

## The Hits Just Keep Coming!

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tables. Despite our sometimes adversarial relationship, we need each other. Without the music, there is no format.

To the many program directors and air personalities — too numerous to mention — who inspired me in my youth and still inspire me today with their great radio stations past and present, I am truly grateful.

To the general managers who have graciously put their radio stations into my hands — Kevin Mashek, Clancy Woods, Tex Meyer, Nancy Tulli, Bill Schoening, Jack Palvino, Ken Spitzer, Bob Morgan, Terry Owen, and the

late Mickey Franko — thank you for your faith in me.

To the people who have worked with me and for me, I hope I have done right by you. I remember a young Kevin Weatherly running the board on Saturday nights in Phoenix, and an even younger Michelle Santosuosso joining KZZP from the nightclub where she was spinning records. More recently, J. J. Rice has headed to Syracuse for what will surely be the first in a long line of programming successes for him. I wish him well.

In a similar way, I know I would not be here today if not for the great program directors who believed in me and generously taught me what they knew so that I, in turn,

# CHR: MUST HEAR RADIO!



could teach others: Kevin Metheny, Bobby Christian, Cary Pall, Steve Kingston, Guy Zapoleon, Buddy Scott, and Steve Rivers.

Finally, I give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for my life and my career. Having become a born-again Chris-

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## The History Of Top 40 Radio

By Clarke Ingram

1948

In the period immediately after World War II, the 45rpm record and the 33-1/3rpm long-playing record (LP) are introduced. These new inventions replace old, scratchy 78rpm discs and allow radio stations to play more high-fidelity pre-recorded music.

1949

With the rising popularity of television, listenership to network programs on radio begins to fall rapidly. Radio is soon declared "dead" by many industry observers. While over 40 million households have radios, less than one million people listen regularly.

1950

The earliest network programs featuring hosted, pre-recorded music are heard on NBC. A new phrase comes into use: disc jockey, or DJ. The first all-DJ format debuts at KLAC in Los Angeles. It is soon No. 1 in the market.

1951

Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed begins playing "R&B" or "race" music on his nighttime show at WJWV. Known as "The Moondog," Freed soon dominates the ratings and is credited with originating the musical use of the phrase "rock and roll."

1952

In Omaha, Todd Storz notices that patrons are playing the same songs over and over on the jukebox. Thinking this might be a radio format idea, he does the same on local station KOWH. Within a few months, it has a 60% share of the listening audience.

1953

Gordon McLendon invents his own format at KLIF in Dallas. His disc jockeys must play 40 different records during their airshift, thus the "Top 40." McLendon is credited with inventing modern jingles and the "wild and crazy" promotions radio still does today.

1955

"Rock Around The Clock" by Bill Haley And The Comets becomes No. 1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart. This is the beginning of the rock and roll era. Many rock and roll sounds by black artists are covered in sanitized versions by white artists.

1956

Elvis Presley bursts onto the scene. With his unique style of music — blending R&B and country — his controversial gyrations, and his undeniable sex appeal and star quality, he becomes a voice of the younger generation and a major influence on popular music.

1958

KFWB in Los Angeles signs on with a Top 40 format. It soars to the top of the ratings and quickly becomes a format standard-bearer, imitated in many other markets.

1959

Many disc jockeys and program directors face congressional hearings on "payola," the practice of accepting money for airplay. While this is not yet illegal, the hearings will end the careers of Alan Freed and others and begin a conservative period in Top 40 music characterized by "squeaky clean" teen idols like Fabian and Pat Boone.

1960

ABC switches two of its 50,000-watt AM flagship stations, WABC in New York City and WLS in Chicago, to Top 40. With its other stations, including KQV in Pittsburgh and WXYZ in Detroit, ABC is a major player in the format throughout the AM Top 40 era.

1964

The Beatles lead the "British Invasion" and change the face of music forever. Motown music rises to the forefront, led

by the Supremes, Four Tops, and Temptations. WABC becomes the most-listened-to radio station in America, with a weekly audience of more than six million people. This is the Golden Age of Top 40 radio on the AM dial.

1965

Bill Drake debuts "Boss Radio" at KHJ in Los Angeles, which quickly climbs to the top of the ratings. Consisting of short jingles and quick DJ talkovers, Drake's approach is imitated everywhere and is still the basic format model for Top 40 today.

1966

Two important, influential, and legendary AM Top 40 stations sign on during this year: KFRC in San Francisco and WFIL in Philadelphia.

1967

"The Summer of Love" ushers in the psychedelic era in music. Listeners tired of pop music and fast-talking DJs on AM radio begin to switch to progressive "album" rock on FM stations like KMPX in San Francisco, leading to a schism among younger listeners.

1971

Buzz Bennett creates the "Q" format, a Top 40 approach much wilder than Bill Drake's. With screaming DJs, big-money contests, and an irreverent attitude, Bennett beats his former mentor Drake in many markets and helps to introduce Top 40 to the FM band.

1974

"Rock The Boat" by the Hues Corporation, considered by many the first disco record, dances its way to the top of the charts. Disco rises sharply in popularity over the next few years. Some Top 40 stations largely abandon their formats for disco.

1977

WTIC-FM in Hartford, CT debuts a new, high-energy Top 40 format that is the brainchild of consultant Mike Joseph. This will evolve into an approach called "Hot Hits," which will prove to be the format's savior in a few years.

1978

WKTU-FM in New York City signs on with an all-Disco format. It quickly soars to the top of the ratings, trouncing legendary WABC and signaling the end of the dominance of Top 40 (and music in general) on the AM dial.

1980

The beginning of a rock-oriented period at Top 40, with "corporate rock" by artists like Journey, Styx, Foreigner, REO Speedwagon, and Genesis dominating playlists; a more conversational "less talk" approach by DJs; and very little dance music.

1981

Mike Joseph debuts "Hot Hits" at WCAU-FM in Philadelphia, followed shortly thereafter by WBBM-FM in Chicago. A fast-paced, energetic format with a large cume audience, it sends both stations to the top of the ratings and again changes the face of Top 40.

1983

MTV ushers in a new era of Top 40 music. Scott Shannon signs on WHTZ-FM (Z100) in New York City, which goes from "worst to first" in 72 days and becomes the format's new role model. Many new Top 40 FM stations debut in the next few years.

1988

Top 40 reaches its peak of influence and popularity for the decade, marked by the renewed influence of dance music, teenage sound-alikes (Tiffany, Debbie Gibson), and the advent of rap music, which proves damaging to the format's adult listenership.

1989

A successful heritage Top 40 station, WBJW (BJ-105) in Orlando, FL, changes to WOMX (Mix 105.1). Their format is "Hot AC," or Top 40 without the teens. While not the first station of its kind, this idea will be copied many times over the next few years.

1990

The economy falters. Highly leveraged companies sell their radio stations. Some Top 40 stations switch to Country, others become more adult. Current music declines, and the Top 40 stations that remain play a confusing mix of Vanilla Ice and Bette Midler.

1992

Influenced by MTV, which still caters to teenagers, Alternative or Modern Rock stations rise in popularity with younger listeners. Top 40 stations such as Z100 in New York City and WNNX (99-X) in Atlanta all but abandon their heritage to pursue this musical direction.

1994

Top 40 is declared "dead" by a major radio programming consultant, but Woodstock '94 instead proves to mark the zenith of the Alternative movement. "Another Night" by Real McCoy, a dance song on the Arista label, is a hit against the odds at Top 40 radio and begins to swing the pendulum in the other direction.

1995

As Alternative music becomes more mainstream, a new format evolves: Modern AC. Essentially Hot AC with a pop/rock base and no rhythm, it is first heard on stations like KYSR (Star 98.7) in Los Angeles and KFMB-FM in San Diego.

1996

WKTU, which had signed off 10 years earlier, returns to the New York City airwaves with a Dance format. It rockets to the top in 120 days and decimates Z100, which swings back from its Alternative-leaning direction to compete as a true Top 40 station.

1997

Top 40 is back in full force, not as a teenage format, but with a strong base of 18-34 adults. Music by pop artists like Hanson, Savage Garden, and Spice Girls dominates the airwaves. Many Top 40 stations experience significant ratings increases.

1998

Top 40 is alive and well!

*Author's Note:* While intended to be factual, this history of Top 40 radio must, by its very nature, be somewhat subjective. This is my interpretation of the key events that shaped the format; your opinion may differ. Not every important event is listed. This is a thumbnail sketch and not intended to be exhaustive. Sources often disagree on the details and dates of these events, a few of which may even be apocryphal. And, finally, it is impossible to include the name of every person important to the development of the format. If you are aware of any documentable, factual changes that should be made to this history, I welcome your input. Thanks, and the hits just keep coming!

For the past four years, Clarke Ingram has been the Operations Manager and Program Director of WXPY-FM (98 PXY)/Rochester, New York. He has also served as Operations Manager of KZZP-AM & FM/Phoenix and Program Director of WBZZ-FM (B-94)/Pittsburgh. He is probably best remembered for his achievement as Program Director of KRQQ-FM/Tucson in the late 1980s, where he created the highest-rated Top 40 station in the nation. Ingram has also been an on-air personality at WHTZ-FM (Z100)/New York City, WEGX-FM (Eagle 106) Philadelphia, and other stations. He has been honored three times with awards as "Program Director of the Year" and has been a nominee on numerous other occasions. This year, Ingram is celebrating 20 years in the radio industry (1978-1998). You can reach Clarke Ingram at (716) 272-7260 or by e-mail at [CIngram@aol.com](mailto:CIngram@aol.com).