



Voices made visible—from left, Lance Lenares of KUSP, Sullivan (Kathy Roddy) of KFAT, KLRB's Steve Seaweed, and Johnny Morgan of KDON.

DEEJAYS: PLAYING THE PROGRAM

MARK HUNTER

Since the late 1960's there have been two kinds of radio stations, those aimed at music freaks, and those designed to attract a mass audience. There has been one constant factor, however: both formats relied on disc jockeys for their appeal, on personalities who could take hold of listeners with their voices. The national division between AM and FM has given way to competition for listeners within individual markets, and in the Santa Cruz area, the deejays still have a great deal of control over the outcome.

"We're not programming to your music freaks," said Dana Jang, a jock and music director at KOME in San Jose, Arbitron's (a rating system) number one area station. "We're programming to people who may not be interested in music, but they want a background under what they're doing." He speaks from a foundation of market research, checks on local record sales, and national surveys.

Jang has a graduate degree in marketing from San Jose State. "Being a deejay is a lot of facets," he said. "It's not just spinning records, it's promotion, research, administration—a fairly technical field." How does he

see his role on the air? "The deejay's a friend," he answered, "not a music expert, but somebody giving information of relevance to the listener. People aren't always thinking about music, and we don't want to bore them with trivia."

If the voice of scientific research gives you pause, consider that in the past year KDON radio in Salinas went to an automated format in FM. They use the TM format, which is put together in Dallas. TM offers a variety of music, which KDON selects to fit specific audiences at different times of the day. What were the results? "Our ratings at least doubled from the previous (Arbitron) survey," said Johnny Morgan, jock and music director at KDON. He added, "You have to decide who you're going to attract." Do they attract one group more than another? Though reluctant to label his audience, he conceded that "generally speaking, the teens listen to us."

A comment of Morgan's illustrates the deejay's role: "You have to have more than music," he said, "because everyone has music." KDON's jocks are told "right off," he said, that they're expected to do community work, to be involved in dances, promotions, and so on. A major part of their job is putting the station in a personal light.

Not every station makes those demands. Carmel's KLRB, a far more low-key operation, couldn't send its deejays all over the map, because some of them, like Genial Johnny, don't have cars. Like most front-line soldiers, Johnny isn't especially well-paid for his work; after taxes he makes \$409 a month, before doing commercials. This for a job that consumes time with giant claws, six days a week.

Why does he do it? "I like playing tunes. I get a lot out of the ego gratification, and a little local fame. There's no price on that—some people would do anything for it. A reason it's so cheap is there's a line of meat waiting to take my gig."

Genial Johnny has far more power over what he plays than Dana Jang, who described his task as "being creative within a niche. You set up limitations, and try

to be creative within those limitations." But a jock trying for a mass audience, in many ways, finds his limitations already set.

Perhaps the freest jocks in the area, excepting those on non-commercial stations (where volunteer labor gets personal satisfaction in return for their time) are those on KFAT. "If we were going for younger listeners," said Sullivan, an afternoon deejay, "we'd have to play a Top-40 format. . . I withdrew from rock 'n' roll, it was getting violent and obnoxious, with a lot of violence against women." Once almost exclusively a country-rock station, KFAT "drifted away from that," she said. "It just started that people would play different kinds of music." What limits does she have? "I play country-rock, though some of it bores me to tears, like the Eagles and Ronstadt, because people like it."

It doesn't take a profound thinker to see that deejays who play exclusively what people like will be successful. But can they change audience tastes? In this area, the answer would seem to be yes—over a long period of time, and not dramatically. Lance Lenares of non-commercial KUSP has had the luxury of three years to build an audience for his reggae show, and is generally credited with establishing reggae here. "I know what impact I've had on the community," he said. "I have people who've been taping me for three years." It's also true that KLRB was a major factor in Snail's success (as Snail guitarist Ken Kraft confirmed), but KLRB couldn't make Snail Top 10 hereabouts.

"It's a big responsibility (to push newer music)," said Steve Seaweed, program director and deejay at KLRB, "because there aren't so many people at the forefront." He added "I haven't had a lot of public recognition—occasionally I get in to free concerts." What has he gotten out of it? "I've never been bored with my job."

The scorecard in the competition between "music first" stations and those that follow the audience is tilted toward the researchers, and probably always will be. What makes the competition interesting in the Santa Cruz area is that the audience for the funky stations, and for the DJ's who play what they like, has kept them in business with the mass-oriented stations. •

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