



JOEL DENVER

On The 'High-Energy Dance' Tip

Programmers discuss Churban's latest music trend and ratings booster

Following the recent emergence of New Rock crossovers into mainstream CHR, the newest music trend is a resurgence of what a growing number of Churban PDs call "high-energy dance music."

KQHT (Hot 97.7)/San Jose PD Bob Perry credits the station's Fall '93 Arbitron 4.1-5.5 12+ jump (which upped 'QHT from sixth to fourth in that demo) — along with No. 2 placements among adults 18-34 and 25-34 — to the re-addition of select dance titles.



Bob Perry

"We've made the streets come out of the speakers," says Perry. "We're in a tough three-way battle with [nearby San Francisco Churbans] KMEL and [KSOL] Wild 107. We've discovered the audience has a bigger appetite for high-energy dance music — 'freestyle' and 'house' [genres] — than in the recent past. The return to a more rhythmic approach has made all the difference in the world for us in terms of total audience and our core demos."

Dance Music That's Working

Programmers from KQHT/San Jose, KSOL/San Francisco, and WBBM-FM/Chicago pooled their knowledge to assemble a list of "high-energy dance" currents and recurrences that have researched well for them.

AWESOME 3/Don't Go COLLAGE/It'll Be Loving You CULTURE BEAT/Mr. Vain DAIZE/You Took My Heart DENINE/Remember You JOCELYN ENRIQUEZ/ I've Been Thinking About You GABRIELLE/Dreams GOODMEN/Give It Up HARD COREY & WRAY/Love Train LEGACY/Girls Do It Just For Fun LEGACY/Stay With Me Tonight LIL' SUZY/Take Me In Your Arms MK/Crazy NV/Girl You Hear Me Crying JOHNNY O/Runaway Love REEL TO REAL/Like To Move It REEL TO REAL/Strictly Rhythm STAXX/Joy URBAN COOKIE COLLECTIVE/ The Key, The Secret ROB WOODS/ Give You All My Lovin'

Many PDs got caught up in the hype that freestyle and dance were dead, and they rode the rap fad too far by reacting only to what labels were pushing.

—Bob Perry

'Gangsta' Reaction?

Is the hunger for dance music simply a reaction to an overdose of rap, particularly the "gangsta" type? Perry replies, "Don't get me wrong: We'll play rap records, and adults 18-34 still want them. But it's a question of better balance. Many PDs got caught up in the hype that freestyle and dance were dead, and they rode the rap fad too far by reacting only to what labels were pushing."

"Rap records are still selling, but SoundScan won't show the record sales we could've had if we were in touch with listeners who wanted to hear other things. We have a tendency to chase fads, and we've mistak-

Smart radio people follow trends, not fads. We're seeing the rebirth of freestyle and dance.

—Rick Thomas

enly ignored the other genres of rhythmic hit music because we stopped listening to the audience. We thought we had it all figured out."

Perry and other PDs are successfully using "old school" titles — hit dance tracks from the '80s — which are compatible with current music. These programmers are discovering that listeners 12-24 treat them like new records (see "A Flashback To The Old School"). "The best example is Tom Tom Club's 'Genius Of Love,' which younger demos think is a current hit. It still has great 25-34 appeal, so we bang it several times a day.

"There's a fine line to walk on rotations. We've tightened up consid-

erably, playing 25-35 fulltime currents, depending on available music. Our A's now rotate every two hours, with new music turning over every two to three hours for familiarity. Music is divided into 'High-Energy Dance,' 'Urban Crossovers,' 'Ballads,' 'Rap,' and 'Old School' categories. We try to mix one of each category into each half-hour, without playing any two from the same category back to back."

Records 'Held Hostage'

Across the bay at KSOL, PD Rick Thomas — now in a head-to-head tie with KMEL at 4.3 — agrees stations like his have been overlooking dance music. "A year ago, we went to the streets to find music the audience was passionate about. We got sucked in by the rap fad, while house and freestyle music went underground. Dr. Dre's 'Nuthin' But A "G" Thang' was novel. But the floodgates opened, we overdosed on it — just as we once did with dance — and blew off females with too much of it.

"Smart radio people follow trends, not fads. We're seeing the rebirth of freestyle and dance. Combining dance with female-friendly rap music means being more selective with slightly



Rick Thomas

tighter rotations [about 2:20 for powers]. It avoids a sameness in sound, preventing us from becoming musical wallpaper. Our vibe is to appeal to young, hip people, but not exclusively to 15-year-olds on the street. So we don't do a lot of dayparting."

Wild 107 APD/MD Michael Martin concurs: "Overuse of one type of music gives a station a monotone sound. Dance and freestyle never really disappeared; it's a poor sign that radio simply jumped only on the fastest-reaction material instead of playing a variety of sounds. It's like some of these dance records were being held hostage by people's false perceptions of what was really happening."

'Freestyle' Vs. 'House'

"High-energy dance music" can be broken down into two main genres: "freestyle" and "house." Here are descriptions and examples of each:

- **Freestyle** — Also referred to as "Cha-Cha" or "Latin Hip-Hop," it's more Hispanic in appeal and crosses easily to non-ethnic audiences. *Examples:* Johnny O's "Runaway Love" and Corina's "Temptation."
- **House** — This more well-rounded, beat-driven sound — about 126 beats per minute — also is simply called "Dance." It's almost tribal sounding, with a deep bass-line groove. *Examples:* Reality's "Yolanda," Robin S's "Show Me Love," and Bizarre Inc.'s "I'm Gonna Get You."

Dayparting Dance

WBBM-FM (B96)/Chicago PD Todd Cavanah spotted this trend in the middle of the Fall '93 Arbitron. Subsequently, he re-focused his station toward the dance tip. "In the October Arbitrends, we earned a 4.3. In November, we inched to 4.4. After adding some dance titles in November, we jumped to 5.4 in December. We moved up to third among 18-34 adults and females; mornings leapt 4.2-5.4 12+.

"Initial dayparting of dance is important. Teens aren't exposed to a lot



Todd Cavanah

of club records: They aren't old enough to get into [clubs], and MTV plays few dance videos. I start them during the day — the opposite of what we used to do. We get some input from the Box, but we've really discovered what's happening

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—Todd Cavanah

through our music department's local research.

"We were at a bit of a disadvantage until I got MD Erik Bradley and Dance Coordinator Jeff Andrews aboard in October. But we're getting solid input from the dance scene again at the clubs and smaller stores not hooked into SoundScan. This music has taken the place of a lot of the slower Churban ballads, which were all the labels were pushing.

"Labels will begin to explore freestyle and house again. I fear that radio will overplay it, just as we got saturated with what I call 'industry rap records': mechanical-sounding non-hits. When B96 had a 6.9, all seven of our 'powers' came from the streets. But we lost ratings when we played only the industry records. Now we're redeveloping our own local music identity."

Despite the recent uproar over gangsta rap's lyrical content, Cavanah doesn't see a total rap backlash. "While a number of women were blown off by too much rap, women and teens are into the dance music we've added. We're not going to stop playing hit rap records — we never played titles with questionable lyrics anyway. Since B96 once again plays some titles exclusive to the market, we're seeing two phenomena: The records are burning faster for our core, but they're burning slower for the general market listener. As a result, we're experimenting with rotations to find a comfortable level for the core."

A Flashback To The Old School

This week's PDs contributed a list of strong gold dance songs. Many call these tunes "Old School"; WBBM-FM (B96)/Chicago calls them "Flashbacks":

AFRO-RICAN/Give It All You Got
GEORGE CLINTON/Atomic Dog
CONNIE/Funky Little Beat
CYNTHIA/Change On Me
DEBBIE DEB/When I Hear Music
FREESTYLE/Don't Stop The Rock
FREESTYLE/
The Party Has Just Begun
JAYA/If You Leave Me Now
LIL LOUIS/French Kiss
CHERYL LYNN/Got To Be Real
NICE N' WILD/Diamond Girl
NOEL/Silent Morning
JOHNNY O/Fantasy Girl
ONE WAY/Cutie Pie
TOM TOM CLUB/Genius Of Love
TRINERE/
They're Playing Our Song
SA-FIRE/Boy I've Been Told
SA-FIRE/Don't Break My Heart
SECRET TIES/
Dancing In My Sleep
SHANNON/Let The Music Play
STEPHANIE/Get Away
SWEET SENSATION/
Take It While It's Hot
SWEET SENSATION/
Sincerely Yours
ZAPP & ROGER/
More Bounce To The Ounce
ZAPP & ROGER/Doo Wah Ditty