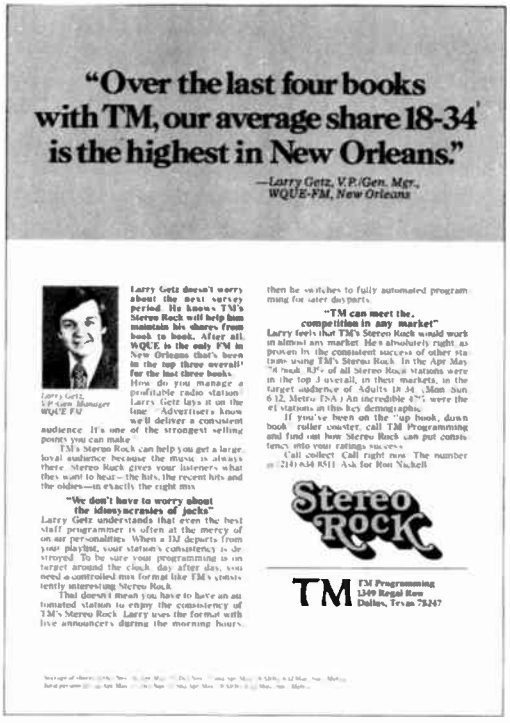
## Progressive Rock: Underground Co-opted

Almost as soon as it began, underground was the center of controversy in the industry. Even the FCC got into the act. In 1970, they issued a statement reminding stations they would be held responsible for any "drug-related" lyrics in the songs they aired. This was also part of a number of antimedia moves by the Nixon administration. Most controversial of all was the behavior of the underground jocks themselves: erratic, unpredictable, and occasionally obscene. At the heart of the problem was the conflict between the nonmaterialistic values of the counterculture the jocks represented and the inherent values of a capitalistic commercial radio system. Underground DJs would occasionally refuse to play a commercial they didn't like. Program directors would reject ads that they considered too hyped or too similar to those on AM. Unfortunately, these commercials often involved the well-heeled national companies that FM station owners wanted for financial support. Clearly, something had to give.

By the early 1970s, a tamer, more controlled version of underground called "progressive" rock appeared. Stations such as Los Angeles's KNX-FM were owned by large corporations that were not interested in the aesthetics of free-form radio, but were interested in the affluent 18–34-year-old audiences the new stations seemed to attract. The answer was often a prerecorded, or *automated*, format that featured a "laid-back" announcer and some of the music that had been played by the undergrounds. But these progressive rock stations stuck to rock; gone was the more esoteric music of the old format. The progressive rockers were able to attract and hold a large segment of the key audience who preferred progressive to Top-40.

Not all progressive stations were automated, but those that weren't greatly restricted their DJs, telling them to give only the time, temperature, and an occasional public service announcement. Once again, it was "shut up and play the music." Both automated and nonautomated stations maintained a tight play list; in most cases, all selections were made by the program director. Even Bill Drake got into the act, with a designed-for-FM-package dubbed "Hit Parade 70."

The most ambitious of these efforts to bridge the gap between progressive and underground styles was the ABC entertainment "Love Network," featuring "Brother John." This short-lived, prerecorded network was aired 24 hours a day on all of ABC's owned and operated FM stations and a number of affiliates. Brother John was a gentle man who read



"Over the last four books with TM, our average share 18-34 is the highest in New Orleans."

—Larry Getz, V.P./Gen. Mgr., WQUE-FM, New Orleans

Larry Getz
V.P./Gen. Manager
WQUE FM

Larry Getz doesn't worry about the next survey period. He knows TM's Stereo Rock will help him maintain his shares from book to book. After all, WQUE is the only FM in New Orleans that's been in the top three overall for the last three books.

How do you manage a profitable radio station? Larry Getz lays it on the line: "Advertisers know we'll deliver a consistent audience. It's one of the strongest selling points you can make."

TM's Stereo Rock can help you get a large, loyal audience because the music is always there. Stereo Rock gives your listeners what they want to hear—the hits, the recent hits and the oldies—in exactly the right mix.

"We don't have to worry about the idiosyncrasies of jocks"

Larry Getz understands that even the best staff programmer is often at the mercy of on air personalities. When a DJ departs from your playlist, your station's consistency is destroyed. To be sure your programming is on target around the clock, day after day, you need a controlled mix format like TM's consistently interesting Stereo Rock.

That doesn't mean you have to have an automated station to enjoy the consistency of TM's Stereo Rock. Larry uses the format with live announcers during the morning hours, then he switches to fully automated programming for later dayparts.

"TM can meet the competition in any market"

Larry feels that TM's Stereo Rock would work in almost any market. He's absolutely right, as proven by the consistent success of other stations using TM's Stereo Rock. In the Apr/May '78 book, 82% of all Stereo Rock stations were in the top 3 overall, in their markets, in the target audience of Adults 18-34. (Mon-Sun, 6-12, Metro-TSA.) An incredible 67% were the #1 stations in this key demographic.

If you've been on the "up book, down book" roller coaster, call TM Programming and find out how Stereo Rock can put consistency into your ratings success.

Call collect. Call right now. The number is (214) 634-8511. Ask for Ron Nichell.

Stereo Rock

TM FM Programming
1349 Regal Row
Dallas, Texas 75247

3.5. "Stereo Rock" is one of the many syndicated/automated progressive formats now available. Note the comment on the "idiosyncrasies of jocks." Courtesy, TM Programming.

poetry on the air and seemed somehow to be part of the counterculture without ever saying so. Apparently, even Brother John was too esoteric for progressive rock. The Love Network collapsed within a year.

But progressive rock grew and prospered. In San Francisco, another young radio whiz kid, James Gabbert, turned a $6,000 investment into $3.5 million by offering listeners nonhype rock 'n' roll from the softer end of the spectrum. Gone were the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company. Gabbert's K-101 played James Taylor, Gordon Lightfoot, Cat Stevens, and the Moody Blues, new artists who were prospering in the new "Diffusion" era of rock (see Chapter 4). K-101 and other stations like it prospered.

Today's progressive stations have changed little from the format established in the early 1970s—though they are now called AOR, or album-oriented rock. Underground and its descendants can claim more credit than any other format for making FM a viable commercial alternative for millions of listeners.


3.6. TM Programming offers yet another kind of progressive rock, this one aimed primarily at women. Note the comment comparing it to the beautiful music format. Courtesy, TM Programming.

## FM: Armstrong's Dream Comes True, Almost

As we have seen, the development of FM radio as envisioned by Edwin Armstrong was hindered by World War II and the tremendous commercial success of AM and television. Most FM licenses were owned by successful AM outlets that feared competition from the new band. The few independent FM stations that did stay on the air featured mostly foreign language, ethnic, classical, jazz, or folk music programming to a small but intensely loyal group of listeners. After all, FM receivers cost more. And as late as 1966 only 3 percent of all car radios were equipped with FM, which was particularly critical since it was auto radios that had truly made radio a "go-where-you-go" medium. But all this was to change.

In 1966, the FCC gave FM a boost by telling FM licensees that at the end of the year 50 percent of all their programming must be "original." This meant that those who owned AM and FM outlets in the same market

could no longer "simulcast" their signals—put out the same program on both outlets simultaneously. The disgruntled owners complained that this meant they would have to hire more staff and engineers while there was no sign of additional profit in sight. Nevertheless, they complied with the decision rather than lose their FM licenses.

The FCC's intent was admirable. They reasoned that more original programming meant a greater diversity for listeners and a chance for FM to grow into a real competitor. Unfortunately, they didn't have the foresight to define *original*, so many station owners simply rebroadcast tapes of their earlier AM programming. In other words, the AM and FM programming was the same, it just wasn't simultaneous. Technically, they were within the law.

Fortunately, some stations had more ambition. There was little to lose since most AM/FM outlets had only 4 or 5 percent of their total audience on FM. Why not see if a larger audience could be brought in by offering an alternative? This was part of the reasoning behind the first underground stations—KMPX, WOR, and KPPC. Other stations tried all-talk, all-jazz, all-sports, and even all-advertising.

The result was a tremendous growth in FM. By 1972, about one-third of all radio listeners tuned to FM some time during the day. Advertisers were after the young, affluent FM audience and were investing heavily. Gross revenues for all FM stations had increased from $9.4 million in 1962 to $84.9 million a decade later.

Many FM outlets tried to maintain a less-commercial image than the AM side. Boston's WJIB limited itself to a mere six commercial minutes per hour and screened commercials very carefully to avoid anything that might be offensive to its listeners.

FM continued to grow in the 1970s. By the end of the decade, there were about 4,000 FM stations, three-quarters of them commercial. 1976 was the first year that the average FM station showed a profit; since then, more and more have wound up in the black. Since 1972, the FM listening audience has doubled; by 1980 it constituted over half of the total radio audience, a feat that would have astonished even the most optimistic FM enthusiast in 1970. In market after market, FM stations have become regular members of the top-ten or top-five rated stations.

The most significant result of the spectacular growth of FM appears to have been the further diffusion of an already diffuse medium. Listeners had more choices than they had a decade or two before. Unfortunately, there was also a price to pay. Many critics contend that FM station programming today differs little from its AM counterpart. For example, the influence of FM has forced even the most stringent Top-40 AM stations to play occasional album cuts and other songs that are not so familiar to

the audience. Of course, AOR stations also play a lot of songs that appear on the Top-40 charts. It seems that at some point there will be no real difference between the two. Some say that time has already come.

## Into the Eighties: Radio Trends

The emergence of FM was only one of several trends in programming in the early 1980s. Apparently, the power of the Top-40 stations, mainstay of the medium during the 1960s and early 1970s was waning. Surveys showed that the number of Top-40 stations had stabilized. Many stations were turning to all-talk and sporting events. Others made serious attempts to bring back radio drama and comedy, with new productions or nostalgic replays of programs from the Golden Age.

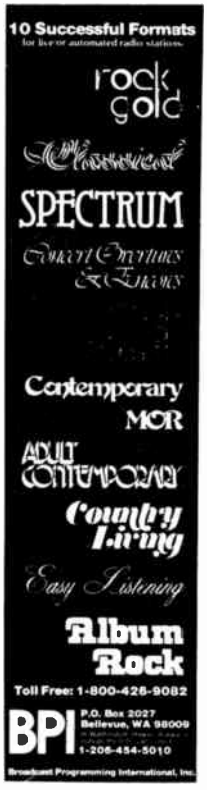
On the music front, country and western enjoyed some growth. In 1961, there had been only 81 radio stations playing country music; by 1975, there were more than 1,000 full-time country stations and another 1,500 devoting part of their time to country.

Another high-growth format was "beautiful music." Beautiful music is actually a package of prerecorded songs, mostly lush orchestral renditions of everything from show tunes to the Beatles. In many markets, beautiful music stations are number one. Many of these were among the first to use automated equipment extensively, but they won't be the last.

Increasingly, stations in all size markets are turning away from "live" DJs to prerecorded, prepackaged programming. This programming is aired by giant "automation" machines that are so sophisticated they can be programmed weeks in advance. Some even offer variations that allow recorded voices to talk to one another in ad-lib style. It's getting more and more difficult for listeners to tell the live sound from the automated one. Look for increasing automation in the future, despite the obvious protests of DJs who see their livelihood threatened.

Many middle of the road or MOR stations also showed a healthy share of the audience. MOR first became popular in the 1950s when older listeners shied away from rock and roll. MOR or "chicken rock" as it was called then, featured softer ballads and more "listenable" popular tunes, many by the same artists who were also singing the new rock and roll. MOR is still a major factor in many markets.

The newest music format to appear is all-disco. It swept the nation in 1978–80 with an estimated 50 stations switching over. Most successful of these was New York's WKTU-FM Disco 92. WKTU was a failing




3.7. The continued splintering of the radio audience has led to demands for more sophisticated and specialized formats, such as these offered by Broadcast Programming International. Courtesy, Broadcast Programming International.

"mellow-rock" station until July 1978, when, without advertising, promotion, or fanfare, it became Disco 92. By August, the number of listeners had doubled, and in September they tripled again. At that point, about one of every six New Yorkers was listening to the station. During the 7:00 to 11:00 p.m. time period alone, 1.5 million people were tuned in, making WKTU the most listened-to station in the nation.

Stations across the country were quick to learn the lesson and jumped on the bandwagon. Soon every major market had at least one disco station. Curiously, just as the format began to get off the ground, the bottom fell out of the disco phenomenon, leaving disco stations with a problem. Some began referring to their sound as disco/dance and added upbeat, but nondisco, songs to the play list. Others began separating disco songs with ballads by artists like the Commodores and Barry White.

Even these stopgap measures appeared unable to save the disco format. As quickly as it had come, it began to disappear. By 1980, WMJX in Miami and WDRQ in Detroit were two of many stations that dumped


*"And now, for the young at heart, we're going to play that same song again—this time with a disco beat."*

Drawing by W. Miller; © 1979 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

disco to go back to rock. According to one industry source, disco still has a future in terms of its appeal to rhythm 'n' blues listeners, but the prospects for a wide national audience are "gloomy."

Despite the problems, the prognosis for radio as a whole in the 1980s seemed good at the start of the new decade. The weekly radio audience was estimated to be at an all-time high. About 166 million adults tuned in some time during each day. The average listener spent about three-and-a-half hours each day with radio, which was more time than the entire household spent listening in 1953. Radio's gross income for 1977 alone had topped $2 billion but was still smaller than television's $5 billion. However, radio is in a good position. The "cost per thousand" (the average amount spent to reach 1,000 listeners with a commercial message) was about two dollars, or half the average cost per thousand for TV.

*U.S. News & World Report* dubbed the 1980s the period of the "Radio Renaissance" and proclaimed that radio was bigger and better than ever.

Radio station owners and programmers tended to agree, but their optimism about the future of the medium was cautious. For years, they had seen themselves as second-class citizens in broadcasting. The specter of television loomed large. Still, there were people like Frank Mankiewicz, head of National Public Radio, who noted that, "Maybe Americans are starting to realize they can get information and entertainment from radio without having their imagination stifled by the hypnotic and unrealistic pictures on TV."

## Queries and Concepts

1. Write a brief "history of radio in the 1990s." Use information found in this chapter as historical rationale for your predictions.

2. Survey your own radio market and make a list of all the kinds of programming available to listeners. Do your results support the diffusion trends of the 1970s?

3. Todd Storz, Dick Clark, and Bill Drake were all young men who had a great impact on radio programming. Why didn't older, more experienced radio people come up with radio innovations? Use material available here and/or outside information to support your answer.

4. Throughout the history of modern radio, music has provided a soundtrack for life for the audience. Describe the different audiences, their needs, and the music that satisfied them. You'll need to dig into outside resources to do a good job here. *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* are good starting places.

## Readings and References

**Erik Barnouw**
*The Image Empire.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
This is the final volume in Barnouw's history of broadcasting (see Readings and References, Chapter 2). This book is largely concerned with television, and the development of radio after the Golden Era is sadly

ignored here, as it is in most texts. However, Barnouw covers payola and several other key issues briefly and begins the volume with a discussion of radio's influence on the development of television. Good index.

**R. Serge Denisoff**
*Solid Gold: The Popular Record Industry.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1975.
The best book to date on the internal workings of the music industry. Denisoff has done an admirable job of walking the tightrope between serious academic scholarship and popular culture conjecture. Excellent section on radio DJs, whom he calls the "gatekeepers." Highly recommended. Good index.

**Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross**
*Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1978.
A concise and readable text with separate chapters on the Prehistory of Broadcasting, The Beginning of Broadcasting, The Coming of Commercialism, Radio's Golden Age, and Radio Goes to War. Most historical topics covered in this chapter can be found in *Stay Tuned* in considerable detail. Highly recommended.

Articles from the following periodicals were also most helpful in researching this chapter: *American Mercury, Business Week, Harper's, New York, The New Yorker, Rolling Stone, Saturday Review, Time,* and *U.S. News & World Report.*

# 4

# Hard Times for Lovers:

# The Magic in the Music

## In the Beginning

Lee de Forest, the father of American radio, had envisioned the day when radio would bring music direct from the great concert halls into the homes of listeners everywhere. Frank Conrad's 8XK had wed two technological innovations, wireless and the victrola, and found an increasingly large audience. Media prophet David Sarnoff had conceived of radio as a music box and convinced RCA to step up production of sets for sale. From the beginning, the fortunes of radio seemed completely intertwined with those of music. This is equally true today.

Most listeners under 30 think of radio almost exclusively as an outlet for music. In a way they are right, for, like it or not, this is what radio has become. In the average metropolitan market of about 30 radio stations, all but 2 or 3 devote the majority of their programming day to recorded music of various types. Thus examining contemporary radio necessitates a look at the development of popular music since the radio became widespread in the 1920s. Music and the sound medium have shared the good times and the bad, always knowing, though not always admitting, that their fates were bound together. If people became uninterested in music, radio in its present form would probably not survive. If there was no radio to introduce the music, the music industry would not be a $4 billion-a-year business.

Music may have "charms to soothe a savage breast," but it also possesses other capabilities. Music is the soundtrack for life for millions of radio listeners. Our very concepts of romance, tragedy, life, and death have been shaped, in part, by the countless hours of music that pour forth each day from our radios. By understanding the form, content, and consequence of the music on the magic medium, we are better able to understand the medium and its audience.

## All That Jazz

Radio's relationship with music has gone through three distinct phases: the euphoria of the early years, the reticence of the 1930s and 1940s, and, finally, the successful marriage helped along by the coming of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s. When Frank Conrad played victrola records for his Pittsburgh audience in the 1920s, no one thought of obtaining the "rights" to broadcast music. Radio was a new, exciting medium, and musicians were honored to have their songs broadcast.

In fact, musicians and entertainers of all descriptions flocked to the radio stations, which seemed to be springing up everywhere, to offer their services. It seemed like a good way to perform for a large audience, the audio equivalent of seeing your name in lights. But as radio stations proliferated, competition among them for key performers became acute. With the introduction of advertising ratings, it became critical. The famous American humorist Will Rogers is said to have been one of the first performers to get paid to appear on radio; soon everyone had a hand out.

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers began asking compensation for member musicians whose recorded works appeared on the air. Record companies tried to discourage the playing of their songs on the air for fear that the public would never buy a record they could hear for free.

All of these things inhibited radio from accurately reflecting the musical tastes of the times. The 1920s were a particularly creative period in popular music. Jazz, an innovative, unpredictable, and free-swinging brand of music that emanated from New Orleans, was sweeping the country. Performers like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and blues singer Bessie Smith were bringing a new sound out of the Deep South and into the hearts of Americans everywhere. Because these performers were black, their songs sometimes went unrecorded, and those that were recorded were not considered playable by many stations. But more "acceptable" white musicians, such as Paul Whiteman, were picking up on jazz, and gradually it could be heard on the radio.

The 1930s brought the big band era and swing—Duke Ellington aptly wrote: "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got . . . swing." Benny Goodman and his orchestra played to packed houses everywhere. The audiences screamed, yelled, and danced in the aisles. Conservative forces in the music industry began to wonder what it was all coming to. But the 1930s was also the era of the Depression. Radio programming was largely composed of soap operas, comedy, and symphonies. Popular music seemed too transitory, not quite serious enough for the magic medium. Besides, the low fidelity of the records coupled with the comparatively crude broadcasting and receiving equipment of the time seemed to work against music.

In the 1940s, many network-saturated markets began to witness the appearance of the *independent*, or nonaffiliated, station. These smaller operations could not afford to employ live musicians or live performers of any kind. Instead, they relied on recorded music because it was cheap and dependable. This contributed to the growing rift between broadcasters and ASCAP, and in 1940 broadcasters formed their own music licensing association: BMI, Broadcast Music, Inc.

ASCAP had not signed up many of the jazz, blues, and country

artists, preferring instead to market showtunes and symphonies. The new BMI, hungry for music of any kind, began licensing many new artists for broadcast (see Chapter 2). This meant that, for the first time, the radio audience was being exposed to a great diversity of popular music. Suddenly it seemed that new artists were popping up everywhere.

Foremost among them was Frank Sinatra. When he arrived on the scene in the mid-1940s he gave a tremendous boost to the recording industry. Sinatra was more than a performer; he was an idol, worshipped by millions of teenagers everywhere. His records sold in the millions, and his songs could be heard on radio and jukeboxes all over the country.

By the time broadcasters and ASCAP settled their rift, BMI and BMI artists were firmly entrenched on the radio. With the coming of television, radio broadcasters looked more and more to recorded music to fill the programming day. The radio audience was younger than ever, and they wanted something new.

## The Age of Innocence (1955–64)

The *new* sound was actually a combination of rhythm 'n' blues (R&B) music and country and western (C&W). Alan Freed, a popular midwest DJ, had been playing R&B music for many years, but R&B was considered "race" music because it was associated with blacks. Freed renamed it "rock 'n' roll" to make it more palatable to his mostly white audience—and, despite the critics, rock 'n' roll was here to stay.

Significantly, both C&W and R&B came from the South, just as jazz had before them. And, like jazz, rock brought with it a kind of euphoria for DJs and listeners alike. Suddenly the airwaves were flooded with songs from the likes of The Chords, Little Richard, Fats Domino, The Platters, Chuck Berry, and other black performers. In addition, there were white artists: Bill Haley and the Comets, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, and, of course, "The King," Elvis Presley.

Presley, and many other successful white rock 'n' roll performers, had grown up in the South and started their careers as country singers. But they had heard R&B all their lives and were able to successfully combine C&W and R&B into rock 'n' roll. Presley's first manager, Sam Phillips, put it succinctly when he said that "what I needed was a white boy who could sing colored." This is precisely what Presley did. R&B was now "acceptable" because it was being sung by white performers. Presley did it so well that he became the Sinatra of the 1950s.

Presley's "swivel hips" and his uninhibited style were perfectly

suited for the new rock 'n' roll audience. Teenagers mobbed him everywhere he went. On the radio, every other song seemed to be by Elvis. The media followed his every move. His songs seemed to touch a responsive chord in the young audience, to reach them at an emotional level their parents found mysterious, and sometimes frightening.

Rock 'n' roll was greeted with less than enthusiasm by most in the music business; it was criticized by just about everyone. Traditional songwriters found it offensive. Billy Rose, an ASCAP songwriter, spoke for his colleagues when he assessed the new trend:

> Not only are most of the BMI songs junk, but in many cases they are obscene junk, pretty much on the level with dirty comic magazines. . . . It is the current climate on radio and TV which makes Elvis Presley and his animal posturings possible. When ASCAP songwriters were permitted to be heard, Al Jolson, Nora Baynes and Eddie Cantor were all big salesmen of songs. Today it is a set of untalented twitchers and twisters whose appeal is largely to the zootsuiter and the juvenile delinquent.

Despite the view of rock 'n' roll as the root of all evil, the emergence of rock and the first decade of its development have since come to be thought of as an innocent and harmless time. Perhaps the influence of films like *American Graffiti* and TV shows like *Happy Days* paint a brighter and simpler picture of the late 1950s and early 1960s than was actually the case. Yet compared to what was to come, this was the Age of Innocence. The world was at peace; first Eisenhower, then Kennedy, was in the White House. The music reflected the times.

The lyrics to most popular songs were simple and straightforward. Love themes were the most popular, followed closely by songs which simply advocated that young people go out and have a good time. What was there to worry about? Bobby Darin's "Splish-Splash" was typical. The song described how the singer was "taking a bath" one Saturday night when all at once "the whole gang" arrived. His solution was simple: he "forgot about the bath" and "went and put my dancin' shoes on."

Rock 'n' roll was an unpolished, noisy, and exuberant new kind of music. Those who sang it tended to be the same way. Those who listened tried to be. Whatever its shortcomings, the music that dominated the airwaves was not the music of the past. It was something new, and teenagers pronounced it exclusively theirs.

Despite the success of rock 'n' roll in the Age of Innocence, there were still many songs that adults found palatable. Singers like Rosemary Clooney, Nat "King" Cole, Patti Page, and even the new heartthrob, Pat

Boone, all found an audience. Most successful among these were singers who were able to appeal to both the adults and the teenagers. Often they sang about love—and why not? It has always been the most universal of emotions.

## The Rock Renaissance (1965–70)

By 1965, innocence was becoming a rarer commodity. Love and having a good time still mattered, but there was growing concern about the war in Vietnam, the draft, and other social issues. Some were experimenting with drugs, including LSD and marijuana. Though the Beatles had arrived in 1964 and were billed as lovable moppets from Liverpool (clearly part of the age of innocence), a new British group, The Rolling Stones, seemed to represent a darker side of the British invasion. One observer put it this way: "The Beatles were content to just 'hold your hand'; the Stones clearly had something else in mind." Lead singer Mick Jagger seemed to capture the changing mood of the nation's youth as he chanted, "I can't get no satisfaction."

Meanwhile, a new single had shot to the top of the charts in the summer of 1965. It contained long, cryptic lyrics about a "Napoleon in rags" and about someone who "used to ride on the chrome horse with your diplomat." The song was "Like a Rolling Stone"; the singer was Bob Dylan, a mysterious poet and prophet who had come from Minnesota by way of New York's Greenwich Village. Dylan's music and other songs by a number of artists would tackle sensitive social subjects such as the war and explore interpersonal relationships with a depth that had never before been attempted in popular music. This was the Rock Renaissance.

Rock 'n' roll continued to be something you could dance to, but now it also became something you could listen to and think about. Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" urged the listener to "think of all the hate there is in Red China" and then "take a look around, to Selma, Alabama." Simon and Garfunkel said that the words of the prophets were "written on the subway walls." This was hardly "Rock Around the Clock" or "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

For many, the magic in the music took on new meaning. Music was now more than something to accompany life; it became life. It vested in life a new meaning and a new vision. Some followed this vision to San Francisco's Haight Ashbury district, Los Angeles's Sunset Strip, or New York's East Village. These areas became meccas for those who tried to live out the mediated reality they found in the music.

The San Francisco sound, characterized by groups like the Grateful Dead, Moby Grape, and the Jefferson Airplane, swept the record stores and radios of America. The Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow* album exemplified the two kinds of renaissance rock. There was the soft, intense, and beautiful ballad with mysterious haunting lyrics ("Today," "Saw You Comin' Back to Me") and the heavily produced dissonant sound of what some were calling acid rock ("White Rabbit," "Somebody to Love").

The Beatles soon joined in, and their albums from this period were among their most creative. In fact, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* is still considered by many critics to be the most innovative album ever produced. The shorter and more traditional songs from these albums found their way to the public on Top-40 stations, while the longer and more complex cuts were heard on the new underground stations which sprang up in direct response to the Renaissance.

The Renaissance fostered and encouraged listener involvement. It was no longer enough just to listen; now you had to become a part of the music and let the music become a part of you. Though the Renaissance passed quickly, this spirit of involvement with the magic in the music continues to the present day. The Lovin' Spoonful helped usher in the Renaissance in 1965 with their hit "Do You Believe in Magic." The song urges the listener "to believe in magic" because "the magic's in the music" and "the music's in me."

The magic ended swiftly however, with the approach of the 1970s. Three important forces in renaissance rock were Janis Joplin (Big Brother and the Holding Company), Jim Morrison (The Doors), and Jimi Hendrix. All died as a result of drug overdoses. In 1969, at Altamont, near San Francisco, The Rolling Stones gave a free concert attended by thousands. The Stones hired the Hells Angeles as "security guards," and in a burst of excessive ardor the guards killed a young man. The Altamont nightmare was described succinctly by Don McLean in his "American Pie." That night, "no angel born in hell could break that satan's spell," and you could see "satan laughing with delight, the day the music died."

## The Diffusion of Rock (1970– )

The new decade brought a semblance of order back to a country that had survived Vietnam, Kent State, and Altamont. In the early 1970s, the harsher elements of renaissance rock seemed to disappear, leaving a more harmonious sound. Those disillusioned with life in the city had moved to

the country, and the music moved with them. Country-sounding groups like Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young and The Band were extremely popular. The Carpenters, a young brother and sister duo from surburban Los Angeles, sang soft, simple love songs that had tremendous appeal to the mass audience.

Since the early 1970s, rock 'n' roll and popular music have passed through several "mini-trends" that have reflected the diverse social and political changes of those years. Perhaps the most powerful of these has been disco. It became a popular music force in the mid-1970s and swept the country. Many radio stations offered an all-disco format, and the best selling album of all time is the sound track from *Saturday Night Fever,* featuring the music of The Bee Gees.

Disco did not seem to have the broad universal support among music fans and radio programmers that characterized the rise of rock 'n' roll or the songs of the Rock Renaissance. Both punk rock and the slicker new wave movements have generated a tremendous following. Punk rock came to the U.S. from England via groups like the Sex Pistols in the mid 1970s. By the latter part of the decade a more refined version dubbed "new wave"had propelled groups like The Clash and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers to national recognition.

There is no single personality that has dominated the Diffusion era as completely as Elvis Presley or The Beatles did in their respective eras. Probably the artist with the greatest staying power, at least during the 1970s, was Elton John. Yet the very success of John underscores the nature of the Diffusion era. He was considered "soft rock" during the early 1970s. Then his "nostalgic" '50s-type songs seemed to come just when rock was "searching for its roots." Disco followers have found many of his later hits danceable. John seems to have a knack for anticipating the audience and releasing songs at just the right time. John himself attributes his success to his ability to "try something different":

> A lot of people who've been successful, in successful positions . . . put out the same albums five times in a row. The first one goes to number one, the next to number eight, the next to number fifteen . . . because it's the same song over and over again . . . People just get a bit fed up with that.

John was the perfect performer for the Diffusion era because his own music has been so diverse.

Perhaps it was inevitable that the audience for popular music and radio should become splintered in recent years. Radio listening and involvement with the magic of the music has affected more and more of us as time has gone on. It is hardly an exclusive club. The music from rock's

4.1. Karen and Richard Carpenter have lots to smile about. Royalties on all of their successful MOR-type tunes should keep them comfortable in their old age. Courtesy, A & M Records.

eras now reaches out and touches us, whether we are in a supermarket listening to a Muzak version of *Sergeant Pepper* or at home listening to the Electric Light Orchestra with earphones.

Naturally, we all have our favorite songs or, in some cases, our favorite eras. No matter what, radio is there to provide. Some stations still

play largely the soft sounds popular in the early 1970s; others play exclusively oldies from the Age of Innocence or only new wave or the latest trend in rock. Top-40 radio still churns out the songs that are most listened to, no matter what their form or content. The marriage of radio to popular music continues to solidify with each passing year. Despite the many trends and new uses we may find for radio in the future, that marriage seems likely to continue.

## Musical Form: "It's Got a Great Beat"

Like radio, popular music has its own form, content, and consequence, and there are many similarities between radio and popular music in all three areas. Any examination of musical content, or lyric, without consideration of the form is incomplete. With much of popular music it is the form, the beat or pace, of the song that attracts and holds the listener. "Shake, shake, shake, shake your booty" seems absurd in print. Yet put together with the proper form (in this case, the instruments and voices of K.C. and the Sunshine Band), it makes perfect sense.

One of the reasons so many people had trouble understanding rock 'n' roll when it first appeared was that they listened for meaning in the content, when the real message was the form. Much of the Diffusion era music is similar. Even with the most poetic lyrics, a song can only be understood when we experience form and content simultaneously. It is at this point that consequences can and do occur.

Since the 1920s, popular music has generally used an increasing tempo, or number of *bars*, or *beats per minute*. There was much concern when some of the jitterbug songs of the 1930s exceeded 70 bars per minute. After all, that was faster than the human pulse! It was here that words like *hypnotic* were first mentioned in an attempt to explain the magic spell some bands seemed to have over their audience. Audiences were prompted to say and do things they might not otherwise do. Music had the power to soothe, but it also appeared able to arouse.

As the beat continued to increase, rock 'n' rollers danced in the aisles as Chuck Berry or Little Richard and their bands pounded away. Disco is yet another step in this direction. Many disco songs have twice as many beats per minute as any previous songs. Step into a disco sometime; the lights, the music at ear-splitting level, all seem designed to completely overcome the audience. Disco music may be the closest thing to pure form

4.2. No matter what the trend or taste, radio is there to capitalize on it. The Ramones were one of the first new wave bands to receive air play in the late 1970s Courtesy, Warner Brothers Records.

popular music has ever had. The content of disco is not only in the music, but also in the disco lights and colors and the clothes worn by the dancers. The visual show is a large part of the disco experience as the audience become performers. Mirrors send these self-images directly back to the dancers. This is one reason why the movie *Saturday Night Fever* became so popular: It provided content to go along with the compelling form of the disco beat.

An emphasis on the form of popular music is evident in the increasing use of electronic technology in the production of successful albums. Fleetwood Mac hit all-time high production costs with their 1979 album *Tusk*. Over $1.3 million was spent producing the album, much of it in the recording studio, altering the music through dubbing, overdubbing, and other electronic means. The production costs pushed the album's retail price to $16.98. Albums by groups like the Electric Light Orchestra, and the Moody Blues before them, were completely dependent on studio production techniques to achieve their final unique effect. The Beatles are generally acknowledged to have started this trend with *Sergeant Pepper*. All of these records feature an individual unifying theme or "concept" and are known as *concept albums*.

Recording engineers and production managers are more important than ever in the production of a distinct sound that will sell. There have been many who seem to have a special ability with musical form in this way. George Martin who produced for The Beatles; Phil Spector, who produced many hits during the 1950s and 1960s and also produced a Beatles album; and Barry Gordy, whose "Motown sound" was so successful in the 1960s are but three.

In any event, form, and the technology now required to produce it, is the key to understanding popular music and its effect on the audience. The days of singing into a simple home tape recorder and shipping the result off to the record company for release are over. Musical form is now too important to be left to the amateurs—or even to the performers themselves.

## Content: Listen to the Words

Some music critics might dismiss any examination of popular lyrics as peripheral to the significance of the music. Yet although form is the single most important element, content also plays a vital role. This would be less true if the words to popular songs were not learned by rote, that is, through repeated air play. One recent study indicated that a number-one song might be heard as often as twice in a single hour over a single Top-40 station. Avid listeners might easily hear the same song ten or fifteen times a day, given their penchant for changing stations frequently in order to hear a favorite record.

What's more, a song might stay on the charts for three months or more. That comes out to well over a thousand plays for the avid listener. By the time you have heard a song even a few hundred times, you probably know it word for word, or at least sound for sound. Think of it yourself: You can easily recite the lyrics to a favorite current song or one that you especially liked three, four, five years ago or more. You are a walking catalogue of phrases and lyrics from the popular songs of your choice, and some you probably hate as well!

It is too easy to dismiss all of this as insignificant. Actually, the words to popular songs offer powerful clues and insight into ourselves and our beliefs, attitudes, and emotions. The accompanying table (4.3) identifies some of the most common themes in popular music since 1955. These themes were chosen because numerous examples could be found in all three eras. Themes that have been popular in all three eras have demonstrated real staying power, and it would seem they probably have the

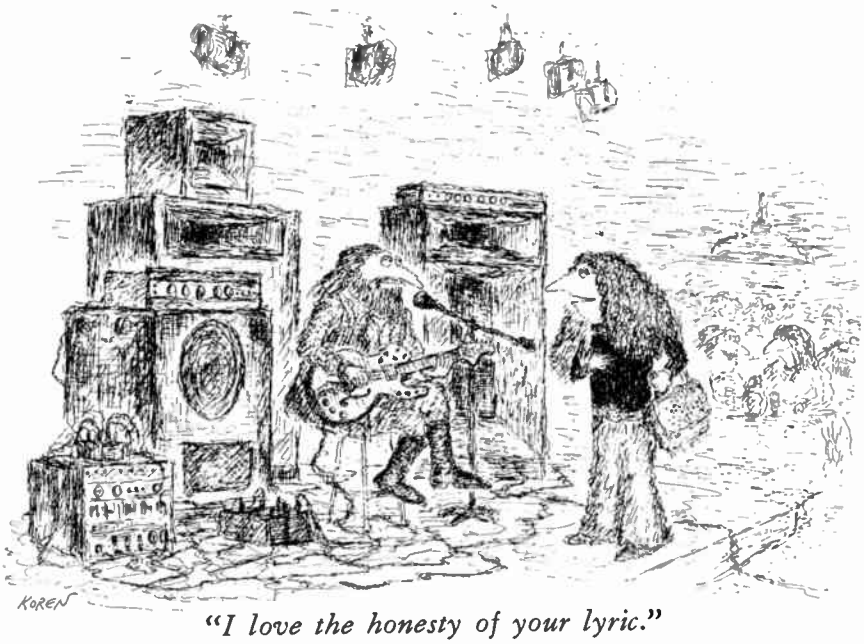
largest collective effect on the audience. Only one song from each era is named, but there are hundreds of possibilities. In addition, though only nine categories are included, many more are obviously possible. The ones included here are among the most recognizable.

4.3. Common Themes in Popular Music

| Category (Genre) | Innocence Era Song and Artist | Renaissance Era Song and Artist | Diffusion Era Song and Artist |
|---|---|---|---|
| I Love My Baby | "Little Darlin'" The Diamonds | "For Emily Wherever I May Find Her" Simon and Garfunkel | "You Light Up My Life" Debbie Boone |
| Hard Times For Lovers (I Lost My Baby) | "This Time" Troy Shondell | "You Were on My Mind" We Five | "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart?" Bee Gees |
| Searching For My Baby | "Dream Lover" Bobby Darin | "Somebody to Love" Jefferson Airplane | "Desperado" Eagles |
| Matrimony | "Going to the Chapel" The Dixie Cups | "Sitting on a Fence" Rolling Stones | "We've Only Just Begun" Carpenters |
| Angelic Women | "Earth Angel" The Penguins | "Cherish" The Association | "Stairway to Heaven" Led Zeppelin |
| Evil Women | "(You're The) Devil In Disguise" Elvis Presley | "Evil Ways" Santana | "Witchy Women" Eagles |
| 'Tis the Season | "A Summer Song" Chad and Jeremy | "Summer in the City" Lovin' Spoonful | "Summertime Dream" Gordon Lightfoot |
| Let's Dance | "At the Hop" Danny and The Juniors | "Dance the Night Away" Cream | "Get Up and Boogie" Silver Convention |
| Success | "Teen Age Idol" Ricky Nelson | "Honey Pie" Beatles | "Fame" David Bowie |

Most of the categories or genres deal with love and interpersonal relationships, as do the majority of all popular songs. *I Love My Baby* is by far the most frequent of all categories. It appears that when we are in love, we are moved to song. Next comes *Hard Times for Lovers*, or *I Lost My Baby*. Falling in love seems inevitably to lead to problems, whether in music or in real life. For those not in love at the moment, there is *Searching for My Baby*. Matrimony is another favorite subject. What songs did you or would you choose as part of your wedding ceremony? Marriage and music just seem to go together. There are songs about *Angelic Women* and *Evil Women* too; of course the same holds true for men.

There are songs about the weather, days of the week, daytime, nighttime, summertime, wintertime, the seasons and cyclical events that liter-




*"I love the honesty of your lyric."*

Drawing by Koren; ® 1978 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

ally divide up our lives. Each seems to carry its own musical mood. It's hard to imagine a happy rain song, but there was "Singin' in the Rain" before rock was ever born. Dancing songs are also a natural.

More introspective are the songs about fame and success. Many artists write about their early struggles, and those songs propel them to the top. Then, quite understandably, they write songs about being at the top. It's not surprising that success and riches change the artist. As Bob Dylan, who grew to fame as an antimaterialistic folk singer, once said, "It's hard to be a bitter millionaire."

In some cases, songs seem to represent their respective categories perfectly. In the Let's Dance category, "At the Hop" by Danny and The Juniors was a picture of innocence, while the Cream's use of psychedelic imagery was evident in "Dance the Night Away." "Get Up and Boogie" is pure disco; it was one of the first successful disco hits.

Some trends are obvious. For instance, there are more songs about women than about men because there are more male popular music stars than female stars. However, in recent years female singer/songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Linda Ronstadt have performed some of the most intricate and candid songs in all of popular music.

On the whole, there is much to be learned from examining the content of popular music; it's an area that's been ignored for too long. Perhaps you will want to continue with this on your own. It would be quite easy to add songs to those on the chart or create a new chart with current hits.

Music and radio are such immediate and fluid phenomena that it can be valuable to stop for a moment or two and take stock of the effects they may be having on you, your life, the people you love. It may involve things you have long taken for granted. Radio and musical experiences are so powerful because they are an invisible environment, part of something profound happening to us all the time.

## Consequence: Thinking vs. Feeling

Some years ago there was a popular song titled "Feelings." The form was sad and soft; the content involved a man reflecting on his life and on the feelings he had experienced when he lost his love. Such songs are often found on the radio because electronic media are most effective when appealing to the audience at an emotional level.

Marshall McLuhan has observed that "logic" and "thinking" as we understand them in our culture have been derived from books. The printed page provides an optimum form for any logical or linear information. If an advertiser wants you to remember a phone number, it need appear only once in a print ad; you can always go back and find it if you missed it the first time. Not so with electronic media. There, a phone number must be repeated several times. Even so, it is likely to be forgotten unless there is intense concentration by the viewer or listener.

In general, radio and television do not make us *think;* they make us *feel*. This doesn't mean that we can't have an occasional thought-provoking, topical song or *Mork and Mindy* episode. Nor does it mean that we don't respond emotionally to print; obviously we can and do. But in most instances, radio and TV have the greatest impact on our emotions, not on our intellect. You've probably often heard people comment that they like songs that "don't make you think"; you might even have made this observation yourself. And it's quite natural.

So to understand the power of popular music, we look to the emotions. Love, hate, joy, frustration . . . these are all common themes for popular songs. Since radio has become the prime purveyor of music, it influences those who listen. Audience analyses indicate that younger

people are more apt to listen to the radio and buy record albums than older people. Radio programmers began to realize this in the 1950s, so Todd Storz began programming his stations to reach the teenage emotional level.

Nevertheless, radio appeals to millions of adults every day. Why? Probably because we are all teenagers inside. As we grow older, we tend to cover up emotions that we once felt freely. In our culture, men especially are expected to be unemotional to prove their manhood (though happily this too is changing). Career-oriented women soon learn that if they are to succeed in competition with men, they must cover their emotional responses or risk being stereotyped as a "typical emotional woman."

Yet when we turn on the radio and listen to a simple popular song, we can escape, if only for a moment, to a world of simple emotions, of happiness, romance, excitement, dancing, and laughter. Is it any wonder such music finds so large an audience? Popular music allows us to experience simple emotions in a vicarious way, without fear of recrimination from anyone. Listening to popular music is very socially acceptable. In our increasingly mechanized and dehumanized culture, it may be a necessity.

Whenever we attempt to understand the form and content of radio or popular music, we must begin with emotions. Music is written to appeal to the emotions; radio formats are designed to capitalize on them. Radio sales and publicity campaigns approach potential listeners at the emotional level. The present and future effects of popular music and radio will doubtlessly continue to involve the emotional realm.

## The Milepost Phenomenon

Have you ever heard a song from several years ago and flashed in your mind on where you were, who you were with, what you were doing when that song was popular? Most of us have such experiences very often. This has to do with music as a *milepost phenomenon*. So powerful and so redundant are the songs we experience that we unconsciously use them to divide and subdivide our lives, to "mark off" our experiences.

Interestingly, this can be accomplished regardless of the intent of the artist who created the song. Several years ago, one student told of her experiences with "You Light up My Life." She said that when the song was popular she was having her first real love affair; the words and music

seemed to fit exactly what she was going through at the time. Later the affair ended, and she began to identify more with songs that would fit in the *Hard Times for Lovers* category. She unconsciously chose songs whose form and content matched her own experiences. Whenever she hears these songs, they bring back memories of that special person.

Another student remembers a song called "Chevy Van." It was about a wandering young man who picked up a young woman, made love to her, then dropped her off at the next town. However, when this student hears it, it always makes him think of his father's death because he heard it on the radio on the way to the hospital where he learned his father had died. Though he had heard it hundreds of times before, and though it is a very upbeat and happy song, he has associated it forever with that one, particularly traumatic afternoon.

Music is so powerful and so much a part of our lives that we integrate it into our experience and measure some of our experiences with it. Artistic intent is only one factor in determining how this happens. The audience selectively perceives and interprets the music as it does all information.

In any event, just as each of us is a walking catalog of lyrics, each of us is a catalog of musical mileposts. Often we forget all about a particular experience until a song triggers it in our imagination. Music, of course, is not the only thing that can do this; any physical object, word, or phrase might do it. But it is not surprising that music does it so often since it is one of the most powerful forms of communication and works at the emotional level.

This effect also derives from the "invisible" nature of the radio experience. Stan Freberg has commented that he would rather produce radio than TV commercials because the listeners can fill in the visual with their imagination. So it is with music. We fill in the visual from our own imagination and life experiences, something we cannot do with TV. When was the last time you got a milepost insight from an old television show? Radio and popular music are particularly effective channels for the milepost phenomenon since they are so *powerful, subjective, invisible,* and *repetitive.*

Finally, with radio there is a random factor. While we try to control the songs we hear as much as possible by choosing the stations we listen to, we are never sure exactly which song will be next. When we "program" our own musical environment on our stereos at home, we choose precisely what we want to experience, and we know it's coming. Radio's random factor helps introduce us to a wider array of music than we might otherwise experience. This probably contributes to its power as a milepost medium.

## 90 The Nostalgia Function

Related to the milepost phenomenon is the *nostalgia function*. Piano players in local bars usually know songs that were popular in the 1930s through the 1970s, plus some current hits. They have learned to do this because they know that each generation has its favorites, and each favorite has the capacity to sweep people of certain age levels into a wave of nostalgia that will guarantee applause at the end of the song.

This nostalgia function is at work in virtually all radio stations that play music of any kind. Whether it's C&W or easy listening, certain age groups have their favorite songs. Most often these songs were popular around the time they were involved in the courtship ritual—making dates, getting engaged, and so on. People who are now 50 graduated from high school about 32 years ago. Songs popular at that time will most often (though not always) get their applause.

Music allows people to go back and reexperience what some consider the best years of their lives. All of us secretly want to be young and in love again. The songs that were popular when we were young and in love make us feel young again, if only for the few minutes they last. We think about an amusing or painful incident from the past and are swept along in a wave of nostalgia.

Since certain radio stations want to reach certain age groups for advertising purposes, many formats have been designed to capitalize on the nostalgia function. The most obvious is the "golden oldie" format, which plays, say, records exclusively from the 1950s. Such formats have an audience heavily weighted with those who were in high school and college at that time. Similarly, a "big band" format will appeal to those who were young during the time of the big bands. Of course, some people from other age groups will listen—you may like big band music whether you are 18 or 80—but the basic programming strategy of such formats involves capturing the audience according to the nostalgia function.

We often long for "the good old days," whether they were 5 or 50 years ago. Because music is so much a part of our lives, and because we measure time and experience with it, radio and popular music are the perfect means to exploit this feeling. They give us not an approximation of what we heard then, but *exactly* what we heard. Similarly, they give us not what we occasionally experienced, but what we experienced hundreds, even thousands of times. Consequently, their role in the nostalgia function is that much more effective.

## Real Life vs. Mediated Reality: The Cone Effect Theory

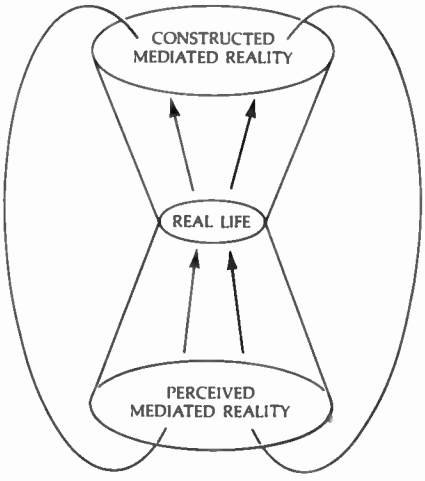
We have seen how we use radio and popular music to sort out and classify our lives, and also how they may reflect social and emotional needs and values as they become a part of our life experiences. Even more intriguing is the world that is created by popular music and how it measures up to the experiences we have in real life.

It is often said that we use electronic media to escape our humdrum, everyday existence, and we have seen that this is true in several ways. But what are we escaping to? How is the mediated reality of radio and popular music different from our everyday lives? *Mediated reality* is defined as those experiences we have with the "world" of mass media. *Real Life* is all those experiences we have that do not directly involve mass media. Unlike mediated reality, which comes to us in preplanned segments, Real Life is spontaneous, nonstop reality.

The accompanying diagram of the *cone effect* (4.4) shows one way of looking at the relationship between mediated reality and Real Life. Note that constructed mediated reality, though it comes from Real Life, is much larger than Real Life. Mediated reality, as it comes to us from the words and music of a popular song, is indeed larger than life. It is a world where the once-in-a-lifetime act of falling in love with Mr. or Ms Right is an everyday occurrence. It is a world where people experience the emotional highs and lows of life almost every minute. It is, in short, a world of intensely emotional and highly volatile people. It is sexier, funnier, more colorful, more active, more interesting, and much more intense than our own. It is a world made from experiences that we all have in Real Life, yet it is a world that offers those experiences every minute of the day and night!

Perceived mediated reality is different from the mediated reality that is constructed because each of us sees media experiences differently. We also take perceived mediated reality and apply it to situations in Real Life. For example, at some of the more romantic moments in your life, you might have actually thought, "The only thing that's missing is the music." On a more subtle plane, we have expectations about romance and other life experiences based on what we absorb from media. Almost always, our lives seem dull and uninteresting by comparison.

Witness the adulation experienced by famous rock stars. Fans scream and claw through crowds in order to be a few feet closer to them. They will do almost anything to touch them in some way. This is not because those stars are particularly different from you and me (though they may be more musically talented); it is because they represent the magic of the music, and radio.




4.4. The Cone Effect.

Similarly, when we attend a concert, we are most enthusiastic about songs that we have heard before on the radio and on records. The closer the live performance sounds to the recorded one, the more enthusiastic the audience response. Again, we want to make Real Life fit the mold of mediated reality. Our entire preoccupation with music and other media stars, in fact the entire media star system, attests to this.

But constructed mediated reality also draws from Real Life. Songs are written about personal experiences and feelings. Love affairs form the basis for ballads that are recorded and become hits. All the things that happen in mediated reality can and do happen in Real Life, but mediated reality has a way of blowing these infrequent occurrences up, of making them larger than life, and of influencing the way we feel about them when they occur in Real Life. The flow between constructed and perceived mediated reality and Real Life is constant, affecting virtually everything we see and touch, every experience we have.

## Direct, Reflect, Refract

We have seen how radio and popular music developed in parallel ways, and how they have influenced one another over the years. The rise of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s, coupled with the advent of television, made radio almost exclusively a music medium. We have also looked at

some theories about how all this music, interacting with us, is affecting our lives.

One of the questions most often asked by radio students is whether radio and music simply *reflect* our culture, or whether they actually shape or *direct* it. When the FCC attempted to ban drug lyrics in the 1970s, they were assuming that the widespread play of songs about drugs would encourage drug use. They seemed to believe that music can direct our behavior. Artists, defending their choice of topical subjects for their songs, insisted that drug use was widespread and they were simply writing about what they saw—in other words, reflecting their culture.

Social scientists have been trying to determine the validity of the various direct and reflect theories for many years. Of particular concern is the possibility that children seeing violent TV programs may come to act violently themselves. Despite all the studies, there are no definitive conclusions. Much less study has been devoted to radio, which many see as a less powerful, hence a less potentially offensive, medium. Yet we have seen that radio, and the music found there, can and does have a powerful influence upon its listeners.

In fact, radio both directs and reflects our culture. Just as the relation between mediated reality and Real Life is constantly changing, radio and music constantly reflect current trends, attitudes, and beliefs, then help reshape those attitudes or solidify them in the minds of the audience. We are directed to experience romance in a certain way, a way that is reflective of the cultural norms associated with romance. As attitudes about marriage change, song lyrics change. No song would have dared come out "against" marriage during the Innocence era, when songs saw marriage as a happily-ever-after experience. As the music grew more sophisticated, renaissance songs began to question the validity of marriage as an institution. Carly Simon sang "That's the way I've always heard it should be" but found fault with the marriages of couples she knew. David Crosby's "Triad" suggested to two women who were both in love with him, "Why don't we go on as three?"

These songs reflected changing moral standards, but they have probably directed them as well. Some listeners may have identified with the lyrics and made life decisions based, in part, on the information they found there.

A third, often overlooked, element in this area is the way that media *refract* information. As with the cone effect, popular music gives us not a picture of life as it exists, but a refracted, or distorted, picture. This effect is very much like looking at your reflection in a pond or lake, then tossing a pebble in. The rings that result alter your reflection, and you see only a refracted image. There is nothing inherently good or bad about this dis-

4.5. Carly Simon's "That's the Way I've Always Heard It Should Be" was a scathing indictment of the institution of marriage. However, that was written some time ago. Now Carly and husband James Taylor live together peacefully in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Courtesy, Elektra Records.

tortion. But to utilize radio and popular music effectively, we must understand how they influence us. Once you have identified and understood the directing, reflecting, and refracting components of the music, and other radio information, you are well on your way toward a real understanding of the power of the magic medium.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Rock Renaissance fans claim that the "new music" of renaissance artists like Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, and others was the "best" popular music of all times, and that today's popular music pales by comparison. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

2. Having read about the differences between the form and the content of popular music, which do you think is most important in making one of today's top songs a hit? Why?

3. List five songs that serve as examples of the milepost phenomenon for you. Write a paragraph or two for each, explaining why it has that effect on you. Exchange lists with others in the class and discuss.

4. Using songs from *Billboard*'s Hot 100, and recent songs you are familiar with, add at least one new song for each category of the chart on page 85. Do any particular categories currently seem to be dominating popular music?

5. Using songs from the sources suggested in number 4 above, can you come up with at least three additional categories or genres? Supply at least three specific songs as examples of each new genre.

## Readings and References

**Carl Belz**
*The Story of Rock* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
This book does an admirable job of chronicling the rise of rock from rhythm 'n' blues to the age of the superstars. Belz is a meticulous writer, and his cautious assessments of the contributions of many "sacred cows," including Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley, are most welcome. Excellent annotated bibliography.

**R. Serge Denisoff**
*Solid Gold: The Popular Record Industry.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1975.
This book is best when describing how the record industry works, how a record becomes a hit, and other processes. Particularly informative regarding the business end, its history and current trends.

**Richard Goldstein, ed.**
*The Poetry of Rock.* New York: Bantam Books, 1969.
A good anthology of significant rock lyrics. Such books are rare since rock artists demand an arm and a leg for reprint rights to lyrics of their songs. It also includes some interesting illustrations.

**H. Kandy Rhode, ed.**
*The Gold of Rock and Roll, 1955–1967.* New York: Arbor House, 1970.
A year-by-year review of *Billboard*'s top songs. Included are the Top-10 for each week during the 13 years covered as well as the Top-50 songs (in terms of retail sales) from each year. There is also a brief introduction and some commentary for each year.

**Ian Whitcomb**
*After the Ball.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973.
You may recognize the author's name. He's a former rock star who took to writing about music after his fall from the charts. This is a panorama of popular music "from rag to rock," written in an entertaining style. There are sections on jazz, swing, ragtime, and Tin Pan Alley. Highly recommended.

# 5

# Chitter Chatter:

# News and Information Programming

## The Information Exchange

In America today, radio acts as a vast information network. Considerably more in touch with the up-to-the-minute needs of its audience than TV, radio information is instantaneous and diffuse, reaching out to touch all of us, directly or indirectly, all the time. Radio information is also *two-way* communication. In Dallas, Texas, at this very moment, someone is calling in to try to win a free album, T shirt, button, or bumpersticker. In Los Angeles, someone has just called KNX newsradio with an eyewitness account of a traffic accident on one of the city's endless freeways. Meanwhile, in Portland, Maine, someone is talking to a disc jockey about his personal problems, while in Atlanta, Georgia, a listener is on the air discussing the rising cost of living.

Radio transmitters, telephone lines, and radio receivers are linked together in an information chain that is constant and unrelenting. Every DJ and talk-show host knows what it is like to work on Christmas day or New Year's Eve. Inevitably, listeners show up at the station with turkey dinners they want to share. *Share* is a key term in understanding radio in more ways than one. Ratings services talk about a station's *share* of the audience while listeners *share* their days and nights with radio and pass information obtained from radio back and forth among themselves. Thus radio becomes the ultimate information exchange.

The need for up-to-the-second *mediated information* seems far greater now than ever before. Our pace of life has quickened considerably since those first few halting radio broadcasts broke the silence of the airwaves shortly after the turn of the century. As each year goes by, we seem to need more and more information to keep up with the events of our sprawling Global Village. Radio is there to bring it to us.

Pause for a moment and switch on your radio. If you flip the dial slowly from one end to the other, you will likely find every conceivable kind of information. Music, news, talk, sports, commercials—it's all there waiting for you. Of course, not all radio information is momentous. You're more likely to hear about a new pimple cream or a new Chevrolet than a recent news event. Still, considering that the silence was broken less than a century ago, radio has come a long way.

## Radio News: The Early Returns

Early radio experimenters like Lee de Forest mixed news and talk with recordings for their first few listeners. De Forest is credited with broad-

casting radio's first political event: results from the 1916 presidential election. But as we have seen, KDKA's coverage of the 1920 Harding/Cox election really brought radio news to the limelight. Listeners were amazed that they could hear the returns immediately and know as much about them as the candidates themselves. By 1924, radio was playing a major part in presidential politics, covering the nominating conventions and major speeches as well as the elections themselves.

It's hard to believe now, but there was skepticism about the role radio should play in reporting the events of the day. Much of the audience perceived the new medium as a purveyor of entertainment and felt that politics and other news events were best left to print. Despite radio's overwhelming advantage in reporting timely events, people felt the medium was an improper forum for really important information.

The 1925 live broadcast of the famous Scopes "monkey" trial in Tennessee was an important news milestone. At issue was the right of a science teacher to teach Darwin's theory of evolution, which clearly conflicted with the biblical version of creation. The trial pitted famous lawyers Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan against each other. It was carried by a station in Chicago; listeners could "sit in" and respond to the oratory along with the jurors. Strangely, there was little concern at the time about what influence the presence of the magic medium might have on the proceedings. The microphone simply sat in the middle of the courtroom for all to see.

Another major radio event came after Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic. No sooner had "Lucky Lindy" become a national hero than he was back in the public eye, and ear, when his young son was kidnapped. So sensational was this event that millions of Americans stopped what they were doing and tuned in for details. Networks interrupted regular evening schedules to bring the events to listeners. This helped make networks more aware of the power of news. Critics of the extensive news coverage contended it made the trial a circuslike event. In response to these criticisms, the American Bar Association passed its Canon 35 limiting radio (and later television) access to the courtroom.

With each passing event, radio seemed to prove itself more worthy of the public trust. Certainly radio reporting was at least as accurate as that found in the newspaper. What's more, radio offered the audience a chance to witness speeches and other events live and make their own decisions.

By 1930, regular radio newscasts had started. Among the first was Lowell Thomas's 15-minute daily newscasts on the NBC-Blue Network. Thomas became famous for his unusual brusk delivery, opening each newscast with "datelines" from world information centers: "From London to Algiers comes today's news. Good evening everybody, this is Lowell Thomas. . . ."

5.1. The newsroom at KSFO radio, San Francisco. Note the "news editing system" equipment. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

Like other newscasters of his day, Thomas received the bulk of his information from the three major wire services: Associated Press (AP), United Press (UP), and the International News Service (INS). But these wire services were set up to accommodate newspapers, and all were owned by print-oriented people. The press-radio war of the 1930s (see Chapter 2) pitted broadcasters against newspaper interests, and for a while it looked as if broadcasters would lose their right to be news outlets. Relatively little news was broadcast during the late 1920s and early 1930s, with entertainment dominating radio content. But by 1933 increased radio news competition forced networks and larger local stations into setting up their own news-gathering bureaus. Public concern over the events of the day, such as the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Depression, and the gathering storm clouds of war in Europe, meant that people wanted more than ever to know about what was going on. By the late 1930s, wire copy was again available to radio stations on a virtually unlimited basis. Newspaper sales also picked up. Apparently there was news enough, and audience enough, for everybody.

Another restriction on news broadcasting involved the use of recorded materials on the air. During the 1930s, audio recording was in the form of cumbersome discs, which seemed to pose a threat to the credibil-

ity of radio. Network executives reasoned that if listeners were not sure whether they were hearing a live or a recorded event, they might come to distrust radio. Consequently, CBS and NBC had explicit rules forbidding the use of recorded material during a newscast. But in 1937, a WLS Chicago reporter named Herb Morrison, making a disc for historical purposes, was watching the landing of the German airship *Hindenberg*. When the ship suddenly burst into flames, Morrison was overcome with emotion, and his recording of the event became one of radio's first great on-the-spot reports of disaster. The networks temporarily dismissed the recording rule in order to play parts of the tape. They were careful to explain to the audience that they were hearing a *recording* of the actual disaster, but no one was angered; in fact, most radio listeners were captivated by the recording and the event. It would not be long before recorded inserts from news-breaking locations became commonplace in network newscasts.

## Bringing It All Back Home

According to broadcast historians Christopher Sterling and John Kittross, World War II greatly increased the amount of broadcast news coverage. In 1940 there were approximately 2,400 total hours of news broadcast on the four radio networks. That total climbed by over 1,000 hours each year until 1944. During this period, hourly newscasts began to be common. They remain an important part of radio programming today.

The first well-known radio news commentator was H. V. Kaltenborn, a former journalist whose paper sponsored his regularly scheduled broadcasts on New York's WEAF. He later joined CBS and achieved considerable fame for his broadcasts during World War II. In 1938, as Hitler made increasing demands on Czechoslovakia, Kaltenborn set up a cot in his famous "Studio Nine" and did more than 80 broadcasts in three weeks, many of which included long comments and impromptu interpretive analyses. Kaltenborn's dedication to duty typified the attitudes of many news broadcasters of that time.

At the same time, radio became a prime purveyor of the patriotic fervor that was sweeping the country. War bond drives became commonplace on the air, and war-related programming seemed to be popping up everywhere. Existing shows inserted war-related material into their programming, and the government produced several war-related series, most notably *This Is War*, a 13-week series designed to arouse the people and spur them on to new efforts to win the war.

## 5.2. EDWARD R. MURROW: PATRON SAINT OF BROADCAST JOURNALISM

The voice that so many Americans came to trust during World War II was that of Edward R. Murrow. Christened Egbert Murrow in 1908, he was the youngest of three sons born to Scottish emigrant parents. Though they began American life in Kentucky, the Murrows soon moved to a small town in Washington state.

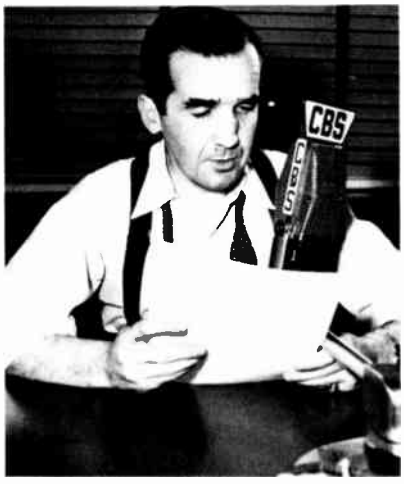
Egbert's education began at home, and with his mother's patient tutoring, he had a head start on his classmates. Young Egbert always liked school. Mrs. Murrow also instilled in her son a firm belief in a solid day's work. He was later to admit that he would feel "miserable" if he didn't work and that he was not "equipped for fun."

After high school, Murrow briefly attended the University of Virginia before returning to enroll at Washington State. There he came under the influence of Ida Lou Anderson, an instructor in speech, who taught him speech, diction, and presence. Always a debate enthusiast, Murrow worked hard and was regarded by Anderson as her most promising pupil. It was she who suggested later that Murrow pause after the first word of his London introductions. Thus, "This is London" became "This . . . is London," the phrase that was to become a Murrow trademark.

(continued)

Most famous of all the wartime radio reporters was Edward R. Murrow. A broadcast journalist without a day's newspaper experience, Murrow captured the imagination of listeners everywhere. On the night of August 24, 1940, America, still at peace, heard the first reports of the German bombings in London. In a steady voice, but obviously shaken, Murrow reported: "This is Trafalgar Square. The noise that you hear at this moment is the sound of an air-raid siren. A searchlight just burst into action; off in the distance an immense single beam is sweeping the sky above me now. People are walking along very quietly now. We're just at the entrance to an air-raid shelter here. . . ." In the background, listeners could clearly hear the antiaircraft artillery and the sound of Londoners

Courtesy, Edwin Ginn Library, Tufts University.




quietly and deliberately making their way to the air-raid shelters. Murrow's reports had "brought the war home" in a way that would long be remembered. More than any other single factor, his broadcasts were given credit for preparing America psychologically for the war ahead.

War dominated American radio from 1941–45 just as it dominated every other aspect of American life. Listeners increasingly put their trust in news reporters who gave them hour after hour of war news. These included reliable veterans like H. V. Kaltenborn, Elmer Davis, and Lowell Thomas, as well as a new group of reporters like Murrow who broadcast directly from Europe. Included in this new group were Eric Sevareid, Charles Collingwood, Robert Trout, John Daly, and Howard K. Smith.

## EDWARD R. MURROW
(Continued)

After working briefly in several radio-related jobs, Murrow joined the CBS radio network in 1935 as "director of talks" through the recommendation of an old friend, Fred Willis, who was then special assistant to CBS President William Paley. Murrow soon proved his worth. The talks director set a precedent for CBS news by hiring reporters, rather than announcers, to broadcast the news in Europe. Some of these such as Robert Trout, would go on to become famous broadcast journalists. Murrow expected superhuman effort from his staffers, but he was no less enthusiastic himself. During one crisis, he made 35 broadcasts in less than three weeks and arranged for 116 others from 18 points in Europe.

After returning from Europe in 1946, his name now a household word, the still young (38) Murrow was named CBS vice president in charge of news, education, and discussion programs. He was joined a year later by his lifetime friend and mentor, Fred Friendly, and together they produced the popular news show *Hear It Now*. The program was unusual in that it blended straight or hard news stories with the interpretive reports Murrow dubbed "think pieces."

In 1951 *Hear It Now* became *See It Now*, and the face that went with the famous voice was introduced to American television viewers. Critic Gilbert Seldes called *See It Now* "the most important show on the air—not only for the solutions it found to some problems, but also for the problems it tackled without finding the right answers."

Murrow was to narrate many famous broadcasts over his career, including

By 1945, Americans were getting over 5,000 hours per year of news and information from the major radio networks. This total would never be exceeded. As the GIs came home and life began to get back to normal, there was less demand for news and the global effort that had produced it during the war years. Radio returned to its steady diet of soap operas, comedy, and dramatic and variety fare.

a blistering attack on Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1954, and a famous CBS documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, which explored the tragic conditions of American migrant farm workers.

Though originally a Murrow admirer, CBS head William S. Paley eventually grew disenchanted with Murrow and *See It Now*. The controversy the program generated, he said, upset his stomach. The result was a falling out of sorts between Murrow and CBS. After an extended sabbatical, Murrow finally left the network to head the United States Information Agency in the Kennedy administration. According to one biographer, the final straw involved Murrow's being denied his usual "instant access" to Paley.

Ironically, *See It Now* was the first television program to openly discuss the possibility that cigarette smoking may lead to lung cancer. For years, Murrow's trademark had been his endless chain of cigarettes and the smoke curling across the screen. In 1965, after a long battle with lung cancer, he assembled his family for a last air appearance, a public service announcement urging Americans to quit smoking. He died in April of that year.

His accomplishments were perhaps best summed up by his longtime associate and friend, Fred Friendly: "He laid down a standard of responsibility for radio and television broadcast journalists, a standard lacking before his time and seldom measured up to since."

## All News, All the Time

The rise of Top-40 in the 1950s and the coming of TV reduced the amount of radio news even further. Top-40 programmers considered news a "tune-out" and tried to minimize it wherever possible. Many stations offered 3 minutes of news or less each hour. TV network newscasts ap-

*"After sports and the weather, we'll be back again with all the news all the time, day after day, year after year, forever and ever."*

Drawing by Lorenz; © 1976 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

peared and then expanded from 15 to 30 minutes. Apparently the audience for radio news had disappeared.

Then in 1961, Gordon McLendon, one of the originators of Top-40, had another original idea. He had made a success of Top-40 by having his stations sound approximately the same 24 hours a day, thus giving listeners a reliable sound. Perhaps it would work with another format? McLendon wanted to program a station in the Los Angeles market, but there were already several powerful Top-40 stations. He decided instead to offer an *all-news* radio station, the nation's first. McLendon became program consultant to XTRA, a 50,000-watt, 24-hour station just south of the Mexican border, whose signal could be heard all over Southern California. Soon Southern California commuters were tuning in XTRA to hear the latest news 24 hours a day.

Almost immediately there were imitators: KFWB in Los Angeles, WINS in New York, and McLendon's own WNUS in Chicago. The success of these stations proved that there was indeed a market for a constant source of radio news. Since that time, each major radio market in the

country has had one or more all-news formats. The all-news station does not ask the listener to stay tuned forever, just long enough to catch the latest headlines. Los Angeles's KFWB typifies this approach with its slogan, "Give us 20 minutes, and we'll give you the world."

Network owned and operated all-news stations like San Francisco's KCBS seemed to have the edge on the competition since they had access to network TV news personalities and facilities. Soon Walter Cronkite, Mike Wallace, and other famous CBS-TV figures were giving regular radio reports. These big names, reinforced by TV recognition and credibility, lent an air of authenticity other stations could not match.

McLendon had found early on that the main audience for news consisted of men 25 and older. While this audience was available during radio's peak "drive-time" hours (6:00–10:00 A.M. and 3:00–6:00 P.M.), it seemed to evaporate during the day. Some all-news stations began to insert features on child care, consumerism, and other "soft-news" items in order to attract the female audience. Others simply opted to abandon the news format altogether during non-drive-time hours. This approach became known as "adult block" programming.

The problem for all-news stations continues to be how much news and what kind of news to present. It is generally acknowledged that news in all media has gotten "softer" in recent years, with increasing emphasis on pictures, Hollywood personalities, and the more sensational crime stories. News stations are constantly asking themselves how much of this soft news they can program and still hold on to the hard-news audience that seeks the facts about national politics and international affairs. Most have made some compromise. CBS all-news stations now run a regular cooking show at middays and the *CBS Mystery Theatre* in the evenings. These types of shows are offered to attract an audience that differs considerably from traditional hard-news enthusiasts.

Though music continues to dominate radio programming, all-news stations are more than a passing fad. In many markets, all-news or modified all-news operations, like San Francisco's KGO, have surpassed Top-40 stations to become number one in the ratings. All-news listeners are loyal radio consumers with desirable *demographics* (sex, age, ethnic, and income characteristics). Thus they are prime targets for radio advertisers.

## Let's Talk

San Francisco's KGO is one of many successful nonmusic stations that has combined the news and talk formats. In fact, KGO labels this hybrid

"Newstalk." The talk format, or two-way radio as it's sometimes called, gives listeners a chance to call in or write to stations and voice their opinions. By doing this, it provides the listener with a chance to become part of the program through the feedback process.

Talk radio's history goes back almost as far as the medium itself. Religious-based talk shows, such as the long-running *National Vespers*, were common in the late 1920s. Early talk shows often had a religious or political fervor about them. Such was the case with Charles E. Coughlin, a Catholic priest who rose to national attention through his CBS radio show, broadcast from the Shrine of the little Flower in Royal Oak, a small town near Detroit.

Coughlin arranged to buy time on Detroit's WJR to promote his small church. He soon found that there were other things to discuss. His weekly "sermons" often involved economics or the threat of communism. During the Depression, he attacked the "international bankers" and the threat of "unregulated capitalism." These themes hit home as the Depression went on, and Father Coughlin soon found the letters, and contributions, rolling in.

Soon he could also be heard on other powerful Midwest stations. When CBS tried to exert some measure of control over his broadcasts, he went directly to his listeners. According to broadcast historian Erik Barnouw, CBS received a million and a quarter letters of protest. Coughlin continued for a while, but eventually his attacks on President Hoover and the Congress became so overtly political that he was "eased" off the air. Undaunted, Coughlin formed his own network by buying time on individual stations and leasing phone lines for simultaneous broadcasts on Sundays.

Father Coughlin's power and fame grew. In 1932, he urged the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt and took partial credit for the Roosevelt landslide. But Coughlin grew to distrust FDR, and by 1934 he had formed his own political party: The National Union for Social Justice. All of these moves were fueled by his radio broadcasts. By 1933 he was spending about a quarter of a million dollars buying radio time; his income, derived almost exclusively from listener contributions, was estimated to be in the neighborhood of half a million dollars. It was said that a particularly moving radio broadcast could bring a deluge of 200,000 letters.

In 1935, Coughlin joined forces with Senator Huey Long of Louisiana, another powerful and controversial figure who knew how to use radio. Though Long was assassinated before the 1936 election, the Long forces and those of Father Coughlin merged to form the Union Party, a third-party splinter force that many felt would draw votes from the Democrats and probably hand the election to the Republicans.

WOMEN'S FEATURES

"MEET THE COOK"... From Hollywood, Ralph Story and the CBS Food Family interview the stars on their favorite foods and secret recipes.

"OUR MAN AT THE PRODUCE MARKET, JOE CARCIONE"... The most popular expert in town, Joe has the best buys of the day direct from the Produce Market.

"WHAT'S HAPPENING?"... CBS Newswoman Stephanie Shelton reports on what's happening to and for women across the country

"THE DIRT GARDENER, BERT BERTOLERO"... Bert, a certified nurseryman, graduate Horticulturist and gardening columnist, answers listeners gardening questions.

"ROBERT FINIGAN'S WINE GUIDE"... Wine expert and author, Finigan recommends wines at all price levels and gives tips on serving.

"PETS AND WILDLIFE"... Nationally-known Roger Caras, author, lecturer and conservationist, talks about the care of pets, and what is known of wild animals

"BAY AREA WOMAN"... Local women, both prominent and unknown, are interviewed on their achievements and their aspirations.

"CRITIC'S CHOICE"... If there is a choice critic, it's Steve Bafferty who makes all the openings in the performing arts, and is the first to report what's best.

"IN THE LEARNING CENTER"... Psychologist Lonnie Carton talks about children, families, and their problems

5.3. A publicity sheet from KCBS radio, San Francisco, touts the station's many "soft news" features aimed at the female audience. Courtesy, KCBS Newsradio, San Francisco.

Despite this threat, Roosevelt went on to win the 1936 election by a larger landslide than in 1932. The Union Party drew less than a million votes, and the power of Coughlin was greatly diminished. Yet the power of radio, and the radio talk show, was still great. Observers noted that FDR's radio "fireside chats" had probably been a major factor in the victory. Coughlin had met his match.

Other kinds of talk shows were also making their way on to the air during this period. Programmers found talk shows offering recipes and beauty and cleaning tips to be popular among daytime listeners. Such shows had particular appeal to smaller, nonnetwork-affiliated stations with limited production budgets.

As we have seen, the first half of the 1940s was dominated by war news. Many news reporters offered a regular "comment" in the form of a talk show. Listeners would respond by letter and, in larger state markets, by phone to those stations with appropriate facilities. But the end of the war brought a decrease in such programs, and network programming returned to prewar fare.

When television began siphoning off listeners in the early 1950s, many stations returned to talk shows for the same reasons they turned to DJs—as an inexpensive way to fill up the long days and nights of the schedule. By now however, listener comments via phone were an integral part of talk shows. Talk-show hosts of this period would discuss everything from the important political issues of the day to the latest movie star gossip. Listeners responded eagerly.

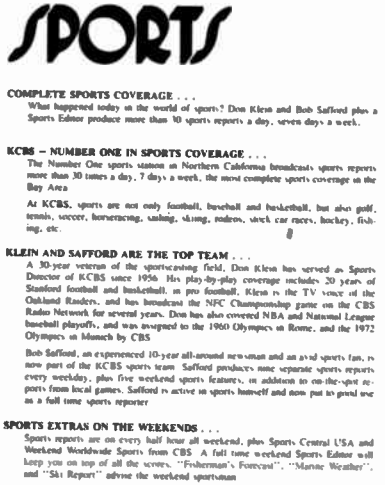
## Topless Radio

A new twist was added to the telephone talk format in the early 1970s by an aging former Top-40 DJ, Bill Ballance. Slotted into "housewife time" from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. on Los Angeles's KGBS, Ballance would select a topic like "What Kind of a Lover Is Your Husband's Best Friend?" and then ask his "little lovelies" to call in and talk to him about it. The results were spectacular. The station was flooded with calls, and the urbane Ballance became one of radio's hottest properties.

A syndicated version of the show, "The Feminine Forum," was featured on dozens of stations across the country. Ballance's topics became increasingly controversial, and critics labeled the new phenomenon "topless radio." Callers not only discussed topics in general, but were often willing to talk about the most intimate details of their own lives. Receiving pressure from his station, sponsors, and even Congress, Ballance was eventually convinced to discard the raunchier topics. His ratings soon dropped.

In retrospect, it was not unusual for so many listeners to be willing to open up their personal lives to the DJ and the audience at large. Radio's nature seems to nurture that kind of intimacy. The announcer broadcasts to the mass audience, but the audience responds individually. There is something about radio that is both close and distant: the satisfaction of knowing that thousands are listening; the security of knowing no one can see.

Today's talk shows offer the listener a chance to probe "in depth" a particular issue or subject that may receive short shrift on a five-minute newscast. The good talk show host is a combination political analyst and psychiatrist, sorting through listener responses and clarifying comments and positions. Though it seemed to be dying out during the 1960s, the talk show made a strong comeback in the 1970s, and it can currently be found in various forms in most major markets.



SPORTS

**COMPLETE SPORTS COVERAGE . . .**

What happened today in the world of sports? Don Klein and Bob Safford plus a Sports Editor produce more than 30 sports reports a day, seven days a week.

**KCBS – NUMBER ONE IN SPORTS COVERAGE . . .**

The Number One sports station in Northern California broadcasts sports reports more than 30 times a day, 7 days a week, the most complete sports coverage in the Bay Area.

At KCBS, sports are not only football, baseball and basketball, but also golf, tennis, soccer, horseracing, sailing, skiing, rodeos, stock car races, hockey, fishing, etc.

**KLEIN AND SAFFORD ARE THE TOP TEAM . . .**

A 30-year veteran of the sportscasting field, Don Klein has served as Sports Director of KCBS since 1956. His play-by-play coverage includes 20 years of Stanford football and basketball, as pro football, Klein is the TV voice of the Oakland Raiders, and has broadcast the NFC Championship game on the CBS Radio Network for several years. Don has also covered NBA and National League baseball playoffs, and was assigned to the 1960 Olympics in Rome, and the 1972 Olympics in Munich by CBS.

Bob Safford, an experienced 10-year all-around newsman and an avid sports fan, is now part of the KCBS sports team. Safford produces nine separate sports reports every weekday, plus five weekend sports features, in addition to on-the-spot reports from local games. Safford is active in sports himself and does put in general use as a full time sports reporter.

**SPORTS EXTRAS ON THE WEEKENDS . . .**

Sports reports are on every half hour all weekend, plus Sports Central USA and Weekend Worldwide Sports from CBS. A full time weekend Sports Editor will keep you on top of all the scores. "Fisherman's Forecast", "Marine Weather", and "Ski Report" advise the weekend sportsman.

5.4. Sports news and sports personalities are a major component in the success of most all-news stations. Courtesy, KCBS Newsradio, San Francisco.

## Speaking of Sports

From the beginning there seemed to be a natural relationship between radio and sports. Here is where the new magic medium could shine, providing an instantaneous play-by-play, blow-by-blow description of major sporting events, something no newspaper could do.

KDKA, the pioneering station in Pittsburgh, scored a number of sports firsts, including the first live boxing match in 1921. Later that same year, KDKA aired live coverage of a tennis tournament and a baseball game. New York's WJZ and other stations were soon describing sporting events of every possible description. Americans relied on sports segments during regular newscasts to bring them up-to-the-minute scores. Each year the nation listened intently to radio coverage of the World Series and other major sports contests. But daily live sports coverage was still too expensive to produce. Phone lines had to be rented by the hour. Local

## 5.5. THE OLD SCOTCHMAN AND THE ILLUSIONS OF A NATION

Gordon McLendon was an announcer and an avid baseball fan, but when he made the rounds of the major radio networks shortly after World War II in search of a job, he found they had plenty of announcers. Undaunted, McLendon decided to start his own baseball "network." At first, it was a relatively simple venture: Western Union would furnish a telegraphic description of each game to anyone for a flat fee of $27.50. This could be used on the air, providing the station had permission of the home team. In the late 1940s there were few local broadcasts of games since owners feared attendance would drop if the games were put on the radio, much as they fear television today. However the Mutual radio network did air some games nationally.

McLendon's "network" originated from Dallas, Texas, and spread westward. In those days, there were no West Coast teams, so granting permission to McLendon hardly seemed an attendance threat. Other radio stations would read the ticker tape accounts verbatim, which made for a dull and lifeless game. McLendon's efforts involved a total re-creation of the game, through the use of crowd noises, sound effects, and other audio gimmicks. McLendon himself broadcast many games under the air name of "The Old Scotchman." The Old Scotchman sounded as if he were a grandfather and had the facts and figures from years gone by at the tip of his tongue. Amazingly, McLendon was barely 30 at the time.

One of the things that made McLendon's re-creations work so well was his devotion to realism. He actually sent engineers to the different stadiums to record

and even national sponsors found the cost of sponsoring regular live sporting events prohibitive.

Into this gap stepped Gordon McLendon, the indefatigable radio entrepreneur. McLendon reasoned that radio was a medium of illusion and that an announcer's actual presence at a baseball game was unnecessary. He arranged an elaborate method of simulating radio baseball coverage through the use of various sound effects and mike techniques. The results were immediate. McLendon's idea soon led to a 458-station alliance known as the Liberty Network.

the national anthem, so when he said, ". . . and now, the National Anthem as played by John Doe at Yankee Stadium," it actually was John Doe at Yankee Stadium. Crowd noises were also recorded at each park, so a game from Boston could feature hecklers with the familiar Boston accent.

Mindful of FCC regulations, McLendon broadcasts always stated that the game was a re-creation. Announcers were careful not to say "here at Washington" instead, they would simply make remarks about how beautiful Washington was "at this time of year" and let listeners draw their own conclusions.

Actually, the re-creations were sometimes more interesting than live broadcasts themselves. During a dull moment, an engineer was likely to turn up the crowd noises briefly, forcing the commentator to give an impromptu explanation about a "great catch of that foul ball" made by an imaginary fan.

The Old Scotchman, and other McLendon announcers like Lindsey Nelson, soon became well known throughout the West and the Midwest; many were more famous than the live announcers with whom they sometimes competed. McLendon had 458 affiliates in his Liberty Network before the loss of a major sponsor and increasing difficulty negotiating rights from owners began to weaken it in 1952. But baseball oldtimers in the West still recall those lively broadcasts by The Old Scotchman who first brought daily baseball broadcasts to many major American cities.

But competition from the Mutual Network, which had actual live coverage, plus the coming of television soon ended Liberty's ingenious efforts. Before long, each team had its own group of broadcasters and was selling the entire package to local radio stations. That situation remains more or less intact today.

Baseball continues to remain radio's prime sports staple, though most major markets also offer live radio coverage of professional and college football, basketball, hockey, and other sports. However, major league baseball's 162-game season guarantees lots of time for commercials.

What's more, baseball franchise owners have traditionally fought against efforts to televise home games, fearing that it would cut into ticket sales. This situation could be changing, however. Ted Turner, the controversial owner of baseball's Atlanta Braves, televises some 100 home and away games each year on his own TV station. In Boston, too, local fans are treated to an ample supply of televised Red Sox home games.

Whatever the outcome of these efforts, radio's relationship with sports appears secure. The increasing American appetite for sports has led to increasing radio sports coverage. The success of all-news radio, which often relies heavily on play-by-play sports coverage, has led some to speculate that it won't be long before the "all-sports" radio format is a reality. In many markets, cable TV viewers can already see 24 hours a day of continuous sports programming.

## Foreground vs. Background: The Dilemma of Audience Response

One of the things that makes sports radio so profitable is that it attracts a special kind of audience, one that listens intently to the games. Similarly, the average all-news and talk-show listener must devote more attention to his or her favorite program than most music format fans. The result is the phenomenon of background vs. foreground audience involvement.

When all-news format salespeople go to a potential advertiser to sell time, they stress not only the *type* of listeners that tune in, but *the way in which they listen*. The argument goes that many people who listen to music stations are really using music for a *background*. Nonmusic formats, by contrast, attract *foreground* listeners, more intent on what the announcer is saying, thus more susceptible to commercials.

This seems to make sense if advertisers are relying on content orientation to sell their products. Yet we know that radio is not particularly good at communicating linear content. For example, phone numbers or prices must be repeated a number of times. Long ago, advertisers found that musical jingles and other radio forms seemed to work better. Rather than motivating a listener to do something specific right now, radio commercials are more effective when stored in the mind of the listener over a long time. Thus the slogan "Coke adds life" does not literally mean that if you want life, you have to have Coca Cola. But it does deliver an image of Coke and liveliness that may at some future point encourage you to pick up a six-pack.

As you can see in table 5.6, the background vs. foreground listener perception and response phenomenon can be broken down in a

5.6. Background vs. Foreground Listener Perception in Radio

| | Background | Foreground |
|---|---|---|
| Format | All-music formats: Top-40, AOR, MOR, C&W | News, talk, sports, religion |
| Form/Content Orientation | Form oriented | Content oriented |
| Linearity | Nonlinear programming | Linear programming |
| Perceived Degree of Listener Involvement | Casual listening | Careful listening |
| Emotional/Intellectual Responses | Elicits emotional responses | Elicits intellectual responses |
| Subliminal/ Conscious Responses | Elicits subliminal responses | Elicits conscious responses |
| Treatment of Political Issues | Seldom deals with political issues | Often deals with political issues |
| Listener Action Capability | Seldom prompts listener to action | Capable of prompting listener to action |

number of ways. Foreground radio tends to be very linear; thus one story follows another in logical order, just as one inning of a baseball game follows another. Meanwhile, Top-40 DJs are instructed to purposely "mix up" the kinds of songs they play. A slow song might be played right after a fast one, or a male vocal might follow a female vocal. The term *flow* is used to apply to the kinds of records and the order they are played on the air. But flow usually involves a diverse, and sometimes mysterious, mix of these programming elements that appears to make no linear sense.

We have seen that background listeners are casual in their approach to radio, while foreground listeners are more intent. In addition, music, and music programming, seems to appeal largely to audiences at an emotional rather than intellectual level. This is not to say that that appeal is not powerful, or that it does not produce listener involvement; it most certainly does. But the involvement is somewhat different from that of a foreground listener.

Foreground listeners are quite apt to be conscious of their involvement with a favorite program, whereas background listeners might be very unconscious of the powerful role of music in their lives. This is one of the reasons we need to learn more about the long-term effects of popular music and their implications for us and our society (see Chapter 4).

Background radio seldom deals with political issues, and the social issues involved in music lyrics usually involve interpersonal relationships

rather than larger societal ones. Politics and larger social issues, of course, make up the bulk of the content of news and talk format programming and can often be found in religious and sports programs as well.

Finally, we see that a news or talk show might prompt a listener to take a very direct action, such as writing a letter to Congress or complaining to a local official. Background programming seldom elicits this kind of response; instead, it is designed to soothe us, stroke us, or excite us without offering a direct course of action.

Of course, all-news listeners may be driving along in the car with their minds completely occupied with something else. The news is heard, but only at the subconscious or background level. Conversely, not all music is background. As we learned in Chapter 4, the music of the Rock Renaissance was a way of life for many listeners, prompting them to action. Lyrics became a new cultural force when young people heard "If you're going to San Francisco, wear some flowers in your hair." Many came; many did not. But for this brief time, music was indeed foreground communication.

Most important, we are all both types of listeners at different times. Even the most rocking Top-40 station stops for news every once in a while, and religious formats often offer gospel music. The definitions found here are exploratory and tentative, but they do offer us a chance to see the two different types of programs that are offered, and provide a starting place for examination of our own responses to radio. In this way, they can help us toward a better understanding of our involvement with the powerful and elusive programming of the magic medium.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Radio has often been called a "first line of defense" when disaster occurs. Why do we turn to radio in times of crisis?

2. Radio and other media did not stir up public patriotism during the Vietnam war, as they did during World War II. Why?

3. Listen to an hour of radio news on your local all-news station or five on-the-hour newscasts on a local music station. Make a careful list of all stories covered. How do these differ from stories in the first few pages of your local newspaper? What might account for these differences? How might these differences influence our perception of world affairs?

4. Imagine you are a native Martian and have had no contact with Earth except for the radio broadcasts you have been able to pick up. After listening to all the major formats, what kind of place do you think Earth is? Why?

5. Using the background section of the table on page 115, listen to a local music station and find specific examples of each of the background traits. Now try it with the foreground chart and a local news, talk, or sports broadcast. Can you think of any additional characteristics of background and foreground formats?

## Readings and References

**Eric Barnouw**
*A Tower in Babel.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
*The Golden Web.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
These two volumes of broadcast history offer a number of insights regarding the role of radio news, especially during the war years. The author deals with the personalities that reported the news as well as with the facts. Highly recommended.

**Lindsey Nelson, with Al Hirshberg**
"A Stadium Inside a Studio," *Sports Illustrated,* March 28, 1966, pp. 38–45.
A behind-the-scenes look at the McLendon re-creation concept of baseball broadcasting by one of his former announcers.

**Edd Routt, James McGrath, and Frederick Weiss**
*The Radio Format Conundrum.* New York: Hastings House, 1978.
The only concise, comprehensive analysis available of modern radio formats. Includes chapters covering information and religious formats, as well as various music formats and educational approaches to radio. Well done. Highly recommended.

**Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross**
*Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1978.
Radio news is covered in several sections throughout the book. The authors do an excellent job of tracing the growth of radio news during the war years (pp. 214–220).

# 6

# The Folks Out There:

# Audience Research

## Remember, You're Listening to . . .

If you happen to be reading this from mid-April to mid-May or mid-October to mid-November, you may have noticed something unusual happening at your favorite radio station. They're probably running a contest or bargain giveaway, or stressing hour-long commercial-free music sweeps. Maybe there are just lots of those nagging reminders: "You are listening to KZZZ, the world's greatest radio station, don't forget KZZZ . . . remember, KZZZ. . . ." Such things are to be expected because the station is "in a ratings period." This means that the folks at Arbitron, a ratings service, are trying to find out how many people listen to each of the various radio stations in your market.

The importance of Arbitron, and ratings in general, to commercial radio stations in this country cannot be overemphasized. There is a built-in reluctance on the part of many advertisers to spend money on radio advertising. When the newspaper comes out, advertisers can look their ad over. And they know approximately how many copies of the paper are published each day. But with radio there is nothing to see, and no real way to know how many people are listening. So advertisers buy radio time according to the rating figures in "the book," that is, the total number of listeners reported by the ratings services. Even though those figures may be up to a year old, they give advertisers a chance to estimate how many people might be reached.

Since stations, formats, and air personalities all come and go according to station revenues, and since the ratings play a large part in determining revenues, most everyone in radio is knowledgeable about the services and how they work. What's more, the extensive figures provide much useful information about the kind of people who listen to radio and the programming they prefer.

## The Numbers Game

As the networks added more affiliates in the 1920s, and radio advertising proliferated, sponsors desired an objective method of measuring the number of listeners. In 1929, the Crossley research company, with the backing of major radio advertisers, began phoning randomly selected households and asking about their listening habits. These first national ratings were called "the Crossley."

The C. E. Hooper company dominated the ratings scene from the mid-1930s until the 1950s. The Hooper ratings were also done by phone, but they were somewhat more extensive and accurate than their predecessors. Yet as radio became a more portable medium, these *in-home* surveys became obsolete. Arbitron, founded in 1948, is the major ratings service in radio today. Arbitron supplies personal diaries that can be carried around by the listeners for seven days. They are asked to write down in these diaries the names of the stations they listen to each quarter hour.

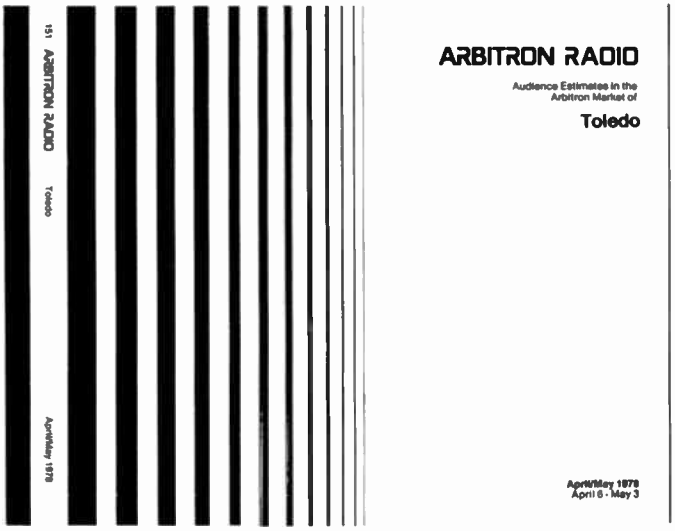
Two smaller companies, Media Statistics, Inc. (MEDIASTAT), and RAM Research, compete with Arbitron. MEDIASTAT, which was founded by a group of former Arbitron employees, uses a telephone recall method. Listeners are called and asked only about their listening patterns that day or during the previous evening. MEDIASTAT contends that this immediate kind of information is more accurate than that obtained by diary.

There is much debate regarding which of the two methods is most effective. In any case, it is Arbitron that supplies the most exhaustive data on the listeners, and it is Arbitron that is most often quoted when ratings are discussed. Arbitron also supplies television ratings, in competition with A. C. Nielsen.

Arbitron currently surveys some 180 radio markets at least once each year. The smallest of these (e.g., Pensacola, Florida; Great Falls, Montana) are surveyed once a year. Moderate-sized markets such as Phoenix, Arizona, and Portland, Oregon, are surveyed twice a year; and the nation's largest markets (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Boston) are surveyed four times per year. In 1981 Arbitron began utilizing an extended measurement method (em) in many major markets. This plan means that those markets are now being measured for 48 weeks each year, with the four measurement periods covering all but a few weeks during the summer and at Christmastime.

Market size is determined by total population in what Arbitron calls the metro survey area (MSA) or total survey area (TSA). The MSA is generally a metropolitan area as defined by the U.S. Government. The TSA includes all of the MSA, plus people who can receive radio signals from the city at a certain specified level. A random sampling of listeners are contacted by phone. Those that agree to help are given a diary and a simple set of instructions. Though the survey period may last for up to 12 weeks, no individual keeps a diary for more than one week. After that, another sample is drawn.

Arbitron processes returned diaries by computer at its home office in Laurel, Maryland, and generally has the information to its subscribers in 5




6.1. Arbitron reports are issued for some 180 markets. This one for Toledo, Ohio, includes 70 pages of data. Reports for larger markets like New York and Philadelphia can run to 300 pages or more. Courtesy, Arbitron.

to 12 weeks. (One of the main subscriber criticisms of Arbitron is that the information is not received quickly enough.) Both advertisers and stations subscribe to the service, but the cost to stations is much higher. A major-market station with four surveys a year might pay as much as $60,000 annually for the service. A subscription entitles the subscriber to use the information for promotion and advertising purposes.

The Arbitron ratings describe listening habits in a number of ways. This includes surveys taken at various *day parts*, or different times of the day. Thus, for example, it's possible to find out how many men 18 and over might be listening between 8:00 and 9:00 P.M. on an average weeknight. The basic adult audience consists of men and women 18+, or 18 and over. Teens, 12–17, are listed in a separate section.

## Reading the Book

When confronted for the first time by a page from an Arbitron book, your natural reaction will probably be panic. "I'm not good with num-


6.2. KOIT radio publicizes its success in one of radio's crucial *day-parts*, 10:00 A.M.–3:00 P.M. Saturdays. Courtesy, KOIT radio, San Francisco.

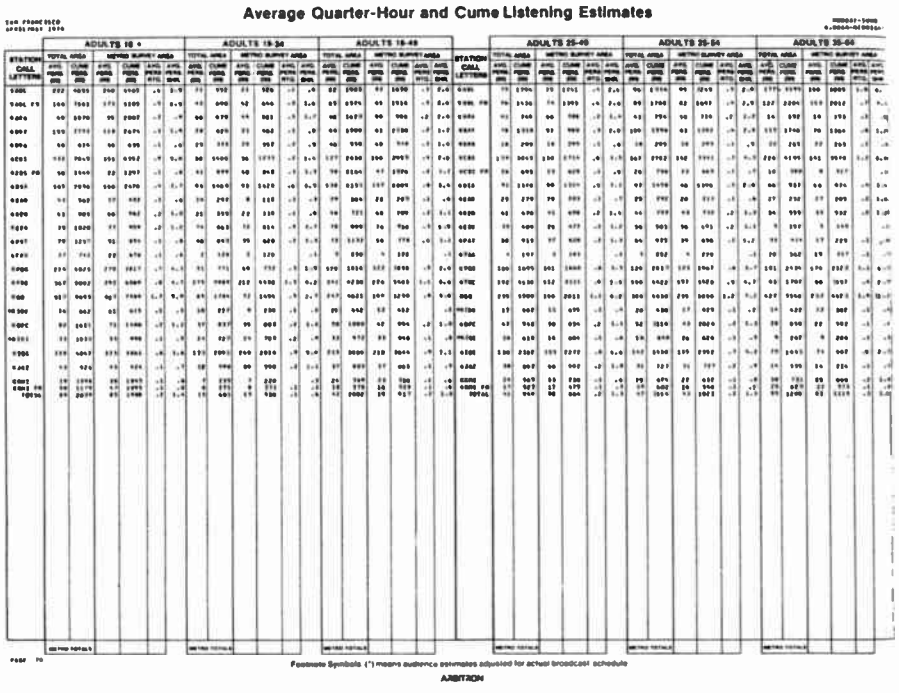
bers," you say. Well, most of us aren't, but reading an Arbitron page is relatively easy once some of the basic terms are defined. For now, let's concentrate on these four:

*Average Persons:* The number of people from the specified group (males, females, teens, etc.) who are listening to a station at any given moment from the specified time.

*Cume Persons:* The number of *different* people who tuned into that station for at least five minutes during the specified time.

*Ave Person Rating:* Average percentage of all people from the specified group who are listening to that station at any given moment during the specified time.

*Ave Person Share:* The average percentage of all people from that group who are listening to that station at any given moment during the specified time, *based on the number of people who have their radios turned on.*



Average Quarter-Hour and Cume Listening Estimates

6.3. Courtesy, Arbitron.

In the upper right-hand corner of the Arbitron sheet (see 6.3), we see "Monday-Sunday, 6:00 A.M.–midnight." This means all the data for the sheet is for that time period. In the upper left-hand corner, "San Francisco, April/May 1979" gives us the area and the months the survey was taken.

Now, let's look at KABL, the first station listed. The number in the first column is 252. This number appears under Adults 18+, so we know it is indicating men and women 18 years of age and older. *Total area* means the total area of the survey, in this case that is almost all of Northern California, as opposed to the "metro" or metropolitan area, which would include only San Francisco and its adjoining suburbs. We know that *average persons* mean people from this group who are listening at a hypothetical moment. We add two zeroes for our final total. Thus, 25,200 people, on the average, were tuned in to KABL-AM at any given moment during this time period.

Of course, at times many more were listening, and at times fewer. But *on the average* an advertiser could expect to reach 25,200 adults 18+ with a message on KABL-AM during this time period.

## 6.4. SORTING OUT THE JARGON: A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*If you were to hear a discussion between station executives about the "numbers," you would probably be overwhelmed by the unknown terms. This handy reference will help you sort them out. Radio, like any other specialty area, has its own jargon. The following are from Arbitron's promotional materials.*

*AM, FM Totals*—A figure shown for AM-FM affiliates in time periods when they are predominantly simulcast.

*Average Quarter-Hour Persons*—The estimated number of persons who listened at home and away to a station for a minimum of five minutes within a given quarter hour. The estimate is based on the average of the reported listening in the total number of quarter hours the station was on the air during a reported time period. This estimate is shown for the MSA and TSA [see below].

*Average Quarter-Hour Rating*—The Average Quarter-Hour Persons estimate expressed as a percentage of the universe. This estimate is shown in the MSA [see below].

*Average Quarter-Hour Share*—The Average Quarter-Hour estimate for a given station expressed as a percentage of the Average Quarter-Hour Persons estimate for the total listening in the MSA within a given time period. This estimate is shown only in the MSA.

*Away-From-Home Listening*—Estimates of listening for which the diarykeeper indicated listening was away from home.

*Cume Persons*—The estimated number of *different* persons who listened at home and away to a station for a minimum of five minutes within a given day-part. (Cume *estimates* may also be referred to as "cumulative," "unduplicated," or "reach" estimates.) This estimate is shown in the MSA, TSA and ADI.

*Cume Rating*—The estimated number of Cume Persons expressed as a percentage of the universe. This estimate is shown for the MSA only.

*Day-Part*—A given part of a day (e.g., 6:00–10:00 A.M., 7:00 P.M.–Mid.).

*Exclusive Cume Listening*—The estimated number of Cume Persons who listened to one and only one station within a given day-part.

*In-Tab Sample*—The number of usable diaries returned and actually tabulated in producing the report.

*Metro Survey Area (MSA)*—Metro Survey Areas generally correspond to Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) as defined by the U.S. Government's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) subject to exceptions dictated by historical industry usage and other marketing considerations.

*Metro Totals and ADI Totals (Total listening in Metro Survey Area or Total listening in the ADI)*—The Metro and ADI Total estimates include estimates of listening to reported stations as well as to stations that did not meet the Minimum Reporting Standards plus estimates of listening to unidentified stations.

*Rating* (See Average Quarter-Hour Rating and Cume Rating.)

*Sampling Unit*—A geographic area consisting of a single county, a group of counties or a part of a county.

*Share* (See Average Quarter-Hour Share.)

*Simulcast*—The broadcasting of the same program at the same time by AM-FM affiliated stations.

*Total Survey Area (TSA)*—Where applicable, a geographic area that includes the Metro Survey Area plus certain counties located outside the MSA.

*Universe*—The estimated number of persons in the sex-age group and geographic area being reported.

(For additional information, see "Standard Definitions of Broadcast Research Terms," published by the National Association of Broadcasters, 1771 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.)

Now, let's move to the *cume persons*. Here we find that 465,100 *different* adults 18+ tuned in to KABL-AM for at least five minutes. So the station reached almost half a million adults 18+ for at least five minutes some time during the week.

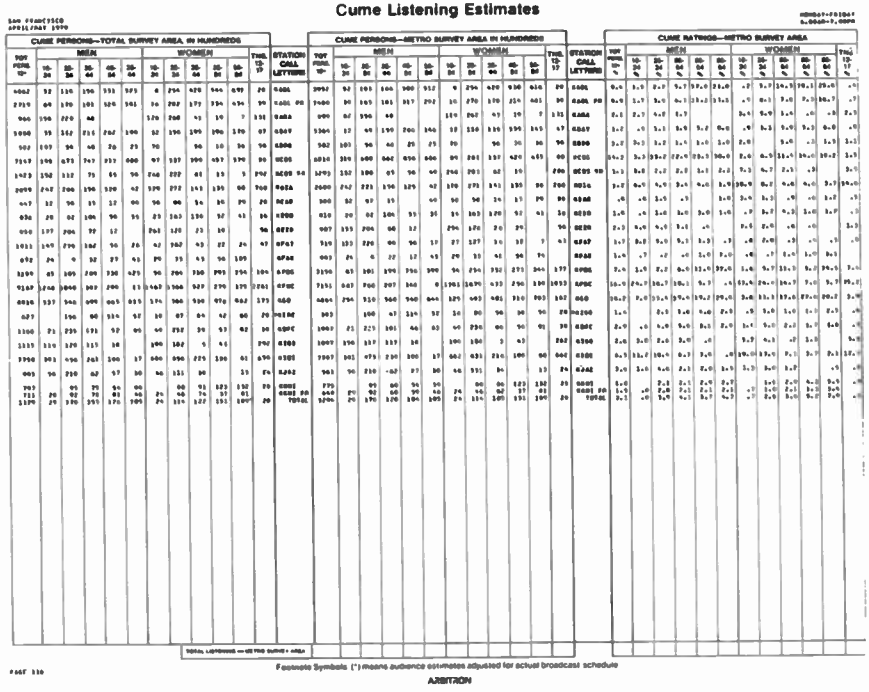
Skipping over a couple of columns, we come to *metro survey area, average person rating,* and *average person share.* The number .6 simply means that, on the average, a little over one-half of one percent of all adults 18+ who live in the metropolitan area were listening to KABL at any given moment. The 3.9 is simply the .6 number *expressed as a percentage of those who have their radios turned on.* It means that, on the average, about 4 of every 100 adults 18+ with their radios turned on were listening to KABL-AM. Those 4 out of 100 represent KABL-AM's share of the available audience of adults 18+.

This may seem confusing the first time through, or even the second. But if you go over it a few times, you'll soon be reading numbers with the best of them. As you can see, each station has a different share of the audience. Thus advertisers are able to choose the station that reaches more of the people they feel will be receptive to their message. Of course, the advertisers' dilemma also involves the *cost* to run their message. A station with a 10 share of the audience that charges $200 per spot might be rejected in favor of a station with a mere 5 share that charges only $50. In short, advertisers must balance share and cost figures to find the best "buys" in a market.

The *cume listening estimates* in 6.5 give us a chance to see the *demographics,* or age and sex characteristics of our audience. The upper right-hand corner shows that these estimates apply only to the period between 6:00 and 7:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. The first number in the first column on the left indicates that during this period 406,200 persons 12+ tuned in to KABL-AM for at least five minutes.

Looking across from left to right, we can see the numbers of various sex and age groups who listened to the station. Since KABL has a "beautiful music" format, its listeners tend to be older; hence the numbers grow steadily larger as we move through the various age groups, until we reach the final number (512) for men 55–64. Notice also that more women than men listen to KABL. This is also characteristic of the beautiful music format.

Just the opposite can be observed for KFRC. That station is Top-40; hence as we move up in age the numbers get smaller, with the smallest number (8) appearing for men 55–64. Once again, women outnumber men, a usual state of affairs in Top-40 programming. We can readily see that the relation between *program format* and *audience demographics* is fairly predictable. Radio station owners and programmers use this knowledge




6.5. Courtesy, Arbitron.

to try and program to the audience they think advertisers most want to reach. But as we shall see, it's not always easy.

## Market Characteristics

The radio audience is usually very diffuse, or scattered. Dozens of stations can be heard in most markets. A major market like New York may offer 60 or more stations during the day, with more at night, thanks to improved reception capacity. The result is the various formats we learned about in Chapters 3 and 5. These formats are designed to appeal to various demographic groups and to tempt specific advertisers.

Of course, each station varies the basic format somewhat, in a way it believes will best attract and hold listeners. What we really have is 60 or more stations, and a dozen or so basic formats.

6.6 Average Share Trends—Metro Survey Area
San Francisco Area, April–May 1979
Monday through Sunday 6:00 A.M.-Midnight, Total Persons 12+

| Format | Audience share (%) | Format | Audience share (%) | Format | Audience share (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ethnic/disco/jazz* | | *Beautiful music* | | *AOR* | |
| KBLX | .3 | (AM & FM) | | KYA-FM | 2.5 |
| KDIA | 3.1 | KABL | 6.0 | KEZR | 1.2 |
| KSFX | 2.7 | KFOG | 4.1 | KTIM | .4 |
| KIOI (AM & FM) | 4.3 | KOIT | 3.7 | KSAN | 1.8 |
| KSOL | 3.7 | KBAY | 1.7 | KOME | 1.9 |
| KJAZ | .6 | | | KMEL | 2.3 |
| KCBS-FM | 1.0 | | | KSJO | 1.2 |
| | | | | KYUU | 2.8 |
| Total | 15.7% | Total | 15.5% | Total | 14.1% |
| Format | Audience share (%) | Format | Audience share (%) | Format | Audience share (%) |
| *Top-40* | | *Classical* | | *Country* | |
| KFRC | 5.8 | KDFC | 1.2 | KNEW | 2.5 |
| KYA-AM | 1.6 | KKHI | .6 | KFAT | .8 |
| KLOK | 1.9 | | | KEEN | .9 |
| KLIV | .9 | | | | |
| Total | 10.2% | Total | 1.8% | Total | 4.2% |
| *News/talk* | | *MOR* | | | |
| KCBS | 5.1 | KNBR | 5.8 | | |
| KGO | 8.9 | KSFO | 3.4 | | |
| Total | 14.0% | Total | 9.2% | | |

| *Format* | *Share (%)* |
|---|---|
| Ethnic/disco/jazz | 15.7 |
| Beautiful music | 15.5 |
| AOR | 14.1 |
| News/talk | 14.0 |
| Top-40 | 10.2 |
| MOR | 9.2 |
| Country | 4.2 |
| Classical | 1.8 |
| All other | 15.3 |

All figures: Courtesy, Arbitron.

We can learn much about a market by adding up all of the shares for different formats. A sample involving the San Francisco area appears in 6.6. The eight most popular formats account for some 85 percent of all listeners. Note that even though news/talk and album oriented rock


"Sure our predicted rating, share of audience and rank isn't too high. But we're right up there when you break it down to the teen-age boy audience between 14 and 14½."

Cartoon by Sidney Harris. Copyright Broadcasting Magazine; reprinted by permission.

(AOR) account for about the same number of total listeners, there are eight AOR stations and only two news/talk. This is partly because San Francisco has traditionally been a home base for progressive rock, and partly because the *demographics* of AOR include the young adults 18–34 that so many advertisers want to reach. Advertisers know that as people grow older, they grow more resistant to change. This means that older listeners are less willing to try a new product or consider switching brands.

The chart also indicates the tremendous competition between stations in the youth-oriented AOR and ethnic/disco formats. These two formats alone are responsible for 15 stations, almost half of all those on the chart. No one station in these groups can accomplish the huge audience share of a station like KGO or KFOG because the competition in those formats is so keen and plentiful.

All in all, San Francisco is typical of most major markets. Perhaps the only exception involves the classical stations. Though they account for only 1.8 percent of all commercial listeners, this number is quite high compared to most cities. Classical music is now heard largely on non-commercial stations in most areas.

Some of the stations with small shares are in outlying areas and cater primarily to a small, local audience. But others are located in the city, and

their numbers clearly indicate they are in trouble. It is rare when one or more format changes do not occur between ratings periods. What's more, program directors are constantly changing or modifying existing formats to imitate more successful competition or ward off challenges by lower-rated stations.

For all the debate about the wisdom of the American commercial broadcast system, it is these complicated little numbers that form the basis for most major programming decisions. They largely determine what you hear on the radio each day. They also determine the fates and fortunes of disc jockeys, salespeople, general managers, typists, and everyone else who works in the industry.

## The Ratings Credibility Gap

Because so much depends on the ratings, and because so many stations feel they are not fairly represented, there has always been much controversy about the validity of Arbitron and other ratings services. We have seen that Arbitron uses the "diary" method to gather its basic information. Of course, not everyone keeps a diary. Those that do constitute a *sample*, chosen to represent the *universe*, or total market. All sampling methods have potential problems that could affect their accurately representing the universe.

*Sampling errors* occur when the sample differs significantly from the population it is supposed to represent. Arbitron contacts only a few thousand households in the major markets. This means these few thousand people represent the listening habits of millions. How reliable is the sample? Statisticians tell us that such a small sample, when properly chosen, can *probably* give us accuracy within 5 percent or so. This means the numbers we see in the survey book could actually be 5 percent higher or lower than the actual case.

Another problem occurs when some methods use only those people who have a listed telephone number as a sample base. Those who have no listed numbers, for whatever reason, are excluded. The very poor who have no phone or the very wealthy with unlisted telephone numbers can thus be underrepresented in the sample.

Then there is the question of those who don't respond. About one in five households contacted declines participation in the study. Are the listening habits of these consumers likely to be different from those who are glad to keep a diary?

Think of your own listening habits. If you are in the car, you're

probably prone to change stations often. Reflecting this accurately in a diary is extremely difficult. What about background music you hear in the supermarket? That could be an FM station, but have you ever listened for the call letters? Are you likely to be able to remember all of the stations you listen to? And for how long?

Often Arbitron receives diaries with stations mentioned that do not exist—mistakenly transposed call letters, nonexistent frequencies, and so on. Generally, several Arbitron people look over each diary and make decisions about what the respondent meant to write, but these cannot always be totally correct.

Any sampling method of audience research cannot be completely accurate. The only way to ensure absolute accuracy would be to survey everyone and make sure all listening was recorded accurately. This would be financially impractical.

For all of their faults, both the Arbitron and other ratings systems generally reflect audience listening trends, but survey results must be taken with a grain of salt. Unfortunately, station personnel, advertising agencies, and sponsors have a tendency to look upon ratings as gospel. Unless their attitudes change, ratings will continue to play a major role in programming decisions.

## Catching up with Ourselves

Since ratings play such a vital role in program decisions, a logical question involves the *kind* of radio programming that results. Rather than leading the audience to new, innovative kinds of programming, the ratings game has a tendency to encourage similarity in programming. Program directors schedule music and information in an effort to get the largest possible audience, rather than presenting so-called quality alternatives that might reach a smaller, but more devoted, audience.

It is not really the ratings that are at fault here, but the system. On some occasions, the FCC has moved to encourage program diversity, for example, by demanding that music stations offer some news and public affairs programs. Inevitably, these programs are scheduled late at night or on the weekends when audiences tend to be small. Such programs are regarded as a tune-out for the audience that wants (and has come to expect) constant music or whatever else comprises the station's normal broadcast.

The radio audience is like a dog chasing its tail: The more we respond

to the standard radio formats, the more standard radio formats we get. Major listening habit changes, like the rise of Top-40 or the all-news format, come rarely. Ratings usually tell us where we've been; they seldom tell us where we're going. Until there are significant changes in the structure and purpose of American commercial radio broadcasting, the ratings, and the formats they measure, are likely to remain about the same.

## Queries and Concepts

1. In small markets, stations often are not rated or find the cost of ratings prohibitive. However, if you live in a medium or large market, contact a local station and ask to see a sample of the ratings. How do these ratings compare with your listening habits? With those of the class?

2. Say you were starting a brand-new station in your market. Given current formats available, and the location, demographics, and competition, what kind of programming would you choose for your station? Why?

3. Play "Arbitron diary" for one day by writing down your exact radio listening habits. Make sure that each entry is listed by the quarter hour it occurred. Make a list of problems encountered during your sample day. Can you see problems with the diary method beyond those discussed in this chapter?

## Readings and References

Arbitron is very helpful to students and others interested in more detailed information. Among the booklets free for the asking are *Description of Methodology, Research Guidelines for Programming Decision Makers, Understanding and Using Radio Audience Estimates: A Quick Reference Guide,* and *Quick Reference Guide to Arbitron Radio Market Report.*

Contact the Arbitron center closest to you for more details:

*New York:* 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019; (212) 262-2600.

*Chicago:* 1408 Tribune Tower, Chicago, IL 60611; (312) 467-5750.

*Atlanta:* 3330 Peachtree Road, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30326; (404) 233-4183.

*Los Angeles:* 4311 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90010; (213) 937-6420.

*San Francisco:* 425 California St., San Francisco, CA 94104; (415) 393-6925.

*Dallas:* 5327 N. Central Expressway, Dallas, TX 75205; (214) 522-2470.

*Washington:* The Arbitron Building, Laurel, MD 20810; (301) 441-4742.

# 7

# A Sound Investment:

# The Business of Radio

## Don't Touch That Dial



7:45 A.M. The alarm goes off, and on comes your favorite station. You struggle to turn it down, but the message is loud and clear: "That's right no hype, no jive, just two straight-ahead, superamp loudspeakers plus a fantastic turntable and stereo cassette deck, just $499. That's right, $499 takes it home today with no payments until . . ." (click). "Try to call before midnight tonight so you don't forget. That's $8.99 for both albums, only a dollar more for . . ." (click). "We're Panoramic Airlines, doin' what we do best . . ." (click). "The bank that's friends with you because we want more than your money, that's . . ." (click).

Silence.

You breathe a sigh of relief and try to fall back to sleep, but your mind is already full of those audio images—airlines, banks, stereo equipment, and, of course, those "amazing record packages." You've started another day in your diet of unending commercials. If you listen to the radio an average of three hours per day, you probably hear 50 or more advertising messages daily. That amounts to about 10,000 ads in the last year alone.

We tend to think of radio as a purveyor of music, news, entertainment, and information; our "constant companion" on our journey through life. It is all of those things, but most of all it is a business, and a very big business at that. Each year, advertisers spend more than *$2.5 billion* bringing you those familiar messages; that's about $7 million every day, spread out among the nation's 7,500 or so commercial radio stations.

Since 1962, radio *billings*, the total amount of money advertisers contract to spend on radio, have increased each year. Billings were a mere $650,000 that year. Even then, everyone was wondering how long the boom was going to last. It has never ended. Owning and operating a radio station is a very desirable investment. A station that sold for $50,000–$100,000 20 years ago is now likely to be worth more than half a million dollars. Along the way it has probably produced many profitable years for its owner. Today, over 75 million homes have one or more radios. Each year we buy about 50 million new radios, including 10 million or so for our cars. The business of radio is bigger than ever. But it was not always the big business it is today.

## A New Kind of Advertising

Until WEAF in New York began "renting time" to advertisers in 1922, no one had considered the possibility of radio as an advertising medium.

Everyone seemed convinced the only way to make money from radio was by manufacturing and selling receivers. The success of WEAF prompted other stations to experiment with advertising in one form or another. Reaction was swift and decidedly hostile. *Radio Broadcast Magazine* decried the first few attempts and warned readers that "more of this sort of thing may be expected. And once the avalanche gets a good start, nothing short of an Act of Congress will suffice to stop it." Meanwhile, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover was quoted as saying it was "inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service . . . to be drowned in advertising chatter."

In response to this criticism, a new sort of advertiser came on the scene. Instead of touting individual products, these sponsors were content to settle for brand-name publicity by attaching their names to specific programs. Browning King Clothiers was among the first, sponsoring the *Browning King Orchestra*, a weekly musical program that made its debut on WEAF in 1923. There was no sales message; in fact, the listener had no way of knowing that Browning King even sold clothes. The idea was that such programs created "good will" toward the sponsor, which would eventually show up as sales.

Soon there was the Goodrich Silvertone Orchestra, the Ipana Troubadours, the A&P Gypsies, and the Cliquot Club Eskimos. Secretary Hoover felt this indirect, or *institutional*, approach was preferable to the hard sell, and the practice was dubbed "the Hoover method." As more and more stations went on the air, competition intensified, and more direct kinds of advertising could be heard. Still, as late as 1928, the newly formed NBC radio network discouraged sponsors from direct advertising. The first NBC president assured Congress that no products or prices would be directly mentioned. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) issued its first code of conduct for broadcasters that same year. The code clearly forbade any kind of advertising during the prime-time evening hours, stating flatly that "commercial announcements, as the term is understood, should not be broadcast between 7:00 and 11:00 P.M." The NAB reasoned that some advertising might be appropriate during the business day, but surely not when people expected recreation and entertainment. However, the early radio ratings indicated that most people listened in the evening, thus sponsors increasingly asked stations for permission to advertise in the evening.

The scarcity of good-quality programming during the 1920s had led stations and networks to rely heavily on sponsors who bought time and paid all production costs. Stations would simply provide technical facilities and collect revenues. By the early 1930s, most of the popular radio shows were sponsored by one or more advertisers whose messages were increasingly explicit. In 1933, NBC finally lifted the last barrier by giving sponsors permission to mention prices over the air.

7.1. Secretary of Commerce and later President Herbert Hoover felt that radio was best left as free as possible from government interference. His philosophy didn't work out too well in radio. Courtesy, Historical Pictures Service, Inc., Chicago.

By this time, radio commercials sounded much as they do today. Mouthwash producers touted their products for "health and fresh breath." Pepsodent toothpaste found that sales tripled as a result of their

## 7.2. "WITHOUT COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTION:" PUBLIC RADIO

While all America was becoming saturated with radio commercials during the 1920s, there was hope for some kind of noncommercial alternative, this was generally associated with "educational stations" licensed to colleges and universities. At first, all programs were merely an extension of some classroom activity, but soon educational stations began to offer various kinds of musical and public service programs as well.

Public radio never really got off the ground during this period, and when television came in, educational radio seemed to lose what little support it had. The Educational Television Facilities Act, passed by Congress in 1962, provided matching government funds for construction of new educational TV stations. There was no such provision for radio stations.

The National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) lobbied in Congress asking them to reconsider. In 1967, the Public Broadcasting Act corrected the situation, making noncommercial radio stations eligible to receive money from the newly formed Corporation for Public Broadcasting, an agency whose job it was to distribute government funds as "seed money" to encourage local noncommercial programming.

Perhaps the best known public radio program is *All Things Considered*, a

affiliation with the *Amos 'n' Andy* program. Sponsors did not actually produce the shows; they only footed the bill. Advertising agencies arranged for the programs, and advertising agency copywriters made up the musical slogans and other jingles that sold the products. In exchange, the agency received a 15 percent discount on time bought from the station.

Soon, however, sponsors clamored for more direct control of the programs. [When Radio City Music Hall, a popular center for the production of radio programs, was opened in 1933, each studio had a "sponsor's booth" that allowed representatives to hear and attend the shows. Last-minute script changes were approved by sponsors right on the spot.] Sometimes political and social messages were also the result of sponsor wishes. *The Ford Sunday Evening Hour*, a concert series, was supplemented

product of National Public Radio (NPR). The show is a 90-minute news and commentary that airs daily on most NPR-affiliated stations.

Best known of all the noncommercial stations are those in the Pacifica group. Among them is WBAI in New York, celebrated for its role in the "seven dirty words" controversy. A man driving in New York City happened to hear WBAI play a cut from a comedy album by George Carlin, in which the comedian discusses, and names, the "seven dirty words" you can never say over the air. The man lodged a complaint with the FCC, and the commission admonished WBAI. Eventually the case wound up in the U.S. Supreme court, where a majority found that the FCC did indeed have the right to punish WBAI for playing "indecent" material.

Most noncommercial radio material is not this colorful, however. The vast majority of radio listeners choose to put up with commercials in exchange for the type of programs they want to hear. Despite this, noncommercial radio remains an important alternative voice on a broadcast band filled with commercial stations.

Of particular interest are the 130 university stations which are licensed members of NPR. Many of these provide their communities with alternative programming content while giving students valuable on-air training.

with intermission talks by a Ford executive who lauded the free enterprise spirit of Henry Ford and denounced President Roosevelt's more liberal political moves, such as the institution of a surplus profits tax and worker unemployment insurance.

## X Marks the Spot

Until the mid-1930s, all commercials heard on radio were live, since recordings of any kind were financially impractical. However, as the costs associated with live broadcasting soared, the use of disc recordings be-

came more feasible. Recording a commercial meant that it could be played over and over again for the same initial production cost. In addition, the advertisers would know exactly what they were paying for in advance, and mistakes could be eliminated. Recorded commercials could be far more complicated than the live spots, with sound effects, music, voice tracks, and jingles all blended together into one concise message. All elements could be strictly controlled in a way never before possible.

The use of recorded announcements had another far more significant effect. Sponsors thought, "Why buy a half-hour for an entire show when we can rent a 20-second space between shows for a recorded message?" These recorded messages were the first *spot* ads, and they revolutionized the industry. As you know, today's radio and television commercials are almost all spot ads. Very few radio programs are sponsored by just one advertiser. Most musical formats rely on ten or more spots per hour for their income.

The addition of spot-advertising income to the already growing sponsored-program income shot radio profits up. As radio gained prestige during the war years, the use of the medium became a basic practice of many large companies. It seemed as if everyone who was anyone was advertising on the radio. The public was happy with the "free programming" (listeners in England had to pay a fee when they bought a radio set), advertisers were happy with increased profits, directly attributable to radio advertising campaigns; station owners and programmers were happiest of all. It would never be quite as good again.

## TV and the Big Change

We have already seen how the rise of television in the late 1940s altered radio programming. It was inevitable that TV would change commercial practices as well. Network radio profits seemed to fall in direct proportion to the rise in TV revenues. As the big names in entertainment moved to TV, they took their sponsors along with them. The rise of Top-40 and other music formats intensified an increasing reliance on spot advertising. Network affiliates could no longer throw the switch and receive top-flight entertainment and sponsors from the networks. Now they had to scramble to sign up national as well as local advertisers for their stations.

Since it was not practical for each individual station to maintain a sales staff where national spot-buying decisions were made, *station representatives*, or reps, spoke in the place of individual stations to national

advertisers. Later these reps would form sales networks of independent stations. This system simplified things for national advertisers: One contract with a rep could mean time on hundreds of small local stations. This was necessary for maximum coverage since advertising on network programs no longer guaranteed a large national audience.

With the networks no longer dominating radio broadcasting, stations approached many local companies for the first time. And with the new emphasis on music, some small stations actually began pulling higher ratings than the network giants. A new era of competition had arrived. Despite the dire economic predictions for radio in the early 1950s, the medium emerged more robust than ever. Stations, markets, advertisers, and the listening audience all underwent tremendous change, yet radio remained a viable advertising medium.

## Who Are These People? The Structure of Radio Advertising

The structure of radio advertising today is a curious hodgepodge of practices begun in the 1920s and altered significantly during the 1950s and 1960s. Basically, the process involves five separate parties, linked together in various ways. These are advertisers, ad agencies, marketing researchers, station representatives, and the stations themselves.

*Advertisers,* with products or services to sell, are more plentiful than ever, but there never seem to be enough to satisfy station sales personnel. There are two categories of advertisers: local and national/regional. National/regional accounts usually come to the station via the station rep. Local advertisers must be sought out by station salespeople. The national/regional accounts most often supply their own spots, with live copy or taped materials, whereas local sponsors often (but not always) need to have their ads written and produced by the station.

*The advertising agency* plans advertising strategies for its clients, produces the necessary materials, and supplies those materials to selected stations for airing. The result (hopefully) will be increased sponsor profits and a long-term contract for the agency. So volatile is the broadcast industry, and so fickle the buying public, that advertisers often become disenchanted with their agencies. It is not unusual for even a large, stable corporation to change agencies every year or two.

Large agencies compete heavily for advertiser contracts. Often an advertiser will shop around for an agency at contract time, inviting a number of agencies to make marketing presentations to the company executives. The agency with the most impressive presentation will get to handle all company advertising for a specified period.

Agencies also come in many sizes and descriptions. Some consist of one person working out of a small office; large agencies may have offices in many cities. Agency size is also measured in terms of *total billings;* that is, all the money the agency's clients agree to spend on advertising. If an agency has a million dollars in billings, its gross income would be the 15 percent commission, or $150,000. Advertising researchers Elizabeth J. Heighton and Don R. Cunningham quote American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) estimates that there are about 4,000 agencies operating nationally, employing some 60,000 people.

*Full-service agencies* handle a client's advertising business from concept to completion. In recent years, the job has become so complex that *modular* or *à la carte* operations have sprung up. The latter agencies perform specific tasks for the advertiser, such as commercial production or marketing strategy. Generally they work for a flat fee rather than the standard 15 percent. Full-service agencies may hire modular agencies to perform specific functions for their clients.

*In-house agencies* are often found in some of the larger national corporations. They were created when advertisers began to question the practice of devoting 15 percent of their buying power to an agency fee. Advertisers reasoned that if they could create their own agency, they would qualify for the 15 percent discount that stations gave to independent agencies, thus cutting costs. However, in-house agencies frequently cannot hire the kind of qualified personnel found in full-service agencies because of limited budgets. Nevertheless, advantages accrue to in-house agencies since the whole agency operates for the benefit of just one client. Employees and executives are more familiar with the product than those at full-service agencies who might have to handle many clients.

*Marketing research firms* began springing up when the job of assessing marketing needs for advertisers became too complex for most agencies to handle. Often companies and advertising agencies will come to marketing research firms with specific marketing problems. Say Levi Strauss & Co. is thinking about a new brand of jeans. Marketing researchers can tell them who is most likely to buy the new jeans and why. Armed with this research, the company decides to go ahead. Then the advertising agency

hires a marketing research firm to assist in choosing the proper kinds of messages and targeting the audience that will be most receptive to the new product. Marketing research firms conduct consumer research, obtain data about competing products, predict consumer trends, give detailed information about specific markets, and also test-market new products to see what the national response might be. In recent years, they have emerged as a major component in the broadcast advertising system.

*Station reps* continue to provide vital services to local stations. As we have seen, it is impractical for each station to maintain a sales office wherever major national companies make local buying decisions. It is the reps who know the stations, going to national advertisers or their agencies to convince them that their client is the best buy in a particular market. Since station reps are, in effect, salespeople for local stations, they cannot represent more than one station in any one market. Commissions for station reps are usually 5 to 10 percent of all the time they sell, although it can be more for the small stations whose dollar volume is low.

Whatever the fee, the station reps are almost always worth it. For this reason, many local radio stations employ station reps to sell their stations to national advertisers. However, some ambitious advertising agencies have bypassed the station reps to deal directly with the stations. In doing so, they claim a rep fee, thus taking money from both the client and the radio station.

*Radio stations* themselves are the final link in the advertising process. Stations survive on the income generated from advertisers. In most cases, the competition for the advertising dollar is keen. Indeed, the business of running a radio station in a highly competitive market is challenging, to say the least. Yet, in spite of any troubles a station may have had in the past, there always appears to be someone willing to buy it and try something different.

## Save Me a Spot: Buying and Selling Radio Time

Individual radio stations sell the spots available for advertising messages to both local and national advertisers. A national buy involves people who are knowledgeable about radio advertising practices, but the local salespeople or account executives (AEs) who contact retailers directly find


7.3. Part of the Account Exec's bag of tricks includes promotional materials like this sheet, designed to tout the sales ability of station air personalities. Courtesy, KOIT radio, San Francisco.

they must first sell the idea of advertising on radio. Each AE has a practiced strategy, but as with all forms of direct selling, it takes a very special talent to convince advertisers to part with their money.

Since radio is a nonlinear medium, retailers are normally encouraged to use it to advertise an event or sale in general, rather than try to mention specific prices. Experienced retailers know that the audience will seldom remember specific information but might remember a clever or humorous ad and associate it with the store.

This doesn't stop local retailers from trying other things, however. All you need do is turn on the radio to hear ads full of numbers. Such ads are seldom effective, but AEs would rather sell ineffective ads than none at all. Retailers are often convinced they must get as much content as possible for their money, and salespeople go along, contending it is the advertisers who are paying the bill, and they should have what they want.

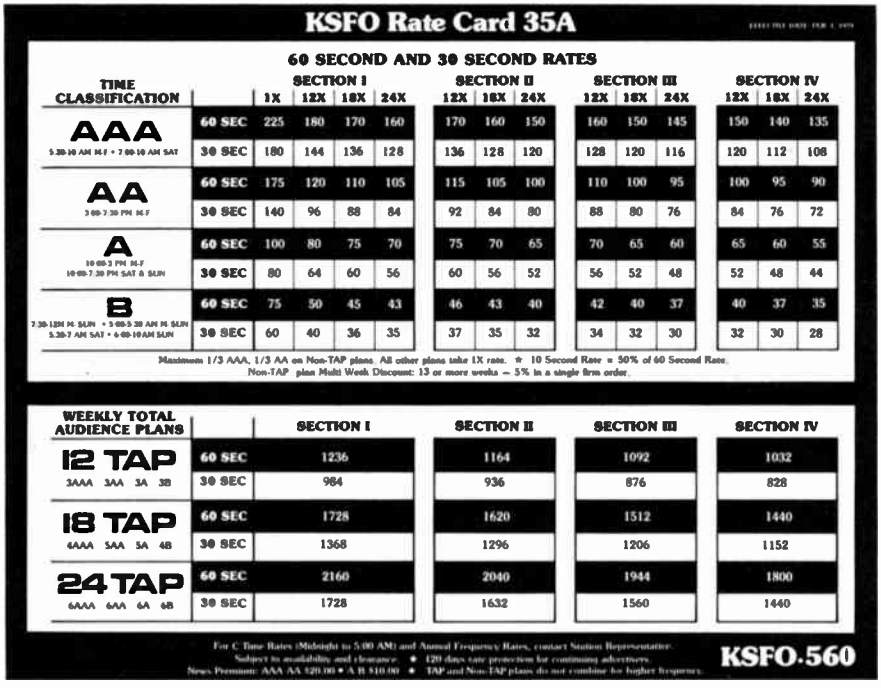
The more sophisticated retailer realizes the strengths and limitations of the medium and plans accordingly. Since local ads are produced at the stations, effective AEs can come up with ideas that may suit client needs. The clever salesman may think of a particular aspect of the business that


7.4. Part of any station's sales campaign relies on the ability to be "number one" among a particular demographic group and at a particular time of day. Courtesy, KOIT radio, San Francisco.

would communicate well to his listeners. The effective saleswoman must do her homework about the kind of business she's trying to sell and come prepared with facts and figures attesting to radio's ability in that particular area.

All AEs are fond of carrying letters and testimonials from satisfied clients about how their ad campaigns were helped by that particular station. The station also provides colorful brochures and background about station air personalities and other aspects of programming. All of this material is designed to help the AE make a sale. Selected quotes from the ratings (which make the station look as popular as possible) are also part of this package. For example, an AOR station may emphasize it is number one among adult women 18–25, whereas a news and sports station may boast it is number one among affluent males 25+. In every local market, there is always a proliferation of stations claiming they are number one.

Once the clients are convinced they should advertise, the next step is to choose the length and location of the proposed spots. This is done through use of a *rate card* (see 7.5). Buyers may select either a 30- or a 60-second message (some stations also offer 10- or 20-second rates). Then



**KSFO Rate Card 35A**

**60 SECOND AND 30 SECOND RATES**

| TIME CLASSIFICATION | | SECTION I 1X | SECTION I 12X | SECTION I 18X | SECTION I 24X | SECTION II 12X | SECTION II 18X | SECTION II 24X | SECTION III 12X | SECTION III 18X | SECTION III 24X | SECTION IV 12X | SECTION IV 18X | SECTION IV 24X |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AAA 5:30-10 AM M-F • 7:00-10 AM SAT | 60 SEC | 225 | 180 | 170 | 160 | 170 | 160 | 150 | 160 | 150 | 145 | 150 | 140 | 135 |
| | 30 SEC | 180 | 144 | 136 | 128 | 136 | 128 | 120 | 128 | 120 | 116 | 120 | 112 | 108 |
| AA 3:00-7:30 PM M-F | 60 SEC | 175 | 120 | 110 | 105 | 115 | 105 | 100 | 110 | 100 | 95 | 100 | 95 | 90 |
| | 30 SEC | 140 | 96 | 88 | 84 | 92 | 84 | 80 | 88 | 80 | 76 | 84 | 76 | 72 |
| A 10:00-3 PM M-F 10:00-7:30 PM SAT & SUN | 60 SEC | 100 | 80 | 75 | 70 | 75 | 70 | 65 | 70 | 65 | 60 | 65 | 60 | 55 |
| | 30 SEC | 80 | 64 | 60 | 56 | 60 | 56 | 52 | 56 | 52 | 48 | 52 | 48 | 44 |
| B 7:30-12M M-SUN • 5:00-5:30 AM M-SUN 5:30-7 AM SAT • 6:00-10 AM SUN | 60 SEC | 75 | 50 | 45 | 43 | 46 | 43 | 40 | 42 | 40 | 37 | 40 | 37 | 35 |
| | 30 SEC | 60 | 40 | 36 | 35 | 37 | 35 | 32 | 34 | 32 | 30 | 32 | 30 | 28 |

Maximum 1/3 AAA, 1/3 AA on Non-TAP plans. All other plans take 1X rate. ☆ 10 Second Rate = 50% of 60 Second Rate.
Non-TAP plan Multi Week Discount: 13 or more weeks — 5% in a single firm order.

| WEEKLY TOTAL AUDIENCE PLANS | | SECTION I | SECTION II | SECTION III | SECTION IV |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 TAP 3AAA 3AA 3A 3B | 60 SEC | 1236 | 1164 | 1092 | 1032 |
| | 30 SEC | 984 | 936 | 876 | 828 |
| 18 TAP 4AAA 5AA 5A 4B | 60 SEC | 1728 | 1620 | 1512 | 1440 |
| | 30 SEC | 1368 | 1296 | 1206 | 1152 |
| 24 TAP 6AAA 6AA 6A 6B | 60 SEC | 2160 | 2040 | 1944 | 1800 |
| | 30 SEC | 1728 | 1632 | 1560 | 1440 |

For C Time Rates (Midnight to 5:00 AM) and Annual Frequency Rates, contact Station Representative.
Subject to availability and clearance. • 120 days rate protection for continuing advertisers.
News Premium: AAA-AA $20.00 • A-B $10.00 • TAP and Non-TAP plans do not combine for higher frequency.

KSFO·560

7.5. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

they must select the number of times they wish the spot to run (1X, 12X, etc.) and the time of day it is to be aired (AAA, AA, A, B). Thus a sponsor desiring to put a 60-second message on KSFO once in Section I AAA time would pay $225. Notice that as the number of spots increases, the cost per spot goes down. Thus the sponsor in the same section who buys 24 60-second spots in AAA time pays only $160 per spot, a considerable savings.

The prices are also divided into various sections, or *grids*. These grids represent the priority and availability of locations in that particular time slot. An advertiser who buys a 60-second AAA spot for $150 in Section IV agrees that it may be preempted by an advertiser willing to pay the higher Section III rate of $160. Typically, sponsor willingness to buy in the higher-priced sections depends on the station's current *avails* or available times. A station with lots of avails finds it hard to sell premium-priced spots. On the other hand, the month of December almost always finds station logs (the guide that tells the DJ which ads and other materials to put on the air) crowded and avails scarce because of Christmas advertising. Therefore, the remaining time may sell at premium rates.

This situation is further complicated by station policies that limit the number of commercials or commercial minutes per hour. The NAB code

limits member stations to 18 minutes of commercials per hour, but stations in competitive markets may find listeners won't put up with that many. Stations that limit the number of commercial minutes to three or four per hour may have many more listeners, but they limit potential income unless they can charge enough per spot to compensate.

Program directors and management personnel are constantly seeking the proper commercial load balance. Let's say a new station goes on the air. Since it is not well known and has no ratings as yet, it may be virtually commercial free. This tends to attract listeners, and soon more and more people listen. Ratings go up, and advertisers begin to buy spots on the station. Station owners who have made a tremendous capital investment may lift the original restrictions on commercial load. Listeners tune out, and the whole cycle starts all over again. Stations that are constantly "sold out" have one of two choices: They can increase their commercial load, or they can raise their rate cards, that is, ask more money for each spot they broadcast. Each path has its hazards. Listeners may tune out, or advertisers willing to buy at old rates may not be eager to buy at higher ones.

To limit the scramble for the most desirable times, some stations have instituted *total audience plans,* or TAP buying. This generally means advertisers buy a total package of spots spread out more or less evenly among the most and least desirable times. TAP plans are often a poor buy for the advertiser. They reach the total audience by buying at all times of day, but their cost per person reached may actually be quite high. It's not unusual for a station to have five times the audience during drive time (AAA or AA time) than it does during other times. Rates for the less desirable periods are always cheaper, but they are seldom one fifth the price of drive time spots. Most stations encourage TAP buying because it fills their schedules during less desirable hours.

Advertisers may also buy spots at *best time available* (BTA) or *run of station* (ROS) rates. This means the message will be placed in the best available space left when all other spots sold at the regular rates have been logged. The wisdom of a BTA buy involves knowing what the best available times might be. BTA and ROS rates are usually a small fraction of the regular rate.

## The Big Buys: National Spot Business

Whereas radio stations in small areas rely mostly on local retailers for their revenues, stations in larger markets tend to have more national spot business. Of the $2.5 billion in annual radio billings, 50–60 percent comes

## 7.6. BARTER: OR THE GREAT TRADE-OUT

*The practice of trade-out, or barter, occurs when a station has time left on which it could place ads but has no ads to run. A station is rarely sold out all the time, and once the time is gone, it can never be sold. In effect, the station goes to an advertiser and says "Let's make a deal!" A company that furnishes typewriters, for example, will give the station five typewriters valued at $500 each in exchange for $2,500 or more in "free" advertising. Often the barter company will get double or more the value of the goods since ads run at odd times. One DJ in Southern California describes his early experiences with the barter system:*

I was working at a little station in San Diego when I started in radio. We didn't have much advertising because we were one of the first to play underground rock in the area, and advertisers were a little leery. They figured all our listeners were too poor or too out of it to buy anything.

The people in sales were constantly after us to clean up our act when we read the copy for the few advertisers we had. But, you know, it was hard to get serious about water beds or silver-plated roach clips. Anyway, a lot of us lived on trade-out, sales people and DJs alike. The station couldn't afford to pay us much in salary so we'd get a set amount of trade at many of our sponsors. I got a water bed, a bunch of posters and all of the donuts I could eat every day from a donut shop around the corner. I think they signed with us because they got so tired of the sales people pestering them.

from these national ads. They are seldom purchased by advertisers themselves but are usually bought through advertising agencies or *time-buying services*. These buying services work for agencies and sponsors and select the appropriate stations in each market for a national spot advertising campaign.

Likewise, it is seldom the station AEs who land these accounts; usually business is passed along by the station rep. When time buyers and station reps get together, each tries to get the best possible deal for his or her client. Each is a cool, calculating professional who cannot be taken in by much of the usual hoopla associated with local radio. Time buyers

Anyway, we were getting pretty sick of donuts when Mike, our head sales guy, struck the motherlode. He signed up with a good restaurant that served steak and lobster and what not. Best of all, they had a bar. Each of us on the air got $150 a month in trade at the place in lieu of a long-promised salary increase. The idea was good; every DJ got to know the menu and the people who ran the place, inside out. We all liked the place, so when we'd get to one of their spots on the log we'd just ramble on about it, sometimes for several minutes.

The only catch was we *had* to use up our full trade allotment every month or it reverted back to the place. On the last night of every month you could find the whole staff there, everybody from the General Manager on down, eating as much steak and lobster as we could, and ordering all sorts of exotic wines. It was the only time in my life that I ever bought a $30 bottle of wine. The end-of-the-month thing got to be quite a ritual, one of those crazy things that happens when you work in radio.

Finally, the place cancelled its contract with us. They were going bankrupt, despite all our good on-air efforts. I don't know if our end-of-the-month antics played a major part in the cancellation, but they couldn't have helped. That was over 10 years ago, and when I run into people who worked with me then, they still talk about it. It was the best trade-out I ever had.

know precisely what kind of audience they are trying to reach. Station reps are well acquainted with the format and avails of their stations. The stakes are high. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of business may be transacted in just a few minutes.

Since time buyers cannot hear what they are buying, they must learn to find dependable station reps who'll level with them. This is not always easy. Time buyers tend to rely on the CPM, or *cost per thousand,* of the target audience they are trying to buy. Basically it works this way: Say station KXXX has a 5.0 share of the audience from 6:00–10:00 A.M., Monday through Friday. By consulting the Arbitron book, the time buyer

knows there are about 100,000 people listening in the market at that time. KXXX is reaching an average of 5,000 people. If KXXX is charging $50 for a 60-second spot, the CPM is $10.00. A competing station, KYYY, has a 1.0 share of the audience but is selling its spots for only $5.00. They have a $5.00 CPM.

All things being equal, KYYY is a much better buy, despite its lower rating. Of course, all of this is contingent on the current ratings being the same as they were when the last survey was taken. In addition, the format has to be right: A bank may not want to advertise on a station that appeals largely to young teenagers, whereas a soft drink manufacturer might be looking for just that kind of audience. Nevertheless, CPM plays a central role in most national spot-buying decisions.

Another rule of thumb used in national spot buying is GRP, or *gross rating points*. This has to do with the number of rating points achieved when an advertiser buys several different stations in a market. National time buying services seldom stick to just one station in a market, but strive instead to saturate the market by reaching as many different people as possible. A typical buying plan for a general-use product might include some spots on Top-40, AOR, beautiful music, and country and western stations. National spot buyers also demand a strict accounting of what they have bought. Stations that do not bill accurately are likely to lose a lot of their national spot business; this is especially crucial to stations in major markets. Thus the traffic and accounting departments that handle these tasks are notoriously efficient.

## Form vs. Content: Ethics in Advertising

A Southern California car dealer who advertised extensively on radio and TV became famous for his exaggerated claims. He vowed he would "stand on my head" to make the best deal. He also boasted if you found a better deal and proved it, he would "eat a bug." Whether he actually ever stood on his head or ate a bug is not known, but it seems unlikely. One thing is known—he sold a lot of cars.

Like many advertisers, he realized that it is form not content that works best with broadcast advertising. Flashy sound effects, exaggerated claims, and rampant absurdity are a part of many radio commercials. Banks do not really want to be our friends, but they would like the use of our money. One airline is about the same as another, yet one claims it is "the only way to fly." We know there are other ways to fly, but we accept

these exaggerations as part of the nature of the medium.

Yet sometimes it's important to step back and look at just how exaggerated and how ridiculous some of these claims are. The people you hear on radio commercials may not actually use the products they are touting. Often they are actors and actresses paid to say they do. Though this practice is not illegal, many argue it is morally wrong.

"Nine out of ten leading New York doctors prefer the ingredients in brand X" may sound good, but what does it really mean? How many doctors were asked? Were they paid to participate in the survey? Who conducted the survey—a product representative or some independent agency? How many of the ingredients the doctors named are actually in the product? Do competing products also contain these same ingredients?

Sponsors argue that there is no time in 30 or 60 seconds to answer these questions, and they are right. But is it fair to the consumer that these questions go unanswered? In a growing climate of consumer awareness, more and more disturbing evidence indicates that much of what we hear in advertising is pure form. Words, phrases, music, and voices are chosen for how they sound, while the content, or literal meaning of the message, may be vague or even nonexistent.

A larger question involves the whole concept of all media advertising as practiced in this country. Some argue that if we really need a product, we will find it; advertising exists only to sell us things we don't need. Perhaps our very needs are created and perpetrated by advertisers themselves. Look in your medicine cabinet and examine what you find there. Would you be less healthy or less happy if you disposed of most of what's there?

Advertising sells much more than product. It sells status and success: "You can be desirable by wearing X perfume." "You can improve your love life by brushing with brand Z toothpaste." "You too can be the life of the party with . . . ." And so on. What's more, advertising, particularly broadcast advertising, offers instant gratification. "Go now, pay later" and "No payments till next February" are phrases often heard.

If there are no real differences between products, there is no reason to buy one product rather than another. So often differences involve packaging and merchandising, not the product. There may even be no reason to buy the product in the first place.

There are no easy answers to these questions involving the ethics and social responsibilities of advertising, but they need to be asked. Given the thousands of students who are reading this text, some are bound to wind up writing, creating, buying, and selling those ads we hear on radio each day. The rest of us hope that you'll occasionally take a step back and think about some of the issues raised here. If you do, it would mean a lot to all of us.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Call some local radio stations and ask them to send along a rate card. Compare prices and ratings (if available). How do they compare? Are there significant differences in costs? Why? Are there any differences in the approach to TAP and other discount plans?

2. You are the media buyer who must make a decision about buying local radio time for your client, the Cadillac Division of General Motors. The spot in question features the current model Cadillac Seville. Your budget will allow you to buy only two stations in your market. Which two do you purchase, and why?

3. Listen to an hour each of programming on two competing stations in your market during comparable time periods. Which seems to have the greatest commercial load? How does the identity of the various sponsors relate to the station format?

4. Pick a particularly memorable radio commercial. Write a synopsis of it, dividing it into form and content. Which aspect seems most likely to sell this particular product? Why? How does this spot relate to some of the issues raised in the final section of this chapter?

## Readings and References

**Erik Barnouw**
*The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
The noted broadcast historian traces the development of broadcast advertising in America with a lucid and fluid style. Part One deals with radio in depth, from a historical perspective. Interesting reading.

**Phillip Ward Burton and J. Robert Miller**
*Advertising Fundamentals* (2nd ed.). Columbus, Ohio: Grid, 1976.
A comprehensive look at the entire range of the advertising business. Chapter 18 is devoted exclusively to radio. Much information, but difficult reading in places.

**Elizabeth J. Heighton and Don R. Cunningham**
*Advertising in the Broadcast Media*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1976.
The only really thorough and realistic book available on practices in the broadcast advertising industry. Separate sections cover campaign strategy, buying and selling time, and social responsibility. The authors have academic as well as "real-world" expertise. Most appropriate for the beginning student. Highly recommended.

# 8

# "Turning Music into Gold": The Business of Popular Music

## A Hit or a Miss?

In 1979, a new musical premiered at the Old Waldorf nightclub in San Francisco. Written in part by ex-Jefferson Airplane, ex-Starship member Marty Balin, *Rock Justice* told the story of a young star who couldn't get a hit, despite the backing of his record company and various promotion attempts. In a dreamlike sequence, he was "put on trial" for his failure to appear on the charts. The Prosecuting Guitarist called a number of witnesses, including the singer's manager, his girlfriend, a record company executive, and others. In the end, he was found guilty and sentenced to obscurity. The jury concluded he didn't have what it takes to become a rock 'n' roll star.

Rock Justice demonstrated the important role that record companies, managers, DJs, and others play in making or breaking a record—and a career. For most of us, it is the artist that counts. We're not likely to buy a record because it's from a certain company. And we're not likely to think about all the things that happen between the time a song is sung in the studio and the time we buy the record. That process is called the popular music industry, and its gross revenues exceed $4 billion annually.

The recording industry is number one in the entertainment field, bigger than television, film, or radio. Somewhere between 10 and 15 thousand records are released each year. About 60 percent of these are singles, the rest, albums. About one in ten eventually show a profit. Yet the profit from that one in ten supports hundreds of record companies. Annual worldwide sales for major companies like Columbia are well over $300 million. Such high stakes, coupled with the low success rate of most records, led rock critic R. Serge Denisoff to label pop music the "vinyl crap game."

## The Companies

From 1948 to 1955, just four record companies (Columbia, RCA Victor, Decca, and Capitol) were the source of over 75 percent of all records listed on the *Billboard* best-seller charts. By 1958, their share had dipped to 36 percent. This tremendous shift resulted from their inability (or unwillingness) to recognize rock 'n' roll as more than a passing fad. Young record buyers, dissatisfied with the product the majors had to offer, turned to small independent (indie) labels like Chess, Atlantic, and Imperial to find what they wanted. The artists on these labels were usually black, and

their music was more rambunctious than anything the majors could offer.

Once the majors realized what was happening, they quickly moved to stem the tide, signing some rock 'n' roll artists and "covering" many black R&B hits—releasing the same songs but sung by white artists. By 1968, the four biggest companies, swollen through a number of mergers, controlled about 55 percent of record sales. The largest, Columbia, accounted for a fifth of all total sales. Those figures have varied little since.

The Columbia story typifies a cycle experienced by many of the majors. In 1950, Mitch Miller (later of "Sing Along with Mitch" fame) signed with Columbia as a promotion and production man. He promptly became the most talked-about personality in the business. Miller was instrumental in the success of acts like Guy Mitchell, Johnny Ray, Rosemary Clooney, and The Four Lads. He seemed to have an uncanny knack for knowing what the public wanted, even before they knew themselves. *The Saturday Evening Post* called him the "shaggy genius of pop music." His formula was simple: The listener must be able to identify with the song. So he looked for songs with universal emotional appeal that were simplistic enough for anyone.

But in the mid-1950s, the tide turned. Miller turned down a chance to sign up country and western newcomer Elvis Presley, claiming the $25,000 advance his manager was asking was too high. Presley signed with rival RCA. Another group he felt had no commercial potential was Buddy Holly and the Crickets. He was quoted as being worried that many traditional singers were now "singing in the frenetic style once belonging wholly to the Negro." While most majors moved quickly to cover the new sound, Columbia hesitated, and it hurt them.

Another blow came with the success of The Beatles in 1964. Beatles records in the United States were released through Capitol because Capitol's parent company, EMI, controlled the rights in Britain. In the first 90 days of that year, The Beatles broke every imaginable record. They had 12 singles on the charts at the same time. Their first album actually outsold their first single, with over 3 million copies in a matter of weeks. "Can't Buy Me Love" sold almost a million copies the first day it was released. By March 1964, it was estimated that The Beatles' singles accounted for 60 percent of all singles sales. This, too, was unprecedented.

Columbia was finally convinced that rock 'n' roll was here to stay. They hired a young Harvard Law School grad named Clive Davis as President of Columbia Records. In 1967 he went to the Monterey Pop Festival and sensed another change was in the wind, and in the wake of the festival he signed Janis Joplin, Blood, Sweat and Tears, Santana, and Chicago. In the next three years, Columbia's share of total record sales

8.1. The Beatles, as they appeared in 1964. The lovable moppets from Liverpool served as the financial base for Capitol records during the latter half of the 1960s. Courtesy, Broadcast Pioneers Library.

shot from 11 percent to over 22 percent. Rock grew from 15 percent of Columbia sales to well over 50 percent. Once again Columbia was number one.

Though the story of each company is unique, one thing is consistent—the tremendous competition between them as each pop trend comes and goes. For example, Capitol suffered a tremendous loss when The Beatles broke up in 1970. At about the same time, The Beach Boys moved to Warner Brothers. With two of their most famous acts gone, Capitol's stock lost 90 percent of its value almost overnight. The record business is by far the most lucrative and unpredictable of all the entertainment industries. The companies who compete for record dollars are ruthless, vindictive, and aggressive, while at the same time the artists they sign may be more interested in aesthetic functions and artistic control of their records. This makes for a clash of ideas and ideals.

## So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star? The Artists

At this moment, there are thousands and thousands of would-be record stars, singing, playing, and performing all over the country. They are playing at the bars of South Bend, Indiana, or on the stages of college towns in Texas, or in garages of the Los Angeles suburbs. They may specialize in disco, rock 'n' roll, new wave, folk, country, or gospel music. They are solos, duos, and groups; acts with a single guitar; and seven-piece bands with a "big-band brass sound." But they all have one thing in common: They want to become tomorrow's popular music stars.

For most bands this means one thing, and one thing only: signing a record contract, hopefully with a major company like Columbia or Warner/Elektra/Asylum. The band would then receive a cash advance of some kind and enough studio time and backup personnel to record their first album. This is the first, crucial step to stardom.

But that first step is not an easy one. Major record companies are inundated with unsolicited tapes from every conceivable kind of group. The odds against any one group making it are about 1,000 to 1, according to Bill Graham, San Francisco's famous concert producer who has managed and booked acts ranging from the Jefferson Airplane to Bob Dylan.

Nevertheless, some groups *do* make it. The Doobie Brothers were signed on the basis of an unsolicited demo tape they sent to Warner Brothers. But they are the exception to the rule. Record companies can easily spend up to $50,000 launching a new group, and they want to have a reasonable chance to recoup their investment. This means making sure signed groups get the right kind of publicity and that concerts are well publicized and well attended. Local radio people are pampered with free front-row passes and invitations to the luscious press parties.

### Sign Here, Kid

One rock writer wrote that "choosing a manager is the single most important career decision a musician has to make." It is the manager's job to book the act and bring it to the attention of record company talent scouts. For this, the manager takes a slice of the action (often 20 percent or more). Successful managers are a rare breed. Record company execs universally despise them—claiming that the bumbling managers actually inhibit, rather than help, new acts get off the ground. Once an act is signed, the

record company often takes over many of the manager's duties. Despite this, the manager continues to draw the 20 percent.

Managers seem to come and go with the tides. Often they have trouble handling stars with big egos. When asked why he stopped managing the old Jefferson Airplane, Bill Graham was reputed to have said, "Every time they walked across the street, they thought it was a ballet."

Once a manager is found, the act needs exposure. This means playing in hundreds of towns. Until the 1970s, most aspiring bands played small nightclubs and coffee houses, but these establishments now seem to be a disappearing breed. The preferable forum for new acts is to play second, third, or even fourth billing to an established group. Several unknown bands are often found playing behind headliners. This is to everyone's benefit. The secondary band "warms up" the crowd for the stars; at the same time, it gains exposure and, hopefully, a record contract.

Of the many thousands of aspiring groups each year, only several hundred will ever sign a recording contract. Of these, statistically, about 20 will finally have a hit record. And, of course, one hit single does not guarantee a hit album, nor a second hit single. What is it that does send a record or a performer to the top? Most outsiders looking at the "quality" of the average hit record might dismiss the process as pure luck. Industry cynics suggest that it's all in the promotion. Yet Stan Cornyn, a Warner Brothers executive, claims: "You can send it up in a balloon, you can put it in the Goodyear Blimp, you can send it up in a rocket, etc. If it doesn't have it in the grooves, it's not gonna sell. You can't package and sell a piece of shit."

According to R. Serge Denisoff, being "in the grooves" means having a little bit of magic, something unusual or unique, and making sure that this bit of magic is evident to those who are exposed to it: audience, music critics, and record executives alike. Perhaps this definition is a little vague, but it is probably as close as we'll get to being able to define that "special something" that most successful music performers seem to have.

Of course, being in the right place at the right time never hurts. It has been mentioned that the fun-loving Beatles emerged on the American scene just in time to bring us out of the doldrums after the Kennedy assassination. Similarly, Elton John, who made his American debut in 1970, came just as The Beatles were breaking up and when popular music in general had reached a stagnation point. Yet in both cases, the performers had that magic, and it's clearly evident in even their least successful recordings.

Maintaining superstardom is also a problem. Successful acts must continually go on the road to promote their new material. The audience, anxious to make mediated reality out of the Real Life concert experience, wants to hear only the previous hits. Exhaustive concert schedules are not

uncommon, even among top acts. The result is creative artists who are burned out and unable to come up with fresh, original material. Reflecting on his successful tours during the Simon and Garfunkel days, Paul Simon observed, "I always felt weird on the road. I was in a state of semi-hypnosis. I went into a daze and I did things by rote. Moreover, I didn't want to sing 'Scarborough Fair' again. I didn't want to sing all of those Simon and Garfunkel songs every night. . . ."

Even at the top, the life of the rock 'n' roll star may not be the continuous party most of us envision. Popular music stars continually write about the problems of being a star. Elton John described it as a life of hotel rooms and nervous energy in the "Holiday Inn." Joe Walsh parodied his own success with "Life's Been Good to Me So Far," and Randy Newman summed it up with a simple, musical statement: "It's lonely at the top."

## Hints for Hitmakers

Despite the warnings of those at the top, you've decided to become a rock 'n' roll star. You've picked a good manager, and she's landed a recording contract with a major company. The company has invested thousands of dollars in studio time, helping you record your first album on synchronous, 48-track tape recorders. These are designed to give the album producer maximum control over your sound. A guitar riff can be "sweetened," played louder or softer, or eliminated altogether. A chorus can be added, deleted, or delayed slightly for the desired effect.

When you are all satisfied, the master tape is sent to the pressing plant. Small companies rent pressing facilities, but since you signed with a biggie, they have one of their own. It costs about a quarter for materials to press your single, and the album costs about 50 cents. Actually, this is a minor expense; the record jacket may cost even more.

Several thousand copies of your album are churned out in a matter of minutes. Now you're all set, except for one thing: Nobody knows about it. Most important of all are the radio people; it's the program directors and DJs who'll be the key to your success or failure.

Record companies, more than aware of this, have devised numerous means for getting to the few people who make the decisions. The most obvious is bribery, or payola. Since the highly publicized scandals of the 1950s, not too much as been written about payola, but it is still very much alive. According to Roger Karshner, former president at Capitol, "Payola is still the industry's little bastard. No one will admit to him but everybody pays child support, and the little devil keeps coming back for more."

The nature of the payoff has changed since the 1950s. Cash is much too obvious; now it's TV sets, junkets, and "gifts" to radio programmers.

One disc jockey, who asked not to be named, described it this way:

> During my years in professional radio in Southern California, I saw money change hands a few times, but more often it was drugs. Cocaine was the favorite, but there was plenty of speed, acid, grass, and even heroin if you wanted it. This was an accepted part of the natural order of things. Southern California is a critical market where air play at just one station, even a fringe station, can make the difference. It's very subtle. Promotion people come around and talk to you while you're on the air. They leave you with a lot of records and a little dope. They don't come back the next week and say, "Hey—I gave you a lid of my choice stuff and you still haven't played that record." It's not that obvious. Yet most jocks can't resist playing a cut or two to curry favor with promo people who they know will be more than appreciative. With so much product around, it's easy to find a few cuts that you actually do like.

Disc jockeys and record companies have long enjoyed one of corporate America's most successful symbiotic relationships.

## Popular Music and Other Media

Though rock and radio enjoy a marriage that seems to have been conceived in heaven, many have wondered if it might be endangered by television. After all, the newer medium was quick to capitalize on the success of existing radio formats when it entered the scene in the late 1940s—why not try again now that pop music has become such a financially successful business?

There have been attempts, some successful, others less so. The long-running *American Bandstand* is a prime example of a TV/music merger that works. The format is simple: Young people dance to the latest hits. Occasionally one of the artists will "drop by" to perform a song. During the mid-1970s, *In Concert, Midnight Special,* and several other concert-type shows appeared. These featured artists performing on stage, just as they would at a live concert. They were on late at night, usually on weekends, and provided something for young people to watch when they got home from their weekend activities.

Rock stars who usually got $30,000–$40,000 per appearance were happy to perform for a few hundred dollars on television because such

wide audience exposure virtually guaranteed greater record sales. Yet these shows did not prove revolutionary. Predictions that they would lead to a greater role for pop music on prime-time television programming proved erroneous. Of course, Sonny and Cher, Donny and Marie, and the Captain and Tennille did enjoy some success on TV, but perhaps they were simply media figures who received initial (and in some cases continuing) exposure through popular music.

There are two reasons pop music will continue to have little influence on TV programming. Most TV sound travels many miles through phone lines, and the quality is third-rate before it even leaves the transmitter. Even if it did arrive undiluted, the quality of the average, five-inch television sound speaker does not match that of the ordinary transistor radio. Cable TV could solve some of this, but cable is still scarce in many areas, and few existing cable companies have experimented with better sound quality in video programming.

More important is the way American commercial television developed over the last 30 years. Recently, programming genius Fred Silverman, the man who brought ABC from number three to number one in the ratings, was asked about the future possibilities of pop music on television. He foresaw little change, despite the enthusiastic audience support for some musical acts. "You people think that because somebody is a hero to eight million people he can have a successful television show? You forget that if only eight million people in this country watch a show, it's a flop. What's more, it takes more than a song and dance to attract a mass television audience week after week." Silverman conceded that there are some pop music figures who are popular enough to bring off an occasional special. Most of these are at the conservative end of the spectrum where they have great support from all segments of the mass audience. Stars like Neil Diamond, Barry Manilow, and even Paul Simon have enjoyed some video success.

The greater future for multimedia distribution of popular music may lie with film. The vast majority of the film-going audience is young. *Saturday Night Fever*, a major film with a soundtrack album, several hit singles, and various promotional spinoffs, was a $90 million multimedia success. There may be room for more *Saturday Night Fever's* in the years ahead.

## The Price of Gold: A Cloudy Horizon

In 1978, the record industry was enjoying its first $4 billion year. Optimism was everywhere. Radio billings and movie theater box-office rev-

8.2. Barry Manilow got started writing commercial jingles for soft drink and fast-food outlets. Eventually he became one of popular music's most salable commodities. His video success was based on the ability to appeal to a diverse audience. Courtesy, Artista Records.

enues *combined* were only about $5 billion. Would 1979 be the year record industry gross revenues would surpass the combined totals of these other two entertainment giants? In 1976, it had been less than either one of them.

*Saturday Night Fever* was at the pinnacle of its success: Some 15 million copies of the album were sold in 1978 alone. Despite a retail price tag of $12.98, a copy was in one of every five homes in America. Sales of 5, 6, or 7 million copies were not uncommon for superstars like The Bee Gees, The Eagles, and Fleetwood Mac. This translated to $30–$50 million in gross retail sales for an album that might cost as little as $150,000 to produce. Not a bad profit margin.

Record company executives pointed out that part of the reason for this phenomenon was that teenagers were no longer the only people buying records. For the first time, people over 30 were responsible for more record sales (40 percent) than teenagers (22 percent) or "young adults" (36 percent). Those who grew up in the 1950s quit buying Little Richard and Fats Domino albums when they got into their twenties. The 1960s youth, a sizable group thanks to the postwar "baby boom," continued buying albums, not only those of '60s heroes like Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, and others, but also contemporary artists like Fleetwood Mac and Peter Frampton.

If anything, they seemed to be more interested than ever in the magic of the music. After all, people willing to spend $1,000 for a top-notch stereo system would certainly not balk at spending $7 to $10 for an LP. Everything was coming up roses.

However, to the dismay of everyone in the industry, 1979 proved to be a comparative disaster. Total industry revenues stalled at the $4 billion mark, and record sales of some companies dipped 20 to 50 percent. There were numerous explanations. There was no *Saturday Night Fever* in 1979. Nothing seemed to have universal appeal. Even the long-awaited Fleetwood Mac double LP *Tusk* was a sales disappointment; reviews were mixed as well.

Rock, soul, and disco music accounted for about two-thirds of all record sales, and all three areas appeared unable to post new gains for the year. Record companies entered the 1980s by cutting back severely on promotional and public relations budgets. Performers yearned for those great tours of the 1970s when the private jets and the huge buffets were commonplace. For the first time in a decade, record companies were feeling an economic pinch.

Also feeling it were new, unsigned groups. Since new groups are such unknown commodities, record giants Columbia and Warner, which account for about half of all rock record sales between them, announced fewer new artists. The record industry, like all industries, was finally found to be mortal.

Given the previous spectacular growth, a period of retrenchment might have been expected, but the industry appeared to be unready for it. Panic was everywhere. Predictions for failure took on doomsday proportions, every bit as extreme as the optimistic predictions that had preceded them. Without a crystal ball, it's hard to predict whether the early trends of the 1980s will continue. Yet it seems safe to say that record industry revenues will continue to top those of television, radio, and film. Popular music continues to be America's biggest and most volatile entertainment industry.

*"It's our boy, Albert, back from the hard-hit music industry, where the tours are cancelled and the record grosses are down. Welcome home, Albert!"*

Drawing by Stevenson; © 1979 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

## Starmaker Machinery: The Artist and the Company

> I resent being just another face in a corporate personality. There isn't even a Warner "Brother" to talk to. The music business and the Grateful Dead are two different orbits, two different universes.
>
> —Jerry Garcia

> The fact of the matter is that popular music is one of the industries of this country. It's all completely tied up with capitalism. It's stupid to separate it.
>
> —Paul Simon

The final, and most fascinating irony, of the business of popular music involves the interrelation of the record company, its corporate

structure, and the creative recording artist.

The medieval troubadour did not need advance men or T-shirts emblazoned with his name. Instead, he simply went from pub to pub singing his songs and dealing directly with the audience. This is obviously not the case today.

Ironically, the image of the troubadour, the singer/artist, is still very much the same in the minds of the mass audience and many performers. Even a brief examination of pop music content reveals countless examples of the wanderer, broken-hearted lover, and alienated artist. Only occasionally is there a song like Joni Mitchell's "Free Man in Paris," which exposes the processes of the modern music business. In that song, we learn about the record executive who longs to be a free spirit but is burdened by all of the artists he must mold into stars.

Artists like Jerry Garcia resent the role these large corporations and record executives play in the process. Obviously, there are conflicting value systems. Artists are concerned with communicating their experiences through music. The corporation refers to that music as "product." Nevertheless, an increasingly large number of recording artists have come to accept the role of the companies as a fact of life in corporate America.

The art that reaches us today does not come from museums or personal experiences, but through the mass media. Most of who we are and what we do results from that experience. To understand America is to examine its media, and the music industry enjoys greater support than any other entertainment medium. For the performer's message to have a significant impact on the mass audience, it must come through mass-communication channels. This means signing with a company, recording a record, and having it played on the radio.

The image of the creative artist as a struggling, noncommercial, free spirit is so deeply ingrained in our culture that neither the audience nor the artists themselves are likely to give it up in the near future. Companies will go on planning marketing strategies, and artists will go on resenting the role that the companies play in their own success.

For better or worse, we live in a twentieth-century, postindustrial society; a society where mediated reality has replaced Real Life in many ways, particularly in the way we receive entertainment. It is sad, but also realistic, to face the fact that successful recording artists today work more from formula than from creative genius, and achieve success more for their ability to generate momentary excitement in millions than to have lasting impact on even a few of us.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Some critics contend that few recording artists are really original, while most are obviously in it "only for the money." Accepting that point of view for a moment, can you formulate a list with three or more entertainers in each category? Explain your choices.

2. Looking over the hit records of today, do you see any new musical trends that could lead to a new surge of record sales? If so, give examples of specific songs and artists and explain.

3. You're a DJ on a rock radio station in a major market. A record company executive has just given you a gift worth several hundred dollars as a gesture of gratitude for playing a new release. You had played the record only because you really liked it. What do you do?
   a. Give the gift back and quit playing the record.
   b. Give the gift back and keep playing the record.
   c. Keep the gift since you would have played the record anyway.
   d. Report this action to the FCC.
   e. Something else. (what?)
   Explain your actions.

4. You're a record company exec who has been assigned to promote a new album by an unknown group. You've been assigned to come up with five new promotional ideas. Describe each one in a paragraph or two and have them ready for an executive meeting tomorrow morning. Remember, they must be original!

## Readings and References

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**R. Serge Denisoff**
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This book combines sociological analysis and interviews with performers and executives. A must for all interested in the area. Highly recommended.

**Geoffrey Stokes**
*Starmaking Machinery*. New York: Vintage, 1977.
An inside look at how records become hits. This excellent resource covers every major phase of the record industry and includes a number of examples of the starmakers in action.

# 9

# Do You Believe in Magic?

## Radio Production

## What's That Sound?

Several years ago, ABC-TV aired a made-for-TV movie about Orson Welles's famous "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast. One scene depicted a woman in charge of sound effects who was having trouble coming up with the sound that was to represent the unlocking and opening of a Martian spaceship. The producer reminded her that it had to sound "as if it hadn't opened in a million light years." She experimented with several alternatives and finally settled on a large pickle jar, opened inside a toilet (for the echo effect). By the time it was piped back to the studio and had gone through the proper equipment, it sounded quite authentic. Upon hearing it for the first time, she exclaimed triumphantly, "Great, the Martians have just landed."

In radio, we have to produce two kinds of sounds: those that are supposed to represent some ordinary sound in Real Life, and those that represent some extraordinary sound we have seldom, if ever, heard before. Coming up with the proper sounds for an invading spaceship may seem like a difficult task, but it is often just as difficult to replicate the ordinary sounds we hear every day. The simple sound of a fire, for example. How does a fire sound? If you put a microphone next to a small fire you'll hear a faint whishing sound; that doesn't sound much like a fire at all. But if you take some cellophane and wrinkle it, you'll hear a noise that sounds very much like a fire. The point is that our mediated ideas of sounds differ from the real sounds. Therefore, whatever we produce must be created especially for the mediated reality. Radio information has very special needs, and the audience perceives it in very special ways.

## Believing Is Seeing

It is said that TV must be seen to be believed, but radio must be believed to be seen. This belief depends on a series of audio illusions, created and controlled by the wizards of audio production. These wizards are not extraordinary; they are people like you and me who've had some training in the area. Basic production skills are comparatively easy to learn and involve only a few hours of training in an audio control room. The perfection of these skills and the ingenuity required to create effective radio productions are honed over a lifetime.

The challenge is to create an alternate mediated reality, a *sound environment* where listeners can join you in an experience. Early DJs did this with their make-believe ballrooms; modern DJs do it more subtly by creating a friendly atmosphere to make the listener "feel at home."

Radio commercials must also create a sound environment. Perhaps there is a storm, and a small boy runs into the house. His mother fixes him a warm cup of chocolate, and he thanks her. Then a mysterious voice comes on and says, "That's Brand X hot cocoa mix; get some today." We hear commercials like this all the time without ever thinking about the effort that went into the making of them.

We see only what's in front of us, but we hear all around us. Marshall McLuhan reminds us that we "have no earlids to shut it out." The power of audio images involves enclosing listeners in an environment that helps create a mental picture of what you want them to experience. The difficulty is that you must do all of this with sound only; no pictures can be used. The beauty is that since listeners create their own pictures, the capacity exists for much greater subjective involvement. The capacity exists; it is up to the producer to make it happen.

If you talk to those old enough to remember radio during the Golden Age, they will probably tell you that the creative use of radio vanished with the advent of television. Actually, the techniques and equipment used in creating today's radio images are far more sophisticated than those of the 1940s. However, the creative functions of radio have moved largely from the programs to the commercials. Most opportunities in modern radio production come in creating brief messages designed to attract and hold attention in order to sell a product or make listeners aware of a service.

## A Head Full of Ideas

Let's say you work as a copywriter at a local station. You are often handed a *production order* with the barest facts about a sponsor. It is up to you to decide the type of spot that will deliver the largest audience and get the greatest response to the sponsor's message. A typical production order lists the name of the client, the type of spot wanted (live or produced), and the length of the spot (usually 10, 30, or 60 seconds). You'll also be told some of the things the client wishes to stress. Perhaps they're having a special sale or have just received a new shipment of merchandise. Many times sponsors won't advertise on the radio unless they have a special event or a sale.

From this information you must first write a script. For many copywriters, this is the most difficult part of the process. Writing radio scripts is unlike any other kind of writing you may have ever done. All your life you have been taught to write for the eye, to structure everything in terms of complete sentences, paragraphs, and so on. In radio, you write for the

ear. And there is only one hard and fast rule: Does it work? If it sounds good and accomplishes its purpose, it's effective. If it doesn't, no amount of correcting spelling and punctuation will fix it.

Scripts are built around a *concept design*, a general idea or "hook," something unusual or unique that will attract the attention of the listener. It is not enough to say, "Macy's is having a sale." There must be a special reason Macy's is having a sale. Perhaps it's "time to fulfill your nighttime fantasies" by buying a new set of sheets. Or maybe, "All your memories are safe forever" by purchasing a certain kind of film. It is not enough to ask people to give to the Red Cross. There must be a special reason to "give now!" Whatever the message it must be designed around a central concept that appeals to the audience.

## Writing the Script

Once you have the central concept design, you write a script to facilitate it. The script is a tool, a way to take the ideas and thoughts that are in your mind and put them down. You have a number of elements at your disposal that will enable you to do this.

*Narration* is, quite simply, the voice of the announcer who is speaking directly to the audience. A live spot consists totally of narration. In a produced spot, the announcer may be male or female, young or old, whatever seems appropriate. In a live spot, the copy is designed to be read by anyone. In both instances, the narration, like all copy, should be concise, clear, and above all, *easy to read*. You must assume all announcers are robots. (Some actually seem to be!) They will do only exactly what you tell them to do, no more, no less. If you do not make it clear you want emphasis on a certain phrase, they won't do it. If you misspell a word or mix up phrases, they will say them exactly as written.

Often an announcer will read a piece of live copy for the first time on the air, without practicing it beforehand. Though this is not good procedure, it happens more often than most announcers care to admit. So make sure it's right before the announcer gets it.

*Multiple voices* are available in the produced spot. You can have two or three people talking together. You can have a room full of people. You can have all the people from every country in the world assembled in an auditorium the size of Texas, if you want to. That's one of the nice things about radio. But before using a multiple-voice approach, make sure it ties in to your concept design and your *target audience*, the people you want to reach with the message. If you are selling a supermarket product, a con-

KLMN RADIO CONTINUITY

CLIENT: DANSK INTERIORS

INSTRUCTIONS: "THE NOT-A-COMMERCIAL"

· LIVE

---

NO ONE -- NOT EVEN ONE OF THE DANSK (DON-SK) INTERIORS EXPERTS -- WOULD LIKE TO BE ACCUSED OF INVENTING THE NON-COMMERCIAL, BUT DANSK INTERIORS HAS JUST CONCLUDED A VERY SUCCESSFUL ONCE-A-YEAR SALE ... AND, WELL, THINGS ARE IN A MESS ... AND THAT'S NOT LIKE THEM. AS UP-TO-DATE SAN DIEGANS KNOW -- AND DANSK IS PROUD TO ADMIT -- DANSK ALWAYS WAS A SHOWCASE FOR THE FINEST MODERN FURNISHINGS AND ACCESSORIES .... BUT AFTER A VERY BUSY SALE WEEKEND ... DANSK NEEDS SOME TIME TO RELAX. AS ANOTHER YEAR BETWEEN SALES BEGINS, THEY'D LIKE TO POINT TO THE FACT THAT TRUE VALUE IS SOMETHING YOU DON'T PUT ON SALE ... AT DANSK INTERIORS, THERE'S PERENNIAL VALUE AS YOU'LL SEE WHEN THE NEW MERCHANDISE IS PUT ON DISPLAY. VISIT DANSK INTERIORS IN EL CAJON'S NEW LA PAZ CENTER ... BUT GIVE THEM A COUPLE OF DAYS TO STRAIGHTEN THINGS UP. THERE, NOW ... THAT WASN'T A COMMERCIAL, WAS IT?

9.1. A typical piece of live radio copy. From *Script Models*, copyright © 1978 by Robert Lee and Robert Misiorowski, by permission of Hastings House, Publishers.

versation between a shopper and checkout clerk might be just the thing. If you are writing a spot for the United Way, a one-voice narration might be more effective.

*Music* is a vital component in most radio productions. After all, music makes up the content of most radio programming, and many listeners will tune out when it stops. So why not keep it going? Music is most often used as a *bed;* that is, it is played under the narration or dialogue. Music must also fit the concept design and the target audience. Too often beginners will call for "soft jazz" underneath a spot. When asked why they chose such music, they say, "because I like it." Jazz might be great on

your home turntable, but it could be wrong for a certain production.

If your ad attempts to reach young people, play the kind of musical bed you think they want to hear. A soft, easy listening tune might be just right to reach men 35–50. Instrumental music is most often used in radio production because you don't want the vocal track of a song competing with your dialogue or narration. DJs are always instructed "never to step on a vocal," that is never talk over a record's vocal track. The sound of narration and a vocal track coming at us simultaneously is usually too much for our ears to handle.

*Sound effects* (SFX) are another tool of the scriptwriter. When used well, they can be tremendously effective. Remember, you must *create* every sound in the script. Nothing can simply be left to the imagination; rather, everything must prompt the imagination. Let's go back to our hot chocolate spot. A little boy comes out of the rain and into his house. How do we know it's raining? We must have rain and perhaps storm SFX. How do we know when he's entered the house? We'll need the sound of the door opening and closing, the rain farther away, the mother saying, "Johnny, you're soaking wet."

Stop wherever you are right now. Put the book down for a moment and just listen. There is rarely absolute silence. Instead, you'll hear the sounds of people nearby, your own breathing, the slow buzz of neon lights. Sound surrounds us all the time, and sound effects are necessary to create the desired sound environment. Remember, we can *only know what we hear,* and we can *only hear what we know.* Give your audience all the help you can.

Once assembled, all the necessary elements can come together in the final script. With live copy, narration is generally written in ALL CAPS; with produced copy, everything is ALL CAPS *except the dialogue.* In both instances, this is done to make the copy stand out from all other elements in the script and to make things as easy as possible for the announcers.

## A Maze of Lights and Wires

Let's say you have completed the script and received approval from the client. It's time to go to work producing the actual spot. Your first trip to the production studio will probably be a frightening experience. To the uninitiated, it looks like a confusing maze of lights, dials, wires, meters, and electronic apparatus. It can be foreboding, but it can also be fun. Just remember that the studio exists for you; like the script, it is a tool to help you create what you want. .

9.2. A standard production studio. The turntables are at the far left and far right. The mixing board is on the left, with the microphone just above it. Just to the right is the cart machine. Above the far right turntable is the bottom half of a studio reel-to-reel tape recorder and a VU meter. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

Just as you took various elements and put them together to make up your script, you will fuse various studio elements together to make up your finished product. Narration, whether your voice or someone else's, will probably be recorded on a reel-to-reel tape recorder and put in at the time you wish. Sound effects can be found on special record collection sets. Music, of course, is available on records. Multiple voices can be recorded separately or all at the same time. Beginning production students often try to mix all elements and act as performers at the same time. This is a virtually impossible task. Get all your elements together first, then begin the mixing process.

Your script tells you when you want narration, when sound effects should be inserted, when the music should come up and when it should be faded under. All that's necessary is for you to learn enough about the studio components so you can get the job done. Most studios have five or six basic components.

*The microphone* is the most fundamental and often the most frightening piece of equipment for the beginner. There are three basic types of studio mikes: *dynamic*, *condenser*, and *velocity*. Of the three basic types, dynamic mikes are the most versatile and rugged; they are also most often used

9.3. Another production room setup. The turntable is flanked on the left by a studio cassette machine and on the right by a cart rack. Above it is a battery of various cart machines. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

outdoors. They are better at picking up high tones than low ones, and they tend to make the speaker's voice sound a bit higher pitched than it really is. The condenser is really another kind of dynamic mike because it uses the same basic process to carry sound. Probably the highest-quality mike of the three, it is usually used for expensive studio work, especially that involving music.

Remember the first time you heard your voice on tape? You probably said, "That doesn't sound like me at all." There are several reasons for that. First, you were hearing your voice as others hear you, not as you hear yourself. In addition, the mike and taping process probably made your voice sound higher than it is. The *velocity* mike is the performer's friend because it tends to bring out the bass quality in most voices. The closer you are to it, the deeper and richer your voice will sound. It also helps with the problems most performers have pronouncing P's and S's. (These two letters tend to sound exaggerated. P's deliver a popping noise, and S's seem to have unnecessary hisses.) The only drawback is that the velocity mike is quite sensitive, and a sudden loud noise may be damaging to it.

Mike performance has been the subject of many whole books. In this short space, I can give only a simple axiom: The more experience you have before a microphone, the better you will sound. Don't be alarmed if

your first few attempts sound disastrous. You are bound to sound nervous and anxiety-stricken, not at all like you think you should sound. This will pass in time. You must experiment with different mike levels; you must try different distances until you find just the right *mike posture* that suits your voice. Above all, relax. The beauty of radio production is that you can do it again and again until you have the sound you want—so why be nervous?

*The reel-to-reel tape recorder* is the workhorse of the recording studio. Because it has the widest range of controls and uses the widest tape of all audio recording devices, the reel-to-reel produces the best quality sound.

The basic components of the studio reel-to-reel are much like the home model. There is the supply reel on the left and the take-up reel on the right. Tape passes through the heads and on to the take-up reel. There are three heads: one that erases the tape, a second that records or imprints sound on the tape, and a third that plays sound back. Normally the record and erase heads work together, separate from the playback head. Tape is ¼-inch thick and runs at various speeds. The most commonly found studio speeds are 7½ and 15 inches per second (ips); home recorders are generally 3-¾ or even 1-⅞ ips. The faster a tape runs, the higher the quality of the sound. Most studio reel-to-reels are two- or four-track types. This means that two or more separate impressions are left on the tape at once, thus making stereo or quadraphonic sound possible.

*Cartridge* or *cart recorders* are also found in most studios. These machines work on the same principle as the eight-track cartridges in your home or car tapedeck. These are industrial models, of course, built to take lots of punishment. In addition, the tape speed tends to be double that of the home units. Carts are basic components in most radio automation equipment since they need no hand threading or cueing.

Unlike most home units, studio cart machines can record as well as play back. When you start to record something, the machine automatically leaves an extra imprint on the tape. When the tape comes all the way back to where it started, it will stop automatically. Carts come in various sizes, but 70 seconds is the most common. This size is designed to accommodate the 60-second commercial. To the busy DJ in the booth, the cart is invaluable. When a spot needs to be aired, the DJ simply inserts it in a machine and pushes a button. When the announcement is over, the cart will automatically stop, with the spot ready to be aired again.

Carts can also contain several rotating messages. For example, a station may have three 10-second IDs on a 40-second cart. The DJ pushes the button, and ID number one plays. The cart stops automatically. Half an hour later, the same cart is pushed for ID number two, and so on. Many

9.4. A KSFO engineer checks the various cartridges needed for the day's programming. Most stations keep hundreds of carts on hand for various commercials and promotional announcements, station IDs, and music. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

stations also record all their music on cart. Unlike records, carts never scratch or skip, and they will not wear out under normal use. Carts are particularly useful for stations with limited play lists.

*Cassette recorders* were originally designed for home use. The slow speed (1-⅞ ips) and narrow tape width (⅛ inch) made them impractical for studio use. But in recent years, cassette quality has improved drastically, and innovations such as the Dolby noise-reduction system have solved many earlier problems. Basically, cassettes are smaller versions of the reel-to-reel tape, but the tapes are enclosed in a plastic case. But, like carts, they do not need to be hand threaded, so there is less that can go wrong. Most modern production studios now contain one or more cassette recorders. Music intended for production is rarely on cassette, but cassettes are excellent for voice tracks, sound effects, or other elements.

*The turntable* in the studio looks much like the one you have at home. It's a little more solid perhaps, and still has a slot for the old 78 rpm speed as well as 45 and 33. Professional turntables allow for *cueing* a record: With the turntable power switch off, the operator puts the needle down near the beginning of the desired track. The whole turntable can then be rotated forward or back so that you can hear exactly where the track begins.

At that point, you need to turn the entire table back about one-quarter turn to prevent "wowing" when you turn on the power switch. Even the most up-to-date turntables need a bit of time to get up to speed.

## The Board: Putting It All Together

So far, we've discussed various *input* devices that allow us to bring in the elements we want in our production. These inputs all come to a *console*, or *control board* or *mixing board*. The board is usually the most expensive and complicated piece of equipment in the studio. It is designed to allow us to bring in many different elements and *mix* them together while controlling volume. Thus [from one control panel,] music can be made louder or softer; a voice track on reel-to-reel can be made clearer or indistinguishable, or eliminated.

The job of the board is to take all input elements, mix them at the proper levels, and send them to the *output* source. Most often, the output, or final destination of the elements, is another reel-to-reel tape recorder; this is why there are two or three of them in many studios. Nevertheless, most studios are equipped so that any of the input sources can also become outputs through the flick of a switch. Thus we can take something from a record and put it on cart, or take a reel-to-reel voice track and put it on cassette. The board makes all this possible.

There are several types of boards, the most common being those made by Sparta, Gates, and RCA. All boards contain *pots*, which are either round knobs or sliding switches. The pots are used to control the level of input or output. Sources of input or output are switched on or off by levers located just above the pot. For some reason, engineers are fond of hooking up various sources to various pots and then not labeling them, or putting the labels into some undecipherable diagram and then hiding the diagram. If you are working in a studio with unmarked pots, you'll just have to get used to which pots control the level of the turntable, cart machine, reel-to-reel recorder, and so on.

Elsewhere on the board is a *master gain control*, which boosts the sound of everything going through, and a *monitor gain*, which allows you to turn up the volume of the speaker without affecting the levels, or actual volume of the sound being recorded.

Somewhere near the top center of the board will be found the *volume unit* (VU) meter. This handy device actually gives you a visual picture of the sound that is passing through the board. The numbers indicate the percentage of total modulation, or energy, in the signal. Normally, a VU

9.5. Sure, it looks like something out of *Star Wars* now, but with some practice, the *mixing board* can become a good friend. Note the numbered "pots," each of which is responsible for an input source. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

meter will have a "red zone" that begins at the 100 percent modulation level. This is because sound going through at over 100 percent modulation will be distorted and take on a fuzzy quality. The rule of thumb on the VU meter is to get as close as possible to the red without actually going into it; your levels should normally ride at the 85–100 percent modulation range.

Sound is a fluid phenomenon, and levels change abruptly. Music may be soft, then loud. A person may move closer or further away from the mike, thus changing the level abruptly. Normally, most input sources should also have VU meters. It's vital that the 85–100 percent rule be followed at each step. So when you are transferring something from cart to reel-to-reel, you would normally check the VU meter at the cart (input) source, the board, and reel-to-reel (output) source. All three should be as closely matched as possible.

All of this may sound complicated on paper, and it can be confusing the first few times in the studio. Typical problems involve not knowing which pots control which sources, or difficulty in locating extra on and off switches and dials the engineers hide all over the board to prevent you from accomplishing your job. Further complications arise when equipment malfunctions, which seems to happen constantly in classroom


9.6. Larger stations may have a separate recording studio like this one. The engineer controls levels and input sources from another area, called a *control room*. Such studios are especially useful for recording panel discussions or other types of programs where "clean" sound levels are a must. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

studios where equipment is being handled by inexperienced people. Again, the watchwords are patience and experience. In time, you will learn how your studio works.

## Bits and Pieces: Editing

Because the typical production involves combining multiple inputs in a short period of time, it is often impossible to finish the project in one take. If you simply have a voice track and want to put a bed of soft music under it, you may be able to do it. But when you have to push a cart machine, insert a cassette, bring the music up and down several times, and so on, you'll find it's easier to do one part at a time. It's not unusual for a 30-second spot to have ten or more individual sections, separated by long gaps of useless tape. Putting these pieces together and creating the tightest possible final product requires *editing*.

You have probably seen a strip of film used for movie projection. Moving pictures don't move, of course; they are really a series of stills.

Each still is clearly separated from the next, and you can edit movies simply by cutting the film at the point where one still meets another. Audio tape operates in approximately the same way. Using special *edit modes* on most studio reel-to-reel recorders, you can wind the tape through by hand and actually hear when a sound begins and ends. You can mark the spots with a special pencil. The entire tape is then removed to the *editing block*, a small steel enclosure designed to hold the tape in place. Since sound is always contained on the dull side, you'll need to turn the tape over to the shiny side and cut it exactly where you marked it. You wind up with a piece of tape containing only what you want. The task then is to put the individual pieces together to form the final product. This is done with *splicing* tape.

One word of caution. As you learn editing, you will have nightmares where you wake up in a cold sweat, having dreamt of thousands of bits of tape all jumbled together in a hopelessly unidentifiable mass. One piece of tape (unlike one piece of film) looks precisely like another. It is easy to get tapes turned around so that parts of your production end up running backward. This can be entertaining, but it is also disturbing. The safest thing to do is edit only one piece at a time and then reattach it to the master, and so on, until the job is complete. This method is time consuming—but safe.

## Final Tips

The final version of your tape will be subject to less interference if you begin with a completely erased master tape. This means using a *bulk eraser* found in the studio. You simply switch it on, run the tape over it several times, remove the tape, then switch it off. Be careful not to have the tape too near the bulk eraser when the switch is thrown or you'll end up with a disturbing click.

Since bulk erasers are demagnetizers, they demagnetize indiscriminately. Be sure any portion of the tape you want saved is in another part of the room. Your watch can also be damaged; it should be removed when you are working near a demagnetizer.

Before you begin the production process, make sure that you have a solid script and a well-thought-through concept design. No amount of studio wizardry can save a spot that is only partially conceived. Know exactly what you are going to do before you walk into the studio.

*Final timing* is absolutely critical for most production assignments. A 30-second spot should be exactly 30 seconds, not 32 or 28. If the client gets

only 28 seconds and is paying for 30, fireworks ensue. If your spot uses up extra time that could be sold to someone else, that too is forbidden. The same holds true for the five-minute documentary or the three-minute newscast. Use a stopwatch if possible.

One last point: You cannot learn how to do production from reading a book. Those of you who've had the opportunity of putting together a tape project know it's like driving a car or making love. You have to learn by doing, not from reading about it.

Those who have not had the opportunity to get some "hands-on" radio experience might consider giving radio production a try. It is unlike any other experience you will have. There is the endless frustration of doing the same task over and over again, constant problems with the equipment, always new things to learn. But most of all, there is the pure joy of hearing the finished product—that short, compact piece of audio information that has taken so many long hours to produce. It is like no term paper, reading, or writing assignment you have ever had. Radio has its own sense of accomplishment.

Radio production experience will also give you an entirely new perspective on the hours of audio information you consume each day. Never again will you be able to hear a promo or commercial without thinking about the time and effort that have gone into it. In that sense, production experience will make you a far more knowledgeable and intelligent consumer of radio information; perhaps it will heighten your enjoyment of it as well.

## Queries and Concepts

1. Listen to a produced 30-second radio commercial, on tape if possible, so you can hear it a number of times. Identify the concept design and all of the production elements and whether they may have come from live recordings, sound effects records, or other sources.

2. You are employed in production at a local radio station. An account executive has just landed a big account with a local department store that wants to promote a new line of wristwatches and calculators. Your assignment is to come up with three different concept designs for the client. Each spot must promote both wristwatches and calculators. This has to be ready for client approval by tomorrow.

3. If you are not currently in a production class, arrange to take a tour of the closest audio production facility. Identify each of the major pieces of equipment mentioned in this chapter.

4. It has been argued that radio is superior to television in that listeners use their own imaginations to create visual pictures. With this in mind, and given what you now know about radio production, describe five scenes you could create on a fairly limited radio budget that would be economically impossible on TV.

## Readings and References

**Stanley R. Alten**
*Audio in America.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981.
This text covers audio nontechnically and is based on American practices. It provides a broad theoretical and practical foundation for audio production and imparts appreciation for the sound designer's unique potential to create with uses of sound.

**Robert L. Hilliard, ed.**
*Radio Broadcasting* (rev. ed.). New York: Hastings House, 1976.
One of the most widely used texts in the radio field, this book concentrates on production practices. There are chapters covering studio operating facilities, writing, producing and directing, and performing. Though it contains some valuable information, the book is dated and there is little emphasis on the most recent programming and production practices.

**Robert S. Oringel**
*Audio Control Handbook* (4th ed.). New York: Hastings House, 1972.
This text is generally too technical for the beginner, though it might prove useful for the more advanced student who has decided to make a career in radio production. Many examples are tied to certain types of equipment.

**Ronald J. Seidle**
*Air Time.* Boston: Holbrook Press, 1977.
This readable text is well illustrated and suitable for the beginning student. The text covers both radio and TV, although radio gets less space. Chapter 2 covers the radio studio and its components.

# 10

# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly:

# Understanding and Evaluating Radio Content

## The Experienced Consumer: You

Are you an average radio listener? If so, you've spent at least 20,000 hours listening in your lifetime. That works out to over two years of continuous sound. It also means you've probably heard about a quarter-million radio commercials. By now, you know which formats you like and which you dislike; you've decided which commercials are clever and which are not. You have one or more favorite disc jockeys. In short, you are an experienced, well-traveled consumer of radio information. And now the time has come to put that experience to work for you. When discussing radio with your friends, you are likely to use subjective responses: "Oh yeah, I've heard that song, it's bad" (which could mean either good or bad). Perhaps you might say that a particular station "used to play good music, but it's gone down the drain." You are expressing your preferences but making no effort to come to grips with the reasons for them.

Each time we experience radio, we store up information to be used the next time we listen. It may be stored at the subconscious level, but it's there just the same. The secret of evaluating radio (or any medium) is to tap into that store of information and use it to help you understand the process of communicating information.

You have the instinctive capability of knowing whether a radio commercial sounds right. If you are involved with audio production and have made a commercial of your own, you have realized that it does not sound as good as those you hear on the radio. There are many reasons for this. Radio programming—music, news, information, and especially commercials—is not haphazardly arranged; every minute detail has been worked out. Millions of hours of research have been compiled; billions of bits of information have been fed into computers; listening habits have been analyzed and reanalyzed. Nothing has been left to chance.

## The Elusive Audience

Every major radio format has been calculated for one purpose and one purpose only: to attract and hold the largest possible audience within the desired demographic boundaries. Every commercial is designed for one purpose and one purpose only: to attract and hold the largest number of people and to persuade them to buy the product or use the service of the sponsor.

We can debate endlessly about the aesthetic merits of radio content (and perhaps we should do it more often). One listener may like a particu-

lar kind of format; another may hate it. One listener may find a particular kind of commercial entertaining; another may tune out. One thing we all can agree on is that radio information is designed to reach and hold the audience, and its success or failure depends on its ability to do that effectively. This is known as the *audience perspective.*

As radio developed during the 1920s, broadcasters found that they could not simply read news from newspapers. Radio copy had to be rewritten for the ear. The same held true for ads that mentioned long price lists. Because radio was a nonlinear medium, a different form of communication, content also had to be different. As a result, strategies were developed to facilitate listener involvement. These strategies were the origins of modern radio programming.

For example, the emergence of Top-40 programming in the 1950s was very upsetting to established music stations. For decades, they had thrived by having well-mannered, slow-paced DJs deliver well-mannered, slow-paced music. Top-40 changed all that by packing more information, music, and other elements into an hour of programming than had ever been attempted before. Top-40 was fast and frantic, and the audience of young people who listened were ready for it. The habits and capabilities of the radio audience had changed significantly since the 1920s.

But format programmers are light years behind advertisers in finding out how to reach and hold "the elusive audience." The advertisers' job is far more difficult for not only must they reach and hold the audience, they must convince them to buy a product or use a service. There is always built-in sales resistance.

The planning of any radio production, and the understanding of the impact of radio information, relies on your knowledge of the target audience and how audio information is designed to reach, hold, and motivate that audience.

## And Now, This Brief Time Out

Turn on the radio and listen to the first commercial you hear. Perhaps it is simply a live spot for a local pizza parlor, or maybe a national spot for a well-known cold remedy. Of the quarter-million or so ads you've heard, how many can you remember? 10, 50, 100? Most of them have come and gone without making a lasting impression, at least at the conscious level. This doesn't mean they have not had an effect. We know that subliminal information can and does influence consumer decisions. But

most advertisers want conscious and immediate results, and they are spending hard-earned money to get them. They get those results by designing their messages in very specific ways.

Of course, there is no such thing as a guarantee in advertising; too much depends on the listener. A poorly worded ad touting a tire sale will probably convince a listener sitting in the car after a blowout. On the other hand, no amount of lush orchestration and planning will convince you to go out and buy a cold remedy if you don't have a cold.

Other variables also play a part in buying decisions. There are many products we don't need. Many are approximately the same as others—only advertising makes the singular difference. The diversity of radio ads can often account for the success or failure of an advertising campaign or product.

An effective ad is one that stimulates listener involvement immediately and *sells the product*. This is why so many ads begin with leading questions or startling statements. "How's your sex life?" or "Are you ready for trouble?" are typical leads. These are designed to lead the listener into the spot. Once the listener is involved, the concept design takes over. "If you want a better sex life, use our mouthwash." "Be ready for trouble with our steel-belted radials."

## Scenarios and Images

*Scenario* radio ads use a story line sequence borrowed from literature. This involves five separate steps:

1. Introducing a central, likable character or characters
2. Placing those characters in a recognizable environment
3. Introducing conflict
4. Resolving the conflict, preferably through use of the product or service
5. A denouement or final hook

Scenario commercials attempt to tell a complete story in 30 or 60 seconds. For example, a small group of friends (1) are at a Fotomat store (2). They are debating about which of a number of available video movies

*"Do you need money? If it's ready cash you want—no delay, no red tape—then come at once to . . .*

*. . . the Happy Days Loan Company. Write down the address . . ."*


Drawing by Cobean; © 1947, 1975 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

they can rent (3). One man wants *True Grit*, another wants *M•A•S•H*, and so on. They decide to take a vote. The announcer reminds us that it is now so inexpensive to rent video movies that we can afford as many as we want (4). In the final few seconds, the central character says, "Hey, how come there are only 4 people here but there are 14 votes for *True Grit*?" (5).

Each step facilitates the next through a logical progression. Each reinforces the product and facilitates listener involvement. Scenario spots can be particularly effective when advertisers have 60 seconds to tell their story.

The trend toward more 30-second ads in television has put pressure on advertising agencies and other producers to come up with shorter radio spots. As with TV, this has forced them to abandon the scenario idea in favor of the *image* approach. The image spot is decidedly nonlinear. Rather than tell a story, it simply creates an image or picture in the listener's mind that is associated with the product. Beautiful music is heard, the sensual voice of a beautiful woman mentions that she always wears a certain type of perfume because it makes her feel "soooo gooood." The announcer voice-over says, "That's perfume X, available at fine shops everywhere." The music fades out.

Both image and scenario spots have a definite beginning. It is often abrupt or startling, in order to catch attention. The ending usually involves a slow fade-out. All of these techniques provide audio *cues* to the listener that say, "Our message is beginning now," or "Our message is ending now." Ending cues also invite listeners to think back over what they have just heard.

These same techniques are used for produced public service announcements (PSAs). Large charities, such as the United Way and the Girl Scouts, employ advertising agencies who create sophisticated appeals. Since most commercial radio stations are under some pressure to reserve air time for PSAs, they are usually inundated with requests for free air time. Having well-produced and easy-to-listen-to PSAs gives an organization a head start.

With both commercials and PSAs several fundamental criteria may be used to evaluate message effectiveness:

1. Does the message encourage immediate listener involvement, usually within the first few seconds?

2. Does the concept design speak directly to the target audience?

3. Do the production elements employ diversity and foster listener entertainment and/or involvement?

4. Does the ad encourage listeners to use their imagination to fill in the missing picture in a way that will reflect favorably on the product or service?

5. Does the ad have a logical ending that encourages the listeners to think about what they have just heard?

The commercial or PSA that accomplishes these aims is far more likely to sell the product or service. As an experienced listener, you know when an ad sounds good. By using these criteria, you can begin to define some of the reasons why.

## Music Formats

An old radio axiom is, "It isn't the music you play, but what you put between the music." Since listeners in survey after survey claim music is what they listen for, this would seem to be contradictory. Yet individual music formats, like advertised products, have much in common. One MOR station plays much the same music as another. Even the most devoted beautiful music listeners cannot identify their station until they hear a station ID or the voice of a familiar DJ.

The trick is to deliver a total package of entertainment. Music formats vary, but most include somewhere between 5 and 20 minutes of non-music programming each hour. It is this portion of the programming that spells success or failure, particularly in a crowded market. Two Top-40 stations in a market may each play the same 12 to 15 hits per hour, yet one station will have five times the audience.

The most common debate in music format programming involves the degree of *DJ personality* that is appropriate. Some beautiful music stations will not let air personnel identify themselves by name; DJs simply give the time and temperature, and then "back to the music." Top-40 formats differ, but usually DJs with the strongest personalities can be found in the crucial drive-time slots. MOR formats stress personality, usually to the exclusion of the music; they assume that listeners tune in to hear a particular DJ.

There is no pat answer to the personality question. Each case must be examined in the context of the conscious and unconscious needs of the target audience. The afternoon personality doing an MOR format may appeal largely to older listeners. Yet these same listeners may tune in to a

10.1. Tommy Saunders, like most MOR DJs, appeals to the audience that tunes in for more than just the music. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

beautiful music format during the evening or early morning hours: Their needs at that time of day are quite different.

Another key criterion for evaluating music formats is *program flow*. Each element must be programmed with a recognition of what came before and what will follow. For example, beautiful music programmers have discovered through trial and error that commercials are best "sandwiched" between announcer segments, rather than musical segments. A typical break might include: the end of the song, an announcement of the titles just heard, two commercials played one after the other, an announcement of time and temperature, and then music again. Listeners prefer not to hear music and commercials next to one another.

Some Top-40 programmers do just the opposite, jamming high-paced, frantic commercials next to high-paced, frantic music. Top-40, like all radio, is a matter of *pacing*. The speed at which the music and commercials are delivered varies from station to station and market to market. Some Top-40 DJs literally scream at their audiences, whereas others prefer a more laid-back approach. The screaming started in the 1950s when Top-40 DJs were forced to deliver their rap *while* music played—this came in an effort to "tighten up" the format and play "much more music" than a rival station. DJs found they had to speak up to be heard, and the

audience liked it that way. The audience gratifications involved in Top-40 demand a tighter, crisper, louder, and more frantic approach.

It is extremely difficult to lay down a universal set of guidelines for a music format; the debate about which approach is best is ongoing. Yet despite the millions of dollars at stake, radio programmers have shied away from more empirical research about their audience, preferring to be guided by their instincts. The radio music format audience is indeed elusive; many success stories are classic instances of hit-and-miss programming.

Shortly after Hugh Hefner started *Playboy* magazine in the 1950s, he said, "I've always edited on the assumption that my tastes are pretty much like those of our readers." He was right. So *Playboy* became the largest-selling men's magazine in America. A lot of radio programming is done in much the same manner. Program directors are hired with the hopes that their tastes will more or less reflect the audience. If they do, ratings rise and the station prospers. If they don't, ratings fall and someone else is brought in.

## The News Appeal

Evaluating foreground radio programming, such as news, talk, and drama, is somewhat easier than evaluating musical formats. Since the audience is listening more intently, the listeners are more likely to know what they want. Consequently, foreground programmers are able to survey listener tastes and responses and program accordingly. News and talk format programmers pay careful attention to letters and phone calls they receive, as these often accurately reflect listener desires.

With the music format, news is generally limited to five minutes or less each hour and is tailored to the type of mood the station wishes to create. A local AOR station playing easy listening rock may start its news segment with an amusing anecdote. The beautiful music station generally offers news in one- or two-minute segments, delivered smoothly and efficiently by the same familiar voice that announces the music. In general, news is regarded as a tune-out, and the more quickly and efficiently it can be dispensed with, the better.

To the news or news/talk stations, however, news is bread and butter. Most attempt to deliver news with an image of authenticity and credibility. This does not mean that their news is actually more authentic or credible than a competitor's. Announcers are chosen more for how they

# PROFILE

**KCBS . . . ALL NEWS, ALL DAY**

**OWNERSHIP:** CBS Inc.

**FACILITIES:** 50,000 watts; 740 KC – 24 hours daily

**COVERAGE:** All 33 counties in total Arbitron survey area in Northern California.

**PROGRAMMING:**

ALL NEWS

KCBS was the first all-news station in the Bay Area . . . on the air continuously, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with complete news coverage . . . from the CBS network, from 7 wire services, and from a local news staff of over 40 people.

SPECIALIZED NEWS

*Business* - Award-winning Business Editor Ray Hutchinson reports directly and exclusively from the floor of the Pacific Stock Exchange.

*Traffic* - Pilot-reporter Ted Thomas circles the Bay Area in his fixed-wing plane during morning and evening commute hours, as part of a comprehensive Traffic Alert System.

*Sports* - Sports Director Don Klein heads a department which programs more than 200 sports reports and features per week.

FEATURES

*Locally Produced* - In Depth, California Driver, The Dirt Gardener, Wine Guide, Steve Baffrey's Critic's Choice, Joe Carcione and many more.

*From the CBS Network* - Face the Nation, Charles Osgood's Newsbreak, Our Man on Medicine, Woman, and more.

**PROMOTION:** In a drive that embraces newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, billboard, transit, taxi posters and wallscapes, KCBS mounts a vast promotion campaign yearly valued at a quarter of a million dollars.

10.2. This programming profile, distributed to potential advertisers, lists the main components of KCBS's all-news format. Courtesy, KCBS NewsRadio, San Francisco.

sound than what they know. An announcer may have 20 years of newspaper reporting experience, but if he stumbles on the air, the audience will perceive him as less credible. It is the form, delivery, pace, and style,

not the content, that generally determine perceived authenticity and credibility.

The content of the news does play a part, however. In recent years, there has been a trend away from hard news and toward soft or "friendly" news on both radio and television. The idea of one person dispassionately reporting the news was borrowed from newspaper journalism. Broadcast news formats now realize that news is, in part, entertainment for the target audience. So the selection of news stories is partly determined by what will entertain as well as inform the listener. Since radio works best at the emotional rather than the intellectual level, stories with strong emotional appeal are often featured.

The story of a woman found with amnesia is aired instead of a tedious economic analysis. A boy who found the lost dog missing for three years might be given preference over a story involving a politician. This is not to say that hard news is never aired; it still makes up a large part of the news diet. But the trend is clearly toward coverage of the emotional, sensational, and more titillating news events. Ratings and other response surveys indicate this is what listeners want to hear.

Friendly team reporters share the news, more than report it. Reporters are part of a "family," that is out there all the time to let the listener know what is happening now. All-news radio stations now feature reports from helicopters for traffic, and live mobile-unit reports from city hall. Radio thrives on elections because they offer a chance to really put these instant information systems to work. We could say that the printed press reported history: "That's the way it was." Walter Cronkite updated this considerably with his "That's the way it is." Friendly team news reporters are actually saying "Here's the way we are."

The importance of the sound of announcers and reporters cannot be overlooked. Since we want to share the news with them, they have to involve us directly in some way. They do this through an informal, subjective approach to reporting, and the use of phrases like "We go now to our remote unit." "We" means more than the station or the employees; ideally, "we" means all of us—announcer, reporter, and audience.

The success of radio play-by-play sports gives us some clues as to what makes up successful radio information reporting. Sportscasters are not really observers, but participants. They become excited when the action is heavy. They act as emotional catalysts to help bring out our feelings. Newscasters are only now discovering they have a similar function for listeners who want to participate in the day's events. The successful newscast is one that facilitates this involvement through the use of informal and emotionally based techniques.

## 196 Drama and Docs

During the early years of radio, the drama and documentary forms were very popular. The dramatic program has all but disappeared, leaving instead the dramatic commercial. Meanwhile, the 15- and 30-minute documentary, designed to explore some news event in depth, has given way to the all-news "magazine," where reporters casually discuss events with one or more experts.

The only remaining documentary form is the "mini-doc," a 90- or 120-second interview punctuated with commercials. *Earth News Radio* and *Star Tracks* were two popular radio mini-docs that emerged during the 1970s. The former featured one particular topic, often an interview with an interesting person or coverage of an unusual event. *Star Tracks* was a *People* magazine–type informational potpourri revolving around the music and entertainment worlds.

Both of these were successful because they packed a lot of information into a small amount of time. Listeners are more apt to stay tuned through a 90-second mini-doc than a 5-minute newscast, especially when documentary content is carefully chosen to reflect target audience interests. News is a more or less random series of events that may or may not involve listeners. Many local stations air public service and other information in mini-doc form. Titles like "60 Seconds" or "The Odyssey File" are commonplace. This approach means less tune-out.

Old-time radio buffs have been predicting a renaissance in radio drama for some time. During the late 1960s, a group called the Firesign Theatre released a series of comedy albums loosely based on old radio drama forms. During the 1970s, two syndicated radio shows, the *CBS Mystery Theatre* and a similar show sponsored by Sears, Roebuck appeared and found small but devoted audiences.

Today's listeners want fast, concise information tailored to their needs, whereas drama offers comparatively slow and tedious linear information. It does contain one key ingredient, however: emotion. In general, the more emotionally stimulating the stories are, the more the audience likes them.

The problem comes in reeducating an entirely new audience to the conventions and expectations of radio drama. Listeners simply aren't used to having to follow a complicated cast of characters through a difficult plot. The *CBS Mystery Theatre* often uses relatively simple plots, based largely on the occult. The shock value of some events in these plots seems to appeal successfully to certain listeners. The emotional content is universally identifiable.

## "We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties"

A number of technical problems can also inhibit message delivery. These problems involve engineering and production techniques. Many can be avoided by following simple radio conventions, developed through years of trial and error.

*Mike presence* is vital at all times. This means finding the right distance, the right type of mike, and the right voice techniques for the particular assignment. Each voice must be as strong, rich, and effective as the situation demands. Most successful announcers project their voices effectively. Proper resonance is also a key. Many voices sound higher pitched on the air than they do off the air.

*Crisp message delivery* is vital, whether as a DJ or a newscaster, or while delivering a line from a radio drama. The audience must be able to hear every word; no indistinguishable words or sounds (unless they are called for in the script) can be tolerated. Proper pronounciation of key words and phrases is a must. When you are on the air, there seem to be thousands of people waiting out there to catch you in a mistake. One mispronounciation always brings a legion of phone calls. Such an error is partly the responsibility of the script or copywriter. Phonetic spellings of each word or phrase that might cause trouble should be provided.

Remember that radio information involves a filtering process. It passes through microphones, wires, transmitters, receivers, and speakers before it reaches the listener. Even then, the listener is likely to perceive it as background, not foreground, information. To successfully reach its target, the information must stand out and demand attention.

*Emphasis* on the proper words is also a must. Sentences and meanings can be changed entirely through emphasis. Consider the following:

1. Can we *go home* now?
2. Can we go home *now*?
3. Can *we* go home now?
4. *Can* we go home now?

Each sentence has quite a different meaning, depending on the various emphases. There is a request, a demand, a plea, and a warning.

Radio information must be conversational and easy to listen to. Successful radio allows the listener to share or participate in what is going on. Warmth and sincerity are called for much more than anxiety and hostility. Successful radio communicators learn to speak as if they are talking to one person or a few, not a huge mass of faceless listeners.

*Repetition of key linear phrases* is a must. This includes phone numbers, addresses or other locations, prices—any information that is deemed vital for the listener to remember. *Information overload,* caused by too much linear information in too short a space, is a constant problem.

*Pace* must match form and content. Information delivered too quickly is lost forever; information delivered too slowly is cause for tune-out. Remember the target audience—what are their needs? Some pauses are natural, but unnatural pauses, ones that seem to be in the wrong place or make no sense, are a cause for distress. Make sure that each pause serves a purpose.

*All audio space must be filled up.* Silence may be golden for some, but silence is deadly in radio. DJs who leave the booth and come back to find the record has run out and the audience has tuned out cannot recoup by suddenly announcing, "You've just been listening to a new single by Marcel Marceau!" Noticeable silence will confuse, distract, and alienate the listener.

*Elements must flow logically.* From music to narration to music to SFX, the order of the elements must make sense to the target audience. Elements usually flow together in such a way that one never stops before the next begins. Elements must not fight one another, but must be complementary. Music should never be so loud it covers up the announcer. Sound effects shouldn't shut out a part of the narration.

*Studio problems* can be heard on many finished productions, especially those made locally. Poor editing may leave clicks or static effects on the tape. Level problems at the input, output, or board can cause a muddying effect. Levels must be checked constantly at every state of operation.

Of course, each audio task has different demands and offers different problems. But the basic criteria in this chapter should give you a solid starting point for evaluating radio information. The time has now come for you to turn on your radios and apply your knowledge. Take a fresh listen to the way radio communication works. It is indeed the magic medium.

## Queries and Concepts

1. You've been assigned the job of coming up with a scenario for the following products:
   Contac cold capsules
   Wrigley's gum
   Bank of America
   Using the paragraph on pages 188–190 as a model, write a paragraph or so tracing the five steps of each story and discuss how they would help sell the product or service.

2. Examine each of the following products. Which would be most suited to the image approach? Which to the scenario approach? Why?

| | |
|---|---|
| Nightgowns | Automobiles |
| Cameras | Potato chips |
| Jeans | Wines |
| Gas and oil products | Diamond rings |
| Charities | |

3. Do you feel the trend toward "friendly news" is good or bad for society in the long run? Why?

4. Tape five radio commercials that involve production of some kind. Analyze them using the criteria found in the final section of this chapter.

## Readings and References

**Marshall McLuhan**
"Sharing the News, Friendly Teamness: Teeming Friendness." New York: ABC Television, 1972.
In this private paper commissioned by ABC-TV, the noted media analyst explains the success of the ABC-TV news approach. Copies may be available through ABC Headquarters, 1330 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019.

# 11

# Making It:

# Employment in Radio

## Getting In and Getting On



"I've decided to go into radio."

Every semester hundreds, maybe thousands, of students make this decision. There are probably just as many nonstudents who suddenly decide radio is for them. What is working in radio really like? What kind of education and training do you need? How difficult is it to get that first job in radio?

There are many standard answers to these questions. Most of what's been written recommends the exercise of good, solid American Puritan values: work hard, be committed, and so on. But that's a little abstract.

First, are you sure radio is all you want to do? Most communication teachers council their students to try to get background and experience in all media areas. To limit your immediate career goal just to radio is probably a mistake. Media jobs are difficult, though not impossible, to find, but you'll have to take what you can get in the beginning. It helps enormously if you apply to multiple media outlets.

Second, are you ready to travel? Immediate employment may not be available in your market. Publications like *Broadcasting* list vacant positions—but many of them are in rural areas, away from major markets.

What makes radio jobs so desirable? In addition to above average pay and career promotion possibilities, the magic of the medium itself seems to draw prospective employees. Many want to be part of the magic and perceive a radio occupation as a status position. There is an unmistakable mystique about working in radio, and that is a part of the magic.

In any event, if you are determined radio is for you, you'll need to single out one of three major areas: programming, sales, or engineering. Each demands different qualifications and promises different rewards.

## "I Wanna Be a DJ"

For many students, the lure of the microphone is overpowering. The excitement involved in programming, being *part* of the music, and having your voice go out to thousands of listeners is perhaps the ultimate ego gratification. Few DJs become so jaded that they still don't get a kick out of the process.

However, the majority of those who go after an announcing career do not wind up as successful air personalities. Most often they end up working in sales, engineering, or some other programming area. This is partly because few students are aware of all the other job possibilities that exist.

# Classified Advertising

See last page of Classified Section for rates, closing dates, box numbers and other details

## RADIO

### HELP WANTED MANAGEMENT

**Opportunities** with growing broadcast group located in the Sunbelt Seeking experienced (1) Radio Announcers, (2) Station Managers, Sales Managers and (3) Sales Persons Excellent benefits Please send resume and tape if applicable Contact Marilyn S Garner, PO Box 529, Laurinburg, NC 28352 919—276-2911 E.E.O. Employer

**General Manager** with strong sales background for West Coast major market FM wanted by progressive, expanding group broadcaster Send resume with salary requirements to: Entercom, 555 City Line Avenue, Bala-Cynwyd, PA 19004

**Midwest Radio Company,** Fargo, N Dak has an opportunity for a quality person as Sales Manager of KQWB AM (rated No 1 - Adults 18-49) Former Sales Manager has purchased a station in another market! Compensation includes percentage of sales, bonus plan, car, family insurance plan, expense account, and car expense allowance A 5 person sales staff, Sales Secretary, and Co-op Coordinator are hired, trained, and ready to cook All we need is a turned on, motivated leader with experience on the streets, and knowledge of handling people Fargo is a 7 station market, billing over 4 million! Write Jim Lakoduk, Box 2983, Fargo, ND 58108 or phone 218—236-7900

**Major radio group** expanding management team Splitting combos Opportunities for experienced general managers and salespeople ready to run sales team Send complete resume and three year salary history Confidentiality assured EEO employer Box I-46

**Radio Station Manager** (Faculty Position) requirements Masters in communications, speech, journalism, business or related area and minimum 3 years in radio/TV management positions, knowledge of non-commercial radio, experience in seeking federal assistance for upgrading such stations preferred, experience may be substituted for advanced degree Successful working experience with minority colleagues highly desirable Salary $16,000-$20,000 for 12 months Apply by September 18 to Robert M Ruggles, Chairman, Journalism, PO Box 14, Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL 32307 or 904—599-3718 FAMU is an equal opportunity/equal access institution

**Well established AM** needs station manager for new 20KW FM being added to cover Harrisonburg/Staunton Va Target Date November 1979 Address replies to Tom Manley, WKCY, PO Box 1107, Harrisonburg, VA 22801

### HELP WANTED SALES

**Opportunities** with growing broadcast group located in the Sunbelt Seeking experienced (1) Radio Announcers (2) Station Managers, Sales Managers, and (3) Sales Persons Excellent benefits Please send resume and tape if applicable Contact Marilyn S Garner, PO Box 529, Laurinburg, NC 28352 919—276-2911 E.E.O. Employer

**Springfield, Illinois' Country Powerhouse seeks** recent college grad with 1-2 years sales experience Strong in creative writing, campaign development Join aggressive team in exciting radio market where big efforts earn even bigger rewards Call now WMAY Jim Lundgren, 217—529-7077 EOE M/F

**Sales Manager,** community oriented and active community participating, RAB/Welsh either/or trained, who can sell and will, who can recruit, teach, motivate sales staff, strong on both on/off air promotions, prolific in merchandising, saturations, short and long term contracts, remotes Great potential—growth area—great market Great signal Great bucks for the great SM, a proven winner Resume, references Box H-4

**California,** Sales Manager—medium market—highly rated MOR Beautiful growth area Successful local sales record Must be self-motivated EOE/M/F Send resume to Box I-39

**Medium to small market sales manager** Here's your chance to move up if you have a good management track record We would like you to come to Sun City El Paso, Texas, and help us grow profitably Salary and override, first year potential $25,000 to $40,000 to right person Contact Garrett Heston, General Manager, KPAS, Area Code 915—533-8211

**Sales Pro Needed**—Beautiful Central New York Market Only AM plus No 1 FM Sell both using the Jennings System Join fast growing broadcasting group, prove yourself and move up Good list!! Need immediately Send resume Larry Rosmilso; 104 Chestnut Street, Oneonta, NY 13820 EOE

**AM-FM Midatlantic** regional's veteran salesperson retiring Replacement inherits existing list plus growing potential EOE Resumes to Box I-62

**God's Country U.S.A.** has career opportunity with La Crosse's leading stations Want to interview bright, problem solver on the way up, strong on creativity with ability to write and sell innovative campaigns Looking for recent college grad with commercial selling experience or 1-2 years small market selling, excellent sales records Live in the Number one small city tremendous growth going on, superior earnings Contact Bill Mann, Sales Manager, WIZM, La Crosse, WI a Midwest Family Station EOE

**Account Executive** for quality radio station in midwest Excellent living conditions and schools Established account list KODY Radio, North Platte, NE Contact Jerry Wing, 308—532-3344 or PO Box 1085, Zip 69101 EOE

**Northern Virginia** FM station has immediate opening for experienced, energetic, aggressive salesperson This is a unique opportunity for long-term employment and advancement into management position Send resume to PO Box 1157, Warrenton, VA 22186 EOE M/F

**Wanted, Sales manager.** Excellent compensation plus ownership potential If you're good, call KFIR 503—367-4444

**Central Jersey market** dominant AM/FM combo looking for bright, enthusiastic, hardworking radio pro to help continue our tremendous growth Lucrative financial rewards available for capable producer EOE Send resume to Box I-92

**WYNF—Tampa/St. Petersburg** has opening for experienced go-getter with track record—Call Joe Bell 813—576-9550

**Wanted—Sales Manager** for dynamic full-time AM station in growing Oregon market If you like the great outdoors, like to hunt, fish, ski or golf, this is for you Must have leadership and strong sales abilities Great opportunity! Send resume to KBND, PO Box 5037, Bend, OR 97701 or call John Stenkamp at 503—382-5263 EOE

### HELP WANTED ANNOUNCERS

**Opportunities** with growing broadcast group located in the Sunbelt Seeking experienced (1) Radio Announcers, (2) Station Managers, Sales Managers, and (3) Sales Persons Excellent benefits Please send resume and tape if applicable Contact Marilyn S Garner, PO Box 529, Laurinburg, NC 28352 919—276-2911 E.E.O. Employer

**Announcer** for modern country format Experienced should send aircheck and resume to J William Poole, WFLS AM-FM, Box 597, Fredericksburg, VA 22401 EOE

**100,000 watt top 40 FM** openings for Jocks with good production skills We have over one million people in our coverage area If you're an entertainer, send tape and resume (no phone calls) Automation experience would be helpful for our AM Station Send resume and tapes to WOLT FM, PO Box 932, Florence, AL 35630 EOE/M-F

**One of our announcers** has been hired as Operations Manager by another station, creating an opening for an announcer who can communicate with the listener on a one-to-one basis and sound warm and enthusiastic while doing it The person we hire will know how to run automation equipment and a live board and will know production and news If you want to be part of a winning team at Denver's beautiful music stations and enjoy one of the great family living areas with good pay, good working conditions, stability, and a chance to work with one of the finest staffs in the country, send your tape and resume to Lee Stewart, Program Director, KOSI AM/FM, PO Box 98, Aurora, CO 80040 An Equal Opportunity Employer, M/F

**Unless you're damn good** and want a challenge in contemporary radio, read no further Competitive market demands excellence in mid-day and afternoon drive personalities Excellent salary and fringe benefits in group owned medium market Equal Opportunity Employer Box I-66

**Needed now.** Announcer with some commercial experience to join our professional staff Adult contemporary format Room to grow Send tape and resume to Ken Riggle, WTON, PO Box 1085, Staunton, Va 24401 EOE

**Florida MOR** seeks experienced announcer, strong on production, for mid-day shift Send resume, tape and salary required to Bill Brown, WIRA, Box 3032, Fort Pierce, FL 33450, an Equal Opportunity Employer

**Full Time Mid-Day** air personality needed immediately at well established mid-western adult/contemporary station Professional delivery required Must be able to develop rapport with adult audience Experience as air personality and good production voice desired Good pay and benefits Send air check tape and resume to Charlotte Webb, Administrative Assistant, WTTS/WGTC, 535 S Walnut Street, Bloomington, IN 47401 WTTS/WGTC is a division of Sarkes Tarzian, Inc An equal opportunity employer

**Upgrading staff.** 90 miles NYC OJ commercial experience Mature natural voice Salary open All applications answered Box I-87

**Experienced announcer** needed for leading adult contemporary station in west central Ohio The person we need should have good programming skills, and be a dedicated worker I am looking for a leader Tell me all about yourself Send tape & resume to: John Bulmer, President WAXC PO Box 148, Wapakoneta, OH 45895 WAXC is an equal opportunity employer

### HELP WANTED TECHNICAL

**Chief Engineer,** directional AM-automated Class C-FM, N E Texas station with outstanding reputation No board work Send resume, references, salary requirements Box H-90

**We've got first-phones.** Now we need a person who knows how to install and maintain all kinds of commercial radio broadcasting and audio gear, for a fast growing station that's doing big things in a small Oregon market. Western applicants preferred due to moving distance EOE For interview, call Mr Smith, 503—862-8833

**Chief Engineer** wanted for WRAP, Norfolk, Virginia's only DISCO station First Class License and at least 3 years experience required Send resumes to Steve Shrader, PO Box 647, Atlanta, GA 30301

**Chief Engineer,** Live Stereo FM, N E Metro, STL Send salary requirements, technical abilities, telephone number EOE Box I-20

**PE with AM-FM-TV** experience for Eastern consulting firm Send resume, salary requirement Box I-11

**Chief Engineer wanted:** for 50 KW, DA2, 5 years experience, knowledge of directional antenna systems, digital remote control, microwave, and strong on studio maintenance Send resume, references & salary requirements to WGTO, PO Box 123, Cypress Gardens, FL 33880 An Equal Opportunity Employer

Broadcasting Sep 10 1979

11.1. A typical listing of positions available in radio. Note that most of the openings occur in small-market stations. Typically, you must start there and then work your way up to a major-market position, if that is your desire. Courtesy, *Broadcasting* magazine.

In a major metropolitan radio station, the on-air people usually make up 10–20 percent of the total staff. DJs are the very obvious "tip of the iceberg" in radio.

Of course, there is a lot more to spinning records than meets the eye, or ear. The successful DJ is one who can talk on the phone, announce the last song, cue up the next record, punch up a commercial, and sign a logbook all at the same time. It is a rather speedy profession, one that can take its toll in a hurry. Most DJs have larger than lifesize egos, and for good reason. A strong belief in your own ability is a solid prerequisite for keeping and holding an on-air position.

There are always more people who want to be DJs than there are slots to fill, even in the smallest market. The result is that you are always looking over your shoulder to see who might come along and take your place. The enemy can come from without, but more often he or she comes from within. Most stations employ a "phantom staff" of four or five part-timers who work weekends or fill in during vacation periods. The jock who does the 2:00–6:00 A.M. shift most likely wants to move to days. It could be your shift he or she craves.

Your future is determined by "the book" (see Chapter 6). In most competitive markets, you're only as good as your last ratings; past glories count for little in so competitive an industry. It's not unusual for a top DJ in a major market to have worked in half a dozen stations over several years. There is always a new program director with new ideas about what staff announcers should sound like. If you don't happen to fit the pattern, you find yourself unemployed.

In addition, a format change often brings the wholesale firing of an entire programming staff, from the PD down to the music librarian. The same thing can happen when new owners take over, even if the format remains the same.

If all this makes being an on-air personality sound like an unstable and frustrating sort of existence, that's because it is. Of course, there is always the example of the daytime disc jockey who's been in the same time slot at the same station for 25 years, but that's the exception, not the rule.

What makes a DJ position so coveted? It's true that it is "show business," but at the local level where it's possible to know your fans on a one-to-one basis. Most of us have little technical training. The very process that can take your voice, put it through a series of wires, and send it through the air to individual listeners in their cars, beds, or bathtubs seems magical indeed. The temptation to make that kind of magic is great for many would-be DJs.

Money is usually scarce on those first few jobs, but plentiful at the top. Many small stations pay as little as $3.00–$4.00 per hour. Often the DJ will double as an account executive, log typist, or receptionist. The average jock in a medium market, say the size of Memphis, Tennessee, or Portland, Oregon, starts at about $200 per week. Top-paid jocks in these

## 11.2. KYMS AND THE EDWARD JAY SHOW

The summer I left San Francisco I was determined to make a fresh start and leave all of Haight-Ashbury craziness behind. My career as an author was embodied in a novel called *No Parking,* a reflection of the San Francisco scene, but I put it aside after receiving the first couple dozen rejection slips. Perhaps there was something else? I enrolled as a journalism major at California State University in Fullerton.

An engineer in a nighttime broadcast journalism course tipped me to a job at KYMS, the local "progressive" station. There was an opening for a copywriter. The next morning I was at their door. The station manager was playing the guitar as I entered his office: "Oh—you're the guy about the copywriting job—got any experience?"

"Sure, I've written a novel, and a lot of poems and short stories. I'm a journalism major and . . ."

He interrupted me, "Is this the easiest job you ever got?"

I gulped—I was actually in radio.

A salary of $250 a month wasn't much, but the job was supposedly only part-time. Before long I was working 10 to 12 hours a day and juggling classes in between. The only thing I could think about was getting on the air. The thought dominated my mind night and day—I practiced in the car, in bed before I went to sleep at night: "This is *Edward Jay* on KYMS/FM . . . *This* is Edward Jay on KYMS-FM . . . This *is* Edward Jay . . ."

Finally, the big break came: We were scheduled to go off the air for maintenance between midnight and five, but the engineer was busy; since nobody else was available, did I want to give it a try? I'd practiced for six months in the production room, but this was the real thing—on the air. Thousands (well, maybe dozens) of people would be listening, and I would be sailing them away on a magic carpet of music, *my* music.

The last thing I needed to worry about was falling asleep. I was so wired all night that I couldn't stop—push a cart here—cue a record there—don't forget the ID on the half hour—not too close to the mike—answer the phone—somebody wants to hear Cream—somebody wants to hear Neil Young—Grateful Dead—Jefferson Airplane—Rolling Stones.

By the time morning came I was both exhausted and jubilant. I don't think there is any way to describe that incredible evening. I've done thousands of radio shows since then, but I can recall that one for you record by record, mistake by mistake. Radio is that kind of thing—it's actually magic. And the music is a big part of it—it's the sound that makes it go.

That incredible adrenalin rush is still there today when I go into a radio studio to cut a commercial or do an air shift. There is so much to remember; and in the true McLuhan spirit everything happens all at once, all the time, because sound surrounds you—it's a total environment. You see only what's in front of you, but you hear all around you. Of course, the disc jockeys are only a small part of what makes radio work, but they *are* radio for the listener. The DJ represents that real-life link with radio, the magic medium.

*from* Mediamerica, *Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1979.*

## 11.3. MAKING IT I: LIFE ON THE AIR

By JoNell Patterson

*JoNell Patterson currently holds down the mid-day air shift at Honolulu's KPOI. She gained experience by working in various capacities at KDUK and KIKI in Hawaii. As a recent college graduate, she was asked to evaluate her education in light of her experiences in the "real world" of commercial radio.*

There was a time when getting on the air meant everything to me, but the reality of it loomed larger than my inexperience. Now going off the air seems just as frightening. There's probably no better way to describe radio than the old cliche: "It gets in your blood, and stays there." No matter how dissatisfied I might get, or how much ego stripping I endure, doing anything else seems out of the question. My general manager's wife believes radio people are a separate species, a breed unto themselves. They have to be to put up with all the insanity inherent in this business.

I first came down with radio fever as a freshman at the University of Hawaii. As soon as I knew there was a school FM station, I just *had* to get on it, so I did, from 2:00 to 6:00 A.M. That progressed to daytime shifts and a sudden change in majors, from tropical agriculture to broadcast communications. I satiated myself with hands-on production classes, and when those were all gone, I did independent study projects in radio production for credit. In production classes we heard, "edit, edit, edit," "the more elements the better," and other axioms. All of this practical training pays off for me every day, as my production load increases. When I got my first talent fee, those crazy school projects I stayed up all night to finish seemed more than worthwhile.

Another major college boost was in broadcast journalism. I took a class from the news director of the local ABC-TV affiliate. He treated us like reporters, and that's a lot more harrowing than being treated like a student. A lot of discipline came out of that class, and eventually an internship and part-time job in TV news production. All that came to a screeching halt when a chance at a commercial radio job came out of the blue. I had won a radio contest, and the announcer actually recognized my name—he'd heard me on the university station. As luck would have it, he was also the program director and looking for a part-time DJ. I was hired to do weekends. Since then I've gone through two owners, three format changes, and four different on-air shifts, all at the same station.

One thing I haven't seen a lot of yet is money, and I've given up hope of sudden fame and fortune. Radio is hard work with little or no time off—Thanksgiving,

Christmas, and New Year's are just working days. Radio stations never close. Most stations demand the impossible, and when you deliver it, ask for more. The glamor is there, but the reality of the job is a series of maddening encounters with egoed-out program directors, dingy salespeople, and equipment that always seem to be broken. If you can put up with this sort of work environment, you're half way to being a success in radio.

The other half depends on your own creative ability, and how quickly you can grow and improve. Past experience certainly is a plus in getting a radio job, but the most important factor is *you:* what you have to offer the station. It takes confidence, perseverance, diplomacy, and a good audition tape. Oh, and I almost forgot, good luck and knowing the right somebody never hurt either.

*Used by permission of JoNell Patterson.*

markets can earn $50,000 a year or more through a combination of salaries, personal appearances, and "talent fees" (special bonuses earned by lending their familiar voices to produce radio commercials for local or national products).

The life of the DJ in all but the biggest markets means a three- to five-hour air shift, plus a regular turn at "production": recording and sometimes even editing and duplicating station commercials, promos, IDs, and the like. Many DJs also do a number of regular personal appearances, often tied in with a special sponsor event or sale.

In the nation's major markets, such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia, full-time DJs at top-rated stations normally earn $500 or more per week. Top incomes can run to $250,000 per year and more. What's more, top earners are not always those who've "paid their dues" the longest. Some of the nation's most popular and wealthiest DJs are in their twenties and early thirties. A chance at that kind of success is what prompts many to set their sights for an on-air position.

## Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out

Students often ask if they "really need" a college degree to be a DJ. The most honest answer is "no." If being a DJ is all you want out of life, then a college degree is a plus, not a necessity. A first-class FCC license, which allows the DJ to operate the transmitter and perform other special technical duties at some large stations, along with voice quality, appearance, and experience are probably more important factors. But after some time on the air, most DJs find they want to move up to become program directors or assume other key management positions. These moves are not impossible without a diploma, but they are a lot more difficult.

One station general manager summed it up this way: "I have found after many years of hiring and observing personnel that those who have been to college generally demonstrate broader vision, a greater depth of understanding, and more skill in learning new concepts rapidly than do those less well educated." In addition, with the number of radio stations stabilizing and more people becoming interested in broadcasting careers, employers are in a better position to pick and choose new personnel, even in smaller markets. Those with a college diploma are bound to be in a better position.

This was not always so. In the early days of radio, station owners were often technicians with little formal education. They tended to be

suspicious of people with a college degree and preferred to hire those at a lower educational level. But as radio matured, more and more management personnel were college educated. Their tendency is to hire other college graduates, whenever possible.

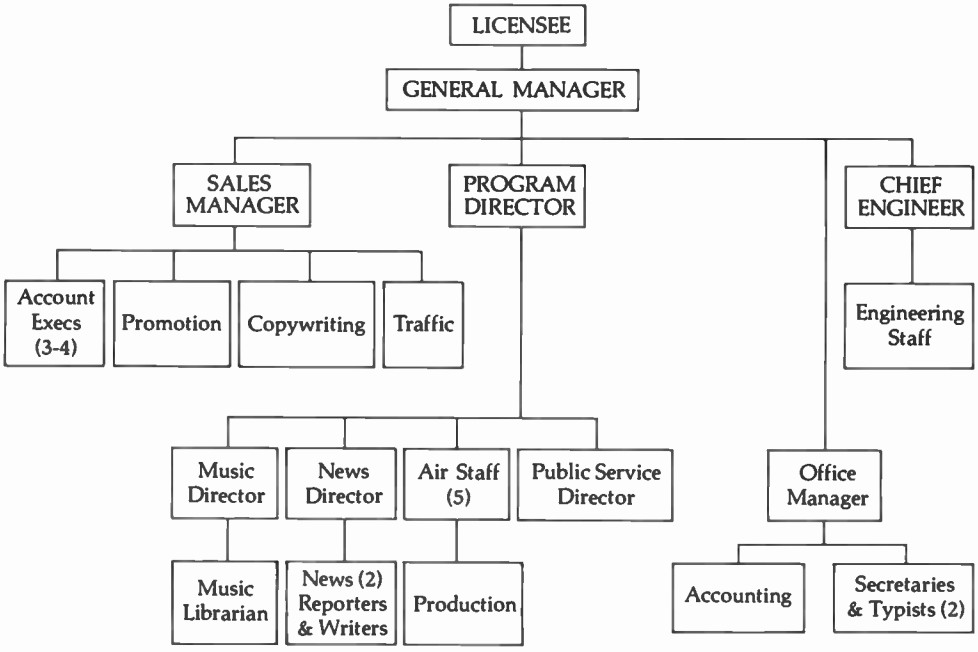
## Under the Iceberg

As you can see from 11-4, being a DJ is only one of a large number of employment opportunities at most stations. The chart in 11.4a is typical of the personnel structure of a station in a middle or major market. In smaller markets (11.4b), the licensee, general manager, and sales manager may be one and the same person. A spouse may double as the office manager and public service director, while doing some copywriting and promotion duties as well. Finding an entry-level position at a smaller market station has numerous advantages. Such jobs are easier to come by, and they are more likely to give you practical experience in a number of areas.

As we have seen, station duties are divided into three general areas. In addition, there are numerous entry-level jobs in the office support staff, working under the office manager. Many are little more than glorified (or unglorified) positions as typists or switchboard operators. The only difference between these jobs and similar ones in law offices or insurance companies is that you will be at a radio station and have the opportunity to learn how radio works.

For example, an employer hires a receptionist with an interest in broadcasting, with the hope that he or she will show initiative and learn about other positions. The program director may eventually hire that receptionist as a DJ or music librarian. Likewise, a sales manager may hire a typist as a new account executive if he or she has shown promise in that area. If you find yourself stuck as a typist, with little hope of moving up, you can always seek another position. Meanwhile, you have some station experience to put on your resume.

Student internships often provide the first "real world" experience. Working for minimal, or no, pay, students are assigned to menial station positions. If any paid openings come up, graduating interns are usually given preference—they are a known quantity and have proven themselves to management. Most colleges offering media studies programs have ongoing internship programs, but sometimes you must go out and find one on your own.

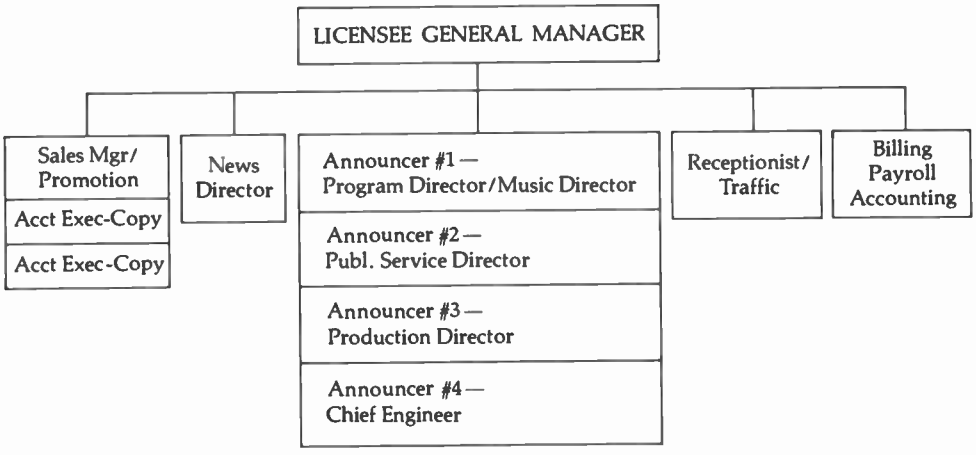



11.4a. Typical Medium- or Large-Market Radio Station Staff Chart. Courtesy, Ed LaFrance.

## Programming: Creating the Magic

The *program director* (PD) is directly responsible to the *general manager* for all station programming. First and foremost, the PD supervises the DJs—makes sure they keep air quality up and follow the station's programming policy. In association with the *music director*, the PD formulates the play list, or list of songs that the station features on the air. Some play lists are so stringent they offer the DJ no choice at all. Others are simply option lists from which DJs must draw their selections. In general, larger metropolitan markets have the most tightly controlled play lists, as the intense competition forces PDs to pay attention to every last detail of their operation.

Music directors are in constant touch with record companies, who supply free records for the station library with the hope they will be added to the play list. The music director tries to audition as many of these new records as possible to determine which might be suitable for the station format. They consult the listings in *Billboard* magazine to find which songs and albums are "breaking" nationwide. Local retail record outlets are also contacted.




11.4b. Typical Small-Market Staff Chart. Courtesy, Ed LaFrance.

The *music librarian* must sort and catalog all new records and make sure that existing copies are unscathed and ready for air play when needed. For some stations, this is not a minor task. A radio record library may contain thousands of albums and singles. Radio station KSAN in San Francisco boasts a collection of over 1,000 concert tapes and other recorded material in addition to the record library. Having an ample library is the key ingredient in the success of most music formats.

The *news director* is responsible for all news and other nonmusic programming. Most stations employ several news writers whose task it is to read and rewrite copy from the AP or UPI wire and prepare it for the air. Music formats usually limit newscasts to several minutes each hour, while the wire services supply thousands of words per hour. Writers must pour over this deluge of paper and choose the stories they think listeners are most likely to find of interest.

More ambitious news operations may also employ local reporters to go out and cover community news events, including police, fire and government activities. This means airing "actualities," or on-the-scene reports. These can be taped and edited, or, in a pinch, phoned in live.

Most ambitious of all is the all-news format, where the news director and PD are the same person. This kind of operation is a news-hound's dream, and the increasing popularity of the all-news format has opened up a number of opportunities for students who are interested in getting radio news experience.

## 11.5. MAKING IT II: RADIO JOURNALISM

By Caytie Robin

*Caytie Robin is currently a reporter and morning drive-time anchor person at KTAR Newsradio in Phoenix. She has also worked at KLBJ radio in Austin, Texas, as a city hall and police reporter. She has been nominated for several awards for her investigative reporting in such areas as government corruption and nuclear power.*

*Radio news is a curious cross between electronic show business and old fashioned journalism. Ms. Robin was asked to comment on that, as well as to pass along some strategies for getting and holding a position in radio journalism.*

Recently, a communications student asked me with a wide-eyed gaze about the excitement and adventure of radio news. My first instinct was to tell her to change her major. No, don't misunderstand me, I love the profession. I am more often than not obsessed with whatever story I'm covering at the moment—but unless you are willing to work doctor's hours for ditchdigger's wages, you're headed for the wrong profession.

Radio journalism is one of the most varied, interesting, fast-paced, and demanding professions around. I have never felt anything like the satisfaction I get from beating the local newspapers, TV stations, and other radio stations with a story, expecially an investigative piece. Competition is fierce between the three media, and although they all have different roles, their common goal is to be the first with the juiciest in-depth details.

Another plus is the chance to meet some of the world's fascinating people. When a disaster occurs, a scientific discovery is made, or an unprecedented legal decision is handed down, a reporter goes to the top person in that field for an explanation. In a small station, you may just turn to the local or state expert, but in larger operations, a reporter is usually given free rein to exploit the station's phone bill to the fullest. There can also be a lot of opportunities to meet the so-called celebrities. Some are exciting, but often you can find yourself pinned to the wall by an arrogant snob.

I have the distinction of having dropped out of the same university as Walter Cronkite; in fact, I spent two-and-a-half years at three universities, majoring in radio/TV. I've found mixed opinions on whether a degree is necessary to make a successful go in the journalism career. College professors have warned I'd never get far without one, news directors have told me it doesn't matter one way or the other, and I have even encountered a widespread prejudice against newly graduated communication majors. They are often accused of displaying a

(continued)

## MAKING IT II
(Continued)

know-it-all attitude and refusing to start as a late-night copy editor for little money. I've come to the conclusion a degree isn't going to hurt, but experience is by far a better asset for landing a paying job.

Long before your senior year, find an internship or a summer job, or just "hang around" a radio station and make yourself useful. Most radio and TV stations have an intern program set up. They're often happy to have an enthusiastic young "go-fer" make coffee or cover school board meetings, car wrecks, and the Jaycee's haunted house.

Internships usually don't pay, and you won't get to cover stories of any substance; but you will learn to write, conduct an intelligent interview, rip tape, and talk into a mike without stuttering. Working in the university radio station is a start, but the deadlines and pressures in a commercial station are another world entirely.

If I had had my two-and-a-half years as a college student to do over, I would have broadened the emphasis on my curriculum to include a lot more than "A Survey of Television in the Modern World." Right now, when I interview an economics expert on the impact of the latest inflation rate, or a nuclear engineer about what new safety features are being considered, I must have the background to ask semi-intelligent questions. If I can't, I've missed the story. I have received an intensive education in a thousand different subjects from reading and writing in a newsroom, but I could have made better use of my tuition money by taking courses like basic English, economics, political science, law, and science. A reporter has to understand everything from civil and criminal legal proceedings to what impact the prime interest rate has on housing construction. Your job is to understand a topic, ask questions about it, and then explain it to the public. You will *never* know enough about anything, so don't be intimidated or impressed by reporters who think they do.

Finally, the *public service director* works under the PD. This position calls for someone who enjoys sorting through the numerous requests received each day from nonprofit organizations for free air time. Most stations have promised the FCC to make such time available. In larger markets, public service directors may actually hold seminars to help

Getting a job is tough. Being a woman, hence a minority, has been a help getting me in the door, but you have to be good to stay there. On the flip side, be sure of the reputation of the station to which you apply. You want one with a dedicated news department and solid management, and don't hesitate to say that in the interview. In an interview, be aggressive and sell yourself. If you don't have the experience to back you up, you have to rely on convincing the news director that he or she won't find anyone with more drive and inquisitiveness.

When you get in, become a sponge. Watch how other reporters cover their beat and handle interviews, and how they pick one sentence for a hard lead out of a one-hour interview. Learn to look at a story, see what's there and what's missing. News conferences and press releases are carefully prepared to present a certain picture. If you see a touchy area being glossed over, don't be afraid to pipe up with a question. No politician or corporate administrator is going to come to you and say, "Hey, I have this problem with rampant corruption," so you'll have to look for it.

A word of warning, however: Don't get carried away playing Woodward and Bernstein. Know your facts, back them up, and keep your credibility somewhere between motherhood and a country preacher. Make a wrong accusation or an error in your facts, and you're dead. It's your responsibility to make each story you write or read on the air the most accurate and descriptive possible.

Also, don't expect a lot of chances at investigative exposés. Most of your reporting will involve city council meetings, local events, robberies, and fires, but these help build the foundation you need when that big story breaks.

Good news reporters know they are not stars, nor are they more important than the stories they cover. As a reporter, you are serving the public's right to know, and if you lose sight of these facts and principles, you are no longer a journalist.

*Used by permission of Caytie Robin.*

nonprofit groups learn the best strategies for getting their messages on the air. Public service directors may also represent the station at various community functions. It's their job to let people know the station is there as a resource. Proof of a job well done is invaluable at license renewal time.

In summary, programming is usually the first area we think of when we consider employment in radio; perhaps this is one of the reasons it is so hard to break into. If you are determined to be involved in radio programming, try to be as flexible as possible about the kind of position you will start with. As a radio consumer, you know a lot about *some* aspects of programming—those that are most visible (or audible). It's important to prepare yourself by learning all you can about the thousands of nonvisible details before you try to convince that PD that you are the one for the job.

## Sales: Selling the Magic

If employment in programming is unstable, work in sales is even more so. Unlike DJs, who live and die by the ratings, account executives, who sell commercial air time, live and die by a monthly balance sheet. At most stations, the amount of business each account exec brings in during a given month is prominently displayed on a bulletin board. For those at the top, it is a real ego boost; for those at the bottom, it is humiliating. What's more, no one stays at the bottom for long; they either up their monthly sales figure or find themselves looking for another job.

Of course, sales has its rewards. Most often, account executives are the highest-paid employees at the station. It's not unusual for top AEs to make double or triple the salary of DJs at their station. And when licensees look for a new general manager, they almost always choose a former sales manager, someone who can make sure the station's financial future is secure.

What does it take to become a well-paid AE? An aggressive personality helps. There are very few "wallflower" types who make it big. As with any selling job, you are selling yourself as well as the product. This means you've got to be likable, a good talker, *and a good listener.* As we have seen, buying radio time is an exercise in speculation, especially at the local level. Good salespeople are those who can convince the unsure clients that radio will work for them if they just give it a try. Once clients are on the air, they must be convinced that radio is working for them, whether it actually is or not.

The key to a success in sales is the ability to compromise. You might listen to one kind of music format but end up selling an entirely different one. You may not actually think a product is worthwhile, but you are

willing to carry the account anyway. You may not always be able to get full "rate card" (the asking price per spot on your station) from a perspective client, so perhaps you'll offer them time for a little less. Then you face the task of convincing your sales manager to let the deal go through.

The most ardent critics claim that there are no ethics in broadcast advertising and that account executives will do anything they can to sign up a client. They are not entirely right, but they are pretty close. Typically, AEs are promised a minimum income per month, as long as they "make their quota," meaning they sell a specified amount of radio time.

Let's say Bill Smith goes to work at WINO-FM as an account exec. He is promised a minimum *draw* of $600 per month. That $600 assumes he will bring the station a minimum of $4,000 in income each month. The normal sales commission is 15% of all *collections*, meaning 15% of all monies received during the month as a result of Bill's efforts. If more than $4,000 is received, Bill will get an increased salary based on the amount over his quota he brings in. For example, it's Christmas time and sponsors are buying time like crazy. Bill brings in $10,000, instead of his usual $4,000. His salary for the month of December is thus $1500, his $600 draw plus $900 commission for the extra $6,000 in collections.

Smaller stations work much the same way, but often without a minimum guarantee. Account executives simply exist on 15% of whatever they bring in. Without clients' billings and collections, they receive no salary. This makes it difficult to pay the rent.

The *sales manager* heads up the sales staff and gives them periodic pep-talks. A good sales manager is an armchair psychologist who knows how to motivate account execs to bring in maximum business. Selling radio time is difficult; AEs are out there banging their heads against the wall every day. They need reassurance and support, and the successful sales manager is adept at this. Sales managers may also service *house accounts*, long-term contracts with key sponsors for which the station pays no sales commission. Sales managers generally receive a fixed salary, though additional incentive bonuses can be paid if total station billings and collections rise. Sales managers often enjoy a luxury that account executives do not: some sort of contract that guarantees their position for a specified time period.

The *continuity* area of the sales department produces ad copy for local sponsors and coordinates client scheduling needs with the account executives. Many radio employees begin their career as copywriters. It's a unique vantage point, since you are able to work with account executives as well as those in programming who are producing your ads. Copywriting calls for a quick and inventive wit, plus a good working knowledge of both sales and programming.

## 11.6. MAKING IT III: SELLING RADIO STARDUST

By Dale Casterline

*While in college Dale Casterline worked at Portland, Oregon's KPAM, as a DJ and salesperson. After graduating from college with a degree in communication, he gained invaluable experience working at the Babb & Clarkson advertising agency in Portland. This propelled him to his present position as an account executive at Los Angeles's KIQQ. For many radio professionals, working in the competitive Los Angeles market represents the industry's ultimate challenge.*

On my seventh birthday, my folks gave me a little portable AM radio. To me, it was a box of magic. I'd turn it on and instantly hear a fantastic concert. Scores of famous musicians would play. The stage must have been immense because as soon as one group finished a song, another started right up. The master of ceremonies would talk between each group's performance and do commercials, just like on television. Imagine my amazement when I found out that this incredible concert was just a Top-40 radio station, and the M.C. was actually a disc jockey sitting alone playing records in a small room. What a great illusion, I thought. Ever since, I've marveled at radio's strange power to paint larger-than-life scenes, all without lifting a finger.

(continued)

Any student who knows what it's like to stare at the blank first page of a term paper knows what a copywriter must go through each day. There is a never-ending stream of clients, all of whom want their ads to be "unique" and "different." Often they will not buy time until they see the copy; thus the account executive is forever demanding better and better work from the copywriter in order to close the deal.

Another slot for the creative sales-minded person is in the *promotions* department. This may be one part-time person, or it may involve a staff of half a dozen. Promotions people must dream up new "gimmicks," contests, jingles, rhymes, slogans, and other paraphernalia to sell the station to listeners and potential advertisers.

At any one time, the promotions department may be handling a new station brochure about increased ratings in the male 25–49 category; distributing buttons and bumper stickers for the current station contest; talking with a client about having an open house featuring personal appearances by the on-air staff; and coming up with a design for a new station billboard out by the airport. As with continuity, the successful promotions person knows how the sales and programming departments work. Promotion is a service department, designed to help sales and programming function more effectively by promoting them to the necessary target audience.

*Traffic* duties are a nightmare for the disorganized personality. Those

## MAKING IT III

(Continued)

Radio is my medium. Since that first day with my new radio, I knew I wanted to explore this magic power. Even now, as an account executive at a popular Los Angeles radio station, I'm amazed at how people's minds are challenged, their emotions stimulated, and their lives changed by as little as one 30-second radio commercial. Radio may seem unobtrusive, but it's actually larger than life and incredibly powerful.

My job is to convince merchants of goods or services and agency media buyers to join my station's magic show. I insist our magic will work for them, too. That's sales.

Naturally, it takes a bit of training to become a radio magician. In college, I chose classes dealing with the role of media and advertising in our culture. On the academic side, media history is important. After all, how do you know where you're going if you don't know where you've been?

Going hand in hand with classroom learning was laboratory work. In my case, a part-time job (correction: there is no "part-time job" in media, only full-time devotion) as a DJ at the campus radio station brought me working experience. Later, it was on to management at that station, then a DJ job at a professional station. While on the air, I began to do sales work. I found it fascinating, and profitable, and decided the life of an account executive was the life for me.

To be a really successful account exec, a solid working knowledge of

who work in traffic are in charge of scheduling ads during desired times and typing up the logs to let the air staff know what to do each hour. This sounds simple, but it's a horror at most stations. The typical station may be running 10 to 15 spots per hour. Each is part of a contract, calling for ads to be run over weeks or months at various times of the day. BTA, or best time available, spots must also be scheduled. And, of course, there are the everpresent public service announcements. All of this must be recorded on a special form that is acceptable to the FCC.

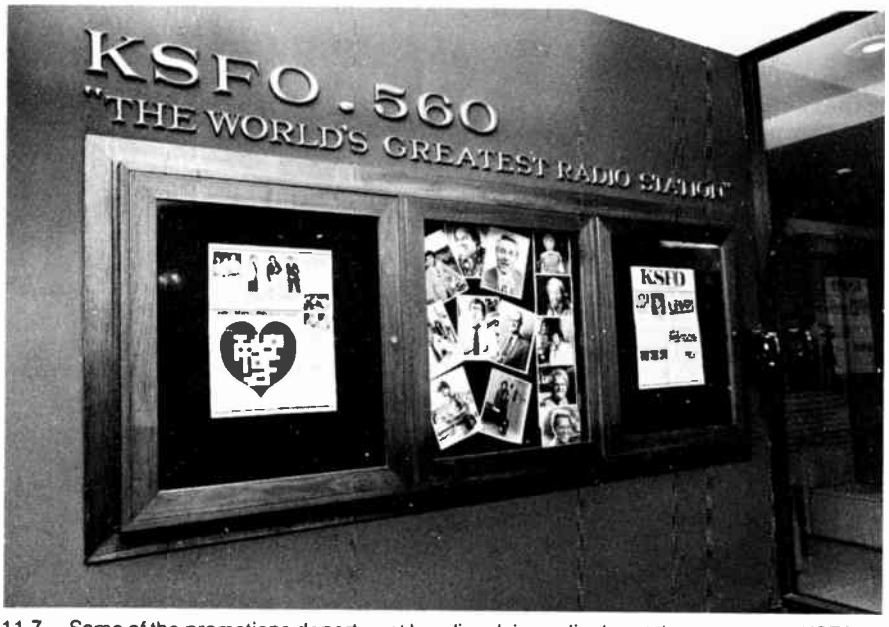
advertising and business is vital. Ad agencies are the world's training grounds for radio salespeople. If agency principals only took stock of how many of their budding copywriters and media buyers eventually slipped over to more lucrative radio sales jobs, they'd charge them to come to work. Once armed with the tools to create commercial magic, you're the expert magician to a potential advertiser and an unintimidated equal to a media buyer—valuable, because power reigns in the agency game.

Even before I left school, I knew I'd regret not sticking it out in more business and management courses. After media and advertising classes and internships, nothing was more sleepworthy than an accounting class. The cold reality is that business people (your potential clients) come from this direction and don't understand an industry without rules, guarantees, or inventories. I could have used more management background to help me sell radio's stardust in business terms.

Every day "on the street," I am continually awed by radio and the creative ways it can be used to sell a product. It's frustrating trying to convince those who've used only newspaper advertising for decades to give radio a try. But it's immensely rewarding when radio works and delivers super sales volume for my clients. Patience and persistence is a must. I've never known a radio salesperson who wasn't involved with the job. It's a funny, fascinating, frustrating way to make a living, and there are lots of us who wouldn't have it any other way.

*Used by permission of Dale Casterline.*

*Adjacencies* are another consideration. You can't have listeners hear all about the car deal that's "the best in town," and then turn around and hear about another great car deal from a different dealer 30 seconds later. DJs are forever complaining that they get two or more live spots during a single break between songs, which seems to taxing for them. The traffic department seems to get it from all sides when anything goes wrong. It's a complex and thankless task, so many people looking for that first radio job wind up in traffic.




11.7. Some of the promotions department handiwork is on display at the entrance to KSFO. The medium-sized station employs a promotions staff of three—a promotions director, an assistant, and a student intern. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

## Engineering: Making the Magic Go

The third, and most stable, area in radio is engineering. For the technical-minded, engineering offers a chance at a secure and well-paid career. Unlike programming and sales people, engineers can often work at one station for many years. Formats and budget crises come and go, but engineering goes on forever.

The *chief engineer* is responsible for the operation of the transmitter. He or she works under a stringent set of FCC guidelines and must struggle under mounds of paperwork to get the job done. Salaries can range from $250 to $1,000 or more per week, depending on the size and relative income of the station. In larger markets, the chief engineer has a support staff. Larger stations must also have at least one engineer with a first-class FCC license on the premises at all times. Often this person will be in charge of actually cueing up records, playing commercials, and so on. All the announcers do is talk—and they can't even do that until the engineer turns on their mikes and gives them the signal.

In smaller stations, a "combo" operation is used, and the DJ in effect

11.8. This major-market on-air setup is controlled by the engineer (left). The DJ (right) is in a separate soundproof booth. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

also becomes the engineer. Nevertheless, all stations must have at least one engineer with a first-class license (first phone) "on call." Obtaining a first phone requires a minimum of several months of intensive study and a good knowledge of the technical aspects of how radio signals work.

It is also the duty of the engineer to keep all the station equipment functioning properly. Every broken-down piece of equipment typically becomes an immediate crisis. Engineers are on-call 24 hours a day, and if a storm or other catastrophe knocks the station off the air, the engineer must be available at once.

Those interested in engineering will find classes at trade and technical schools a more direct route to a job than a college degree. However, engineers who want to advance to management will pick up a B.A. or B.S. along the way, usually in business administration or management.

Engineers can often be heard complaining about the "crazies" in sales and programming with whom they have to work. The temperament of most engineering personnel is decidedly different from others in radio, and it shows. For those so inclined, engineering offers the most stable, and least confusing path to a radio career.

11.9. This small-market setup is known as a "combo" operation. Here, the DJ is her own engineer and performs all facets of her show. Photo by Kris Fujiwara. Courtesy, KANG Radio, Angwin, CA.

## Yes, You Can

"Can I get a job in radio?" Yes, you can. With 8,000 or so radio stations in America, there are lots of positions. Unfortunately, there are always more people seeking broadcasting jobs than there are jobs open. The secret is to be prepared to sell yourself to a prospective employer in as many areas as possible. Whether programming, sales, engineering, or simply being part of the office support staff is your goal, you should have as much preparation in as many areas as possible. This may mean a college degree, internship, technical school, or a combination of all three. The thing to remember is that the more skills and experience you have, the better your chances will be to sell yourself out there in the world of professional radio.

And don't overlook the possibility of an entry-level job in one of the many radio-related positions in advertising, time-buying, and other areas. Wherever that first job may be, be prepared to go to it; don't wait for it to come to you. You can always start in a small or less desirable market and work your way up.

11.10. Among other duties, the engineer is responsible for checking the transmitter regularly and noting the readings on a special form for the FCC. It is vital that stations do not exceed their power and frequency allotments. Several have lost their licenses for such violations. Photo by Nadine Ohara. Courtesy, KSFO radio, San Francisco.

In general, the world of radio is faster, more intense, and perhaps more rewarding than anything else you might have experienced. When you land that first radio job, be sure to drop me a line and describe how it measures up to what you've read here. It would be nice to hear that the next one "making it" in the magic medium is you!

## Queries and Concepts

1. Prepare a resume of your own experiences, including courses you've had in media and any radio skills you may possess. What kinds of experiences are missing? What can you do to obtain them?

2. Call a local radio station and explain that you are taking a radio course and would like permission to come in and look around. Stations often respond positively, especially if you can form a group of interested people.

3. Investigate the employee structure of a local station. Make a chart for it similar to the ones on pages 210–211. How do the two compare?

4. You are an account executive for your favorite local station. You are "out on the street" trying to convince an obstinate advertiser to buy time. What can you tell the advertiser about the station to convince her or him to give it a try?

## Readings and References

Not a lot of useful information about a realistic approach to radio employment is available in books. For current job trends, check *Broadcasting* magazine, available in most libraries. *Billboard* also devotes a section to radio and radio employment. The best single source is your local station general manager or department head. These people can give you a realistic appraisal of the market and some tips on employment if you can get them to give you a few minutes.

# 12

# Dancing with Athena:

# Radio in the Year 3000

## 228 It Happened One Night

Last night I lay in bed tossing and turning, trying to figure out exactly what to put in this final chapter. My old, faithful digital clock radio indicated it was 11:51 on one of those foggy San Francisco nights that make you glad to be safe and warm inside. I had already decided to write about radio in the year 3000; after all, 2000 is just around the corner. Suddenly, I heard a strange tapping just ouside. Cautiously, I opened the drapes and there, shrouded in the fog, was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen.

"What are you doing out there!" I exclaimed.

"Don't shout please," she said. "I could hear you better if you came outside."

Cautiously, I opened the door a bit, then a bit more. She was still there, shivering on the porch. She motioned for me to come out, so I tied my robe a little tighter and crept out on the porch.

"What's happening here?" I asked. "Aren't you cold? Do you want to come in?"

"I'm cold, all right. This San Francisco fog—I'd heard about it clear in . . . Oh well, . . . are you Dr. Edward Whetmore?" she asked.

"Call me Edd."

"You must come with me right away."

"I don't understand."

"Aren't you writing a book, part of which covers what radio will be like in the year 3000?"

"Well, yes, but what has that got to do with . . . ?

"I'm Athena, your guide. Now hurry, we must be off. You have a lot of people to see."

I asked her to wait while I dressed, and thought things over. I realize that following a woman, any woman, through the fog at midnight is a strange thing to do, even if she is beautiful and is wearing a long white dress, has long blonde hair, and seems trustworthy. Still, I decided to follow her, at least until I finally found out what it was all about.

We walked several blocks through the fog and then suddenly we were inside, in a long, warm corridor. Along the way, Athena was filling me in on her mission. She apparently knew about *The Magic Medium*, and wanted me to have a chance to see what radio was actually like in the year 3000. She was from that year, and had been chosen to take me on a tour of radio facilities in her own time. I cursed myself for not bringing my notebook. I also briefly considered that I had been working too many nights and weekends finishing this book, and I'd probably better see a psychiatrist. But that could wait until I got back to the twentieth century.

"So tell me, what's been happening in radio these last ten centuries or so?" I asked.

"Well, there's really a lot to tell, too much for our brief time I'm afraid. But some of the trends that you talked about way back there in the twentieth century are still going on today."

"You know, in a way I'm surprised that radio still exists in your time. I mean, lots of people predicted the end of it, even in my time."

She laughed a soft laugh.

"It has a habit of coming and going. It almost died out around 2300, and again just a hundred years or so ago. But you know, it keeps coming back. And there's always the music."

"You mean music is still the bulk of radio programming?" I felt pretty smug all of a sudden.

"Yes, music is a lot of it—music, news, information, interstellar weather—you know, the usual."

"Oh, sure," I said nonchalantly.

By this time, we'd reached our first destination, a strange hospital-looking place where a white-coated intern waited impatiently. Athena explained that people in the year 3000 did not have radio sets per se, but were given tiny implants in their ears that allowed them to tune in whatever and whenever they wanted, simply by thinking about it.

"A noticeable improvement," I observed.

Once I had my radio, I began tuning around to the various stations. Oddly, there still seemed to be many of the formats that we'd had in the twentieth century. First, there was Top-40. An almost-familiar DJ was announcing the songs that had just played. Then the next set started, and I realized he was playing three songs at the same time.

"How can anyone listen to that noise? It's terrible!" I complained.

"Dr. . . . er, Edd, I'm surprised at you," Athena said, "Why, people used to call some forms of radio noise even back in your day. Besides, we can now absorb much more information and music. Things just kept speeding up so much that the audience got used to hearing multiple layers of sound. It was about 2350 or so, I think, when Todd Storzlendon, one of the real innovators, began programming two songs at once. They called him crazy, but it worked. Now three is the norm, and some of the more avant garde stations program four or five. It's a real information explosion!"

"I can hear that," I said. As I tuned around, I was relieved to know that the old beautiful music format hadn't changed. I could still hear a Mantovani-like string section playing a lush and decidedly tranquilized version of "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

"I'm amazed that some of the songs that were popular in my day are still popular now."

"Well, radio and recording allow us to relive the past whenever we wish," Athena explained, "You see, until recording, everything was lost. Oh, we could hear the old fugues and so on, but not actually played by the writers. You should have given credit to your pioneers who originated audio and other types of storage systems; it's made all the difference in our time. But to explain, I had that station pick out some tunes I knew you'd find familiar."

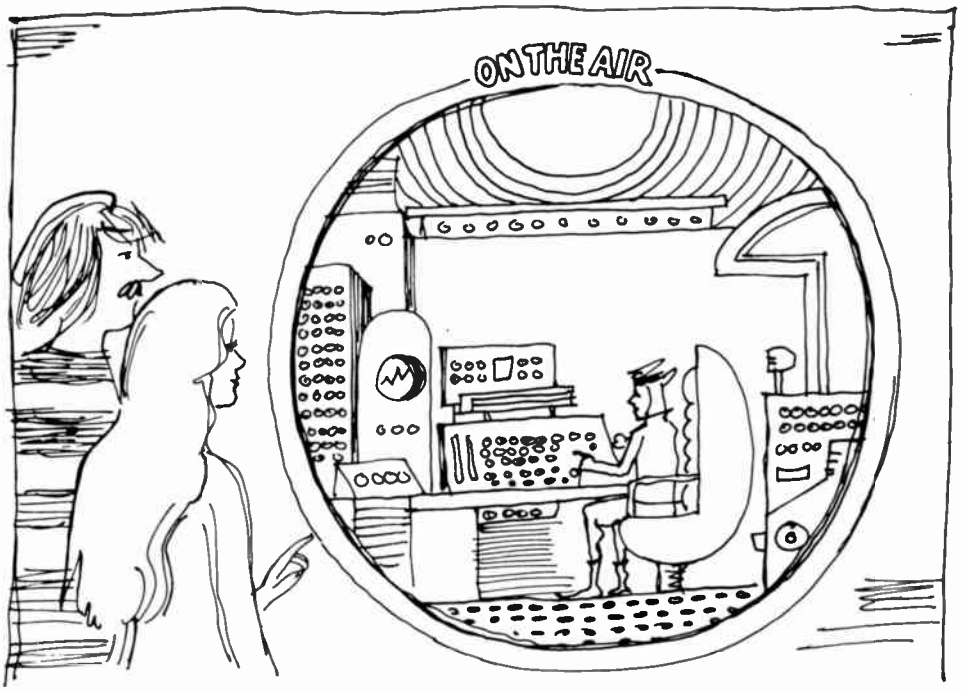
"Why, that's nice of you," I said, making a mental note that in the year 3000 they still take requests. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

I began to notice that there were an awful lot of channels.

"How many channels are available?" I asked.

"About as many as you can imagine. Yet, despite thousands of available channels, most people stay with the same two or three, just as they did in your time. But we do have greater diversity now. People can have exactly what they want, exactly when they want it. For example, if they played a song that you particularly liked, you could automatically hear it over again, then join the program without missing a thing. Pretty nice, huh?"

All during this time, we had been walking down another long




corridor. Up ahead, I saw a familiar looking red light and a sign above it that said "On the air."

Athena explained that this was a studio of a popular music station and that I was to be given a chance to look around. As we walked in, the DJ, a young guy about 20 or so with short-cropped black hair, looked up and waved. The studio was very futuristic, with all sorts of lights and buttons. It made me remember the first time I had walked into a studio; everything looked very complicated and confused. When the DJ had a moment, I asked him about the music.

"I don't know what it was about in your day, but for us, the music is mostly about love. You know, romance and that sort of thing. Take this new song by Turbo and the Rockets. The plot line is simple: boy meets girl from another planet, but the two planets are at war. She leaves him for an alien. You know, the usual stuff."

"Sure, we had our star-crossed lovers, too, you know."

"Right. Then there is a new wave of electronic music that's been around for a couple of years. No content, just form, a sharp series of vibrations. It's interesting stuff, but it'll never replace rock 'n' roll."

"That's good to hear," I murmured as we were walking out the door.

Our next stop was a production room with lots of people running around and strange sounds coming out.

"You wouldn't recognize radio production today," Athena explained. "Everything is done in miniature. The huge records of your time were so clumsy; I don't know how you managed. Now everything is taped on micromini cassettes, with sound reproduction every bit as good as the original—and no scratches."

"I'm all for that," I said, thinking about my own collection of scratched and worn-out discs.

Our next stop was in front of a set of huge double doors marked "Audience/Client Relations." Athena explained there were no sales departments anymore, but simply liaison people who got the audience together with the sponsors who offered goods or services. We walked in and were greeted by a secretary in a trim black business suit. The carpeting was thick, and the interior of the office was lushly furnished.

"I see the sales people still have all the bucks," I said out loud. Athena smiled and showed me into an interior office that was even more lushly furnished.

"Sam, I want you to meet Dr. Edward Whetmore. He's here from the twentieth century to investigate modern radio."

"Call me Edd," I said.

"Welcome Edd. Sorry, this time travel business is fairly new, you know. I've never quite gotten used to talking with people from so long ago. But sit down. How can I help you?"

"I'd like to know a little about sales . . . er, I mean audience/client relations. How does it compare with the kind of thing we were doing?"

Sam lit a huge cigar and stared out the window for a moment.

"Well, if I remember my history correctly, things haven't changed all that much. We still try to get listeners together with sponsors. I guess the biggest shift came in about the twenty-fifth century, when we went all-voluntary."

"All-voluntary?"

"Yes. You see, the listeners hear only the commercials they want to hear now, and only about the products they're interested in buying."

"If they had tried that in our time, no ads ever would have reached the audience," I said.

Sam laughed. "Some of the old mossbacks opposed the new system when it was instituted. Claimed it would ruin the economy and all. But actually, it's worked out much better. People still buy a lot of things they could probably do without, I guess, but now they listen to ads only for the products that interest them. It's great for the clients because they pay to reach an audience that's already interested. It's great for the audience

because they hear only the commercials they program for. Works out better all around, I'd say."

We thanked Sam and went through another maze of corridors and out several doors until we reached a large, modular looking building.

"I thought you'd be interested in seeing the university," Athena explained. "Of course, a lot of the traditional things handed down from the old European tradition are gone. There are no lecture classes anymore, and most people get their instruction at home. But we have a professor of ancient radio history who would like to meet you."

We went down another couple of corridors and knocked. Inside was a friendly old man with a twinkle in his eye and a long white beard. He could have doubled as Father Time or Santa Claus.

"Professor, I want you to meet Dr. Whetmore, our visitor from the twentieth century. You wanted to speak with him?"

"Just call me Edd," I interrupted.

The professor struggled to his feet and asked us to sit down. He was obviously trying to remember why we were there. In a few moments he spoke.

"Ah . . . yes, the radio man. How are you? By golly, it must have been fun to teach back then, real classrooms, students with bright, shining faces. Actual courses in radio production. What a joy."

"I like it," I said.

I asked the old professor about audience research. I was interested if any breakthroughs had been made in understanding the relation between the audience and the station programming.

"We did get some funding back in the twenty-second century to investigate some of these things. And the shift to voluntary commercials that came later helped us focus our attention more on the important cultural issues. I can't really sum it all up in such a brief conversation, but basically we found that the work started back in your twentieth century on uses and gratification theory proved most fruitful."

He stroked his beard as he continued.

"You see, for a long time we thought that people reacted involuntarily to what they heard. But now we know that listeners choose their programming quite carefully, if on a subconscious level. In other words, most people seek out what they want in sound, or other media for that matter. The task then became to understand what voluntary needs and requests, if any, might actually be harmful."

"And . . ."

"And we found that by and large media content is harmless, as long as the consumers were educated to the differences between it and what was happening in real life."

"Ah, the difference between Mediated Reality and Real Life," I beamed. "Well, that's what I wrote about in my media texts. Perhaps you've read the one I did on radio. It was called *The Magic Medium.*"

The old professor got a faraway look in his eyes.

"No, no, I can't recall that one, although I'm sure it's preserved in the computer archives. We don't have actual books anymore, you know. But it sounds interesting."

We thanked the professor for his time, and after walking out, I told Athena that I had hoped *The Magic Medium* might be remembered.

"You have to realize that that was over a thousand years ago," she smiled. "There have been a lot of books written since then."

"I guess," I sighed.

Athena looked at me sympathetically.

"But I'm sure it was remembered by all the students who read it, and that's really the important thing. After all, media change so quickly. A book is out of date in a hurry, no matter how effective it may be."

"I guess you're right," I said. "Well, what now?"

"Before you go back, I thought we'd drop into one of the entertainment centers where music programming is part of a total environment."

"You mean a disco?"

"That was the term that you used then. We call them environmental centers."

Just then we passed through a huge, neon-type portal and into a giant dance palace. A number of songs were playing simultaneously, and a strange assortment of couples were on the floor doing a dance that looked impossible. Athena motioned for me to come out on the floor with her. The lights and the music were pulsating, and the colored shadows that passed across us were almost hypnotic. I was obviously at least a thousand years behind the new contemporary dances, but no one seemed to notice, and I was grateful. Athena looked beautiful on the floor and appeared to be right in step with everyone.

During a break, we had a drink (some sort of purple concoction; I didn't ask what it was), and she asked me if I was tired. I was. We walked a few blocks to her place. For the first time, we were outside, and thousands of stars were visible in the night sky. Athena lived in a modern-looking "modular living space," but it was filled with what she called antiques. There was a Bob Dylan poster and pictures of the Beatles and several musical groups that were popular in the 1980s. Athena told me her speciality was twentieth-century radio and music, and that was why she was asked to guide me on the tour. I told her I was grateful for her company, and we talked for a few minutes.

"I think I'll change into something more comfortable," she said. "Just make yourself at home."

I sat on the couch and thought about all the things that I had learned that day. About the music and the studio, and the advances in sales, and the old professor. I think the drink must have gone to my head, for suddenly I felt a little warm and woozy. I stretched out on the couch. The last thing I remember was noticing an "antique" digital clock radio on a nearby table. Just as I was about to drop off, it went off for some inexplicable reason. I reached over to turn it off, and suddenly I was back in my own bed in San Francisco. It was my clock radio that was going off. It was 7:30 A.M., time to get up, go to the office, and start working on the final chapter of *The Magic Medium*.

I felt a little cheated that I'd never gotten to see what Athena changed into, but I was excited about what radio was like in the year 3000. It strikes me that things aren't really going to change all that much. Radio, like all media, is in our hands to do with as we will. As we develop better technologies, we also seem to be able to find new ways of understanding how the media influence and shape ourselves and our culture.

I guess some people would call me an optimist for thinking that we'll

someday solve problems like overcommercialization, or even for believing that radio will continue to exist in the year 3000. But after all, they've never danced with Athena!

## Queries and Concepts

1. This chapter represents one vision of what radio might be like in the year 3000. In a couple of pages, describe your own vision. How does it evolve from what we know about radio today?

2. From all you've read in *The Magic Medium,* what do you feel are the three greatest problems facing radio today? What kinds of steps can be taken to solve them?

3. Instead of going over the air, radio programming may someday be delivered straight to the home via a cable. In some markets, this is already happening. This makes an unlimited number of channels possible and virtually eliminates FCC regulation. How might these innovations change the structure of radio as we know it today?

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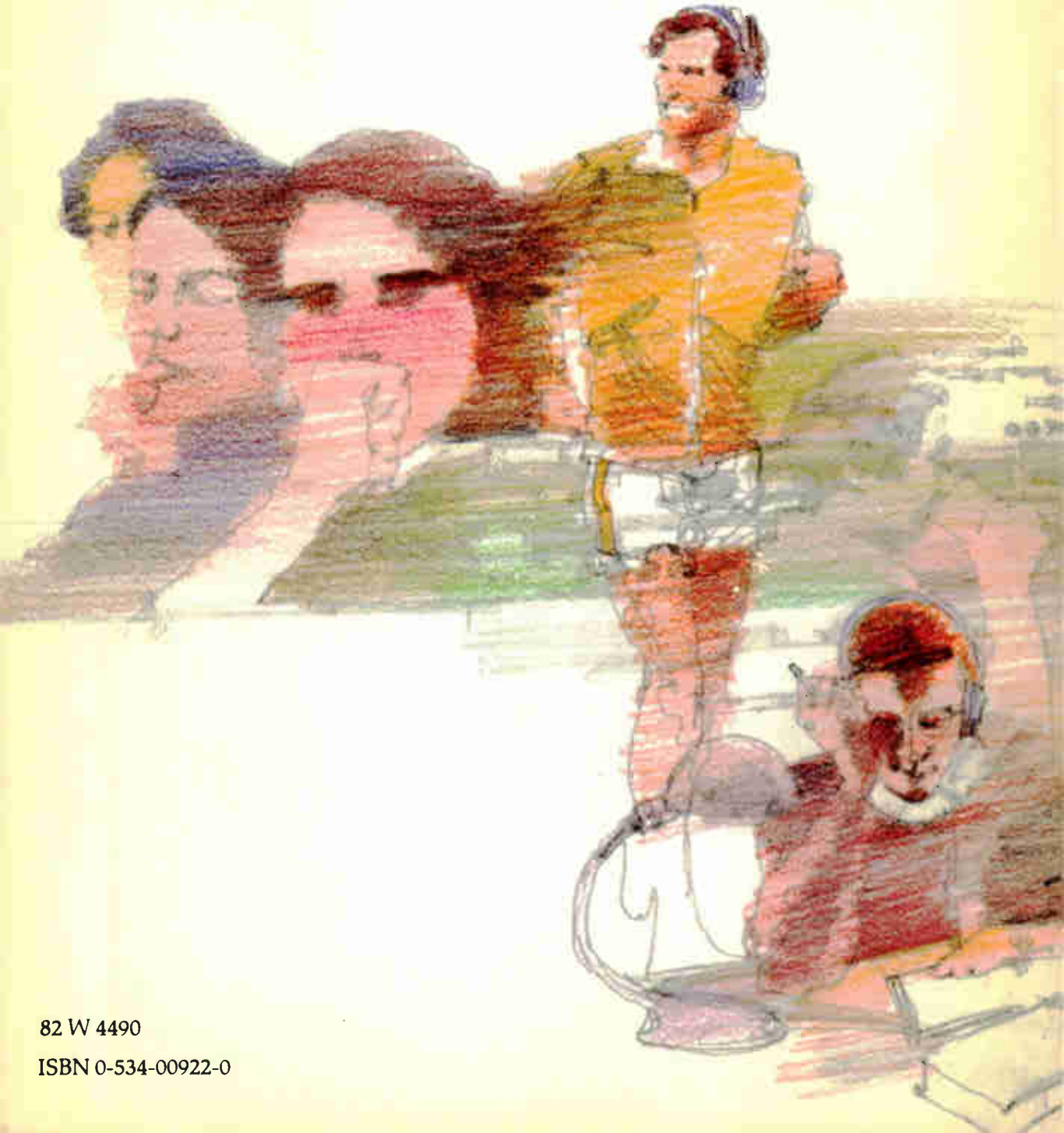

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