

FAREWELL TO KFAC KWKW MOVES 30 KHZ AND GREETINGS TO KAZN

by Steve Mittman

At 7:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on Tuesday evening, January 17, 1989, radio station KFAC-AM, 1330 kHz., Los Angeles, California bid a brief one-and-a-half minute farewell to its listeners on the AM band, then signed off the air forever. [The station had been simulcasting the classical music format of KFAC-FM 92.3, which continued on.] KFAC-AM had had a very historic and colorful past, with its roots digging deep into the beginnings of broadcast radio. Unfortunately, the station had become the latest victim of the plight striking many AM stations today: namely, they are literally struggling to remain alive due to the overwhelming listener appeal of FM radio; and many, such as KFAC, have lost the battle and gone under.

In perhaps a final gesture of "tribute" to KFAC and its historic past, this article was written in an attempt to preserve--for "written historical record"--the final words of KFAC, as well as to describe the other related events of that historic day in Los Angeles broadcast history.

KFAC-AM 1330 kHz., owned by Classic Communications, Inc., had been sold to radio station KWKW, which operated on 1300 kHz., for \$8.75 million. Interestingly, two days after KFAC-AM left the air, it was publicly announced that, in a separate transaction, Classic Communications will soon sell the FM station as well--which had not even been on the market--to Evergreen Media Corporation, a Dallas-based radio station chain (which had once owned Los Angeles stations KTNQ-1020 and KLVE-107.5) for \$55 million--the highest price ever paid for a classical music station. Louise Heifetz and Edward Argow, doing business as Classic Communications, Inc., had purchased KFAC AM and FM in 1986 for \$33.5 million; and will receive a total of \$63.7 million for the two stations--quite a financial bonanza for Classic Communications! [One can't help but wonder that perhaps if Evergreen had come forth with their offer for KFAC just a few months earlier, the KFAC stations most likely would have been sold together as a pair, and KFAC-AM might now still be around!]

Evergreen Media Corp., the new owner of KFAC 92.3 FM, said it plans to keep KFAC's classical music format as well as its current on-air personalities. However, classic music stations traditionally have relatively small audiences, and media experts have already predicted that the high price paid for the station most likely will eventually force the station to change its format to attract a larger audience and boost profits. [KFAC-FM garnered only a 1.5 rating during Fall, 1988, according to Arbitron Rating Service; by contrast, Los Angeles' top-rated station, dance music-formatted KPWR ("Power 106") had a 7.2 rating. (Each rating point equals about 17,000 listeners over age 12, tuned in during an average quarter hour between 6 a.m. and midnight.)]

To keep things in perspective, a very brief history of KFAC is hereby presented, but for the full history of the station (as well as of KWKW)--through the events as described in this article--the reader is referred to a work by IRCA member Jim Hilliker entitled, "Los Angeles Radio History Repeats Itself (Sort Of)," which appeared in the December 31, 1988 issue of the IRCA's DX Monitor.

KFAC began operating in 1922, although with different calls. Jim Hilliker provides this brief overview of the station prior to its becoming KFAC: "KFAC began in 1922 as a continuation of the license for KJS. They later changed calls from KJS to KTBI, as they were operated by 'The Bible Institute.' When the depression hit, they could no longer afford to run the station, and sold it in 1930 to E. L. Cord (creator and manufacturer of the Cord and Auburn automobiles) for \$25,000. In 1931, the station became KFAC--the new call reflecting the owner of their building, Fuller, plus Auburn, plus Cord." KFAC-FM came on the air in 1948, the same year that the two stations began programming classical music. Over the years, KFAC AM and FM changed hands a few times, until 1969, when ASI Communications, Inc. acquired the stations. In 1986, after owning the stations for 17 years, ASI Communications sold the stations to Classic Communications, Inc.

And now, Spanish language-format KWKW (or "KW--La Mexicana," as they call themselves), licensed to Pasadena, California, purchased the 1330 kHz. frequency from Classic Communications. The reason: The 1330 kHz. frequency, with its greater power (5,000 watts day and night) and coverage pattern configuration, will afford them an approximately five times greater nighttime range than can the 1300 kHz. power (5,000 watts day; 1,000 watts night) and pattern; and will thus enable them to better reach and serve the Hispanic communities in the greater Los Angeles and Orange County areas--and especially the large Hispanic communities in the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys.

With the move, 1300 kHz. then became available, and a new radio station--KAZN--has now begun operating on that frequency. KAZN (or "K-Asian") is an all-Asian formatted station; and, in fact, is the first radio station in North America to provide all Asian programming. Interestingly, KAZN is owned by George R. Fritzinger, who by an ironic coincidence, was a part-owner of ASI Communications, Inc. when it owned the KFAC stations prior to 1986! So, in essence, a three-way swap (albeit "delayed"!) has occurred!

It should be noted that this complex set of transactions, moves, the end of one station, and beginning of a new one, are--technically--merely station sales and accompanying call letter changes. That is, though we can appreciate the unusual set of events which have occurred, from the standpoint of the F.C.C., 1330 kHz. has simply had a call change from KFAC to KWKW (and is still licensed to Los Angeles, California); and likewise, 1300 kHz. has simply gone from being KWKW to becoming KAZN (and is still licensed to Pasadena, California).

Here now are the words and events of that historic day in radio history--Tuesday, January 17, 1989:

6:58 p.m. [1330 & 92.3]: KFAC AM 1330 and FM 92.3 simulcasted, but typically all station identifications were simply "92.3 KFAC-FM." The AM, for all intents and purposes, was never mentioned or "acknowledged." The only exception was during the required "legal ID" at the top of the hour (and even then, the AM was "acknowledged" in an "off-hand" manner as possible!) with: "92.3 KFAC FM and AM, Los Angeles." However, as the end approached for KFAC-AM, in perhaps a final moment of nostalgia, the AM was "acknowledged" not only just the usual once--but a very unusual twice!: "92.3 KFAC FM and AM, Los Angeles." There was a break for a couple of commercials, then again: "92.3 KFAC FM and AM, Los Angeles -- your only choice for classical music 24 hours a day. I'm Rich Capparella. Tomorrow, between 3 and 7, we'll be featuring music by Lalo, Chopin, and the 'Violin Concerto No. 1' by Korngold, featuring Itzhak Perlman. Weather permitting, we'll see you then. The time right now is 7:00." [There was a momentary pause on both the AM and FM--apparently so the necessary switches could be depressed to separate the AM from the FM--and then...:]

7:00 p.m. [92.3]: Louise Heifetz announced, "This is 'Arts Tonight'..." and classical music continued.

7:00 p.m. [1330]: "This is Louise Heifetz, president of KFAC, and this is the final broadcast on KFAC-AM 1330. On this occasion it is fitting for us to remember that KFAC has served Southern California for some 57 years--one of a small group of stations which brought music, news, and entertainment to audiences in radio's heyday in the 30's and 40's. It was in 1948 that KFAC committed itself to classical music programming, the same year that KFAC-FM began operation. Over the years, virtually the entire audience for classical music has shifted to the FM band. As a result, KFAC-AM has been transferred to new owners, and at midnight tonight, the programming of KWKW -- 'La Mexicana' will be heard at 1330 on the dial. The facilities formally occupied by KWKW at 1300 will be taken over by a new station which will serve Southern California's Asian community. It is with pride, mingled with sadness, that we say good-bye to our audience on the AM band. Our regular programming continues 24 hours a day at 92.3 FM."

Male announcer (probably Bob Goldfarb, v.p. of programming and operations): "With this broadcast we conclude operation of KFAC-AM, which has served Southern California listeners since 1931. At 1330 on your dial, this is KFAC, Los Angeles."

At that point, KFAC's carrier was immediately turned off, and KFAC left the air forever.

There was also another noteworthy final moment of nostalgia at the very end. Years ago, when the AM and FM stations were programmed separately, the AM would typically give its legal ID as: "At 1330 on your dial, this is KFAC, Los Angeles." And, in a last moment of sweet remembrance, those words were again heard as the final words ever spoken on KFAC!

7:01:30 - 11:22 p.m. [1330]: The 1330 kHz. frequency was completely unoccupied (that is, "open") in Los Angeles! [The stations heard on 1330 by myself during this time period were KMRR, South Tucson, Arizona and KGAK, Gallup, New Mexico; and tentatively, KWKM, Monehans, Texas may have been briefly heard as well.]

8:00 p.m. [92.3]: At this time there was a legal call change from what had been KFAC-FM to KFAC: "92.3 KFAC, Los Angeles -- Southern California's first station for classical music." Thus, the historic call letters live on!

11:00 p.m. [1300]: KWKW gives its final legal ID on 1300 kHz.: "KWKW, Pasadena-Los Angeles."

11:22 p.m. [1330]: Suddenly, Spanish music (in the middle of a song) popped on the air on 1330 kHz. The music played was being programmed independently of 1300 kHz. (that is, it was not a simulcast of 1300 kHz.).

11:31 p.m. [1330]: A male announcer, probably from the KWKW engineering department, said: "This is KWKW, Pasadena." Then, ten seconds later, apparently realizing his mistake which no doubt was caused by "force of habit," returned and corrected himself, "This is KWKW, Los Angeles -- 1330!"

11:31 - 11:58 p.m. [1330]: The Spanish music continued. Occasionally, between songs, an announcer would come on and say (translated here from Spanish): "20 minutes to go," "10 minutes to go," "6 more minutes," and so on. It seemed strange to be hearing KWKW on 1300 kHz. and 1330 kHz. at the same time, and with separate programming on each frequency!

11:35 - 11:50 p.m. [1300]: The D.J. spoke continuously and excitedly about the upcoming frequency change. He took a few phone calls from listeners who wished the station best wishes and congratulations. At one point, in what was either a moment of sheer silliness, or perhaps as a "preview" of their new jingle, the D.J. sung for his listeners: "Trece treinta (13-30), La Me-xi-caaaa-naaa!"

11:55 p.m. [1300]: The D.J. read off a long, long list of names of people who were connected with the station and involved with the frequency change.

11:58 - 11:59:59 p.m. [1300]: The D.J. again sang his little "13-30" jingle, told everyone it was time to tune to 1330 kcs., and then said "Buenos noches" (good night). There was a final "Kah Doble-U -- La Mexicana" jingle played on 1300 kHz., and then one last song was played. At the end of the song, at exactly the final second before midnight, the D.J. said, "Adios de trece cientos" (Good-bye from 1300).

11:58 p.m. - 12:00 a.m. [1330]: The lively "The Mexican Hat Dance" was played. Moments before midnight, it was suddenly cut off, and a new song began.

12:00 a.m. [1330]: Over music came the legal ID: "KWKW, Los Angeles." Then: "Amigos, muy buenos dias..." There was then much hoopla, applauding, whistling, cheering, and many mentions of "la fiesta" (the festivities) to celebrate their "mas potencia" (more power). Then, speeches were given by the station's president and general manager about the entire transaction, how and why they acquired the frequency and studios from KFAC, and so on. After the speeches, the celebrating continued.

12:00 a.m. [1300]: At exactly midnight, there was a legal ID (and call change for the frequency): "KAZN, Pasadena."

Instrumental music ("American-sounding") then began. After one minute, two announcements (lasting a total of 20 seconds) were made--the first in Spanish; the second in English. The first announcement (again, in Spanish, but translated here) was: "Attention, friends. We are notifying you that KWKW - 'La Mexicana' can now be found on the frequency of 1330. Please tune your radio to 1330. Thank you." This was then immediately followed by this announcement in English: "Radio Korea will be on today, Wednesday, at 12 noon. Sorry. See you today."

The instrumental music then began again, and after one minute, the two announcements repeated again. The entire one minute, 20 second tape-loop repeated over and over again the entire morning, with automated breaks occurring at exactly the top of each hour for legal ID's: "KAZN, Pasadena."

[Due to various technical difficulties, KWKW's frequency change was actually four days late (it was originally scheduled to occur on Saturday, January 14, 1989). Therefore, KAZN was also likewise four days late in beginning its programming. One may conjecture that KAZN no doubt had already begun publicizing their new

Korean programming in the Korean communities; and thus the apology given (i.e., "sorry") may have been directed to those people whom may have trying to tune in the program for the past four days.]

KAZN actually sells "blocks" of air time to individual production companies; and they in turn may sell "slots" of time to other commercial advertisers, or do with their block of time as they desire. (One might draw an analogy to subleasing an apartment.) In essence, the production company produces a program targeted for a particular audience (say, a two- or three-hour program of Japanese music and news), buys a "block of time" on KAZN, and then in turn sells minutes of "commercial time" to other advertisers.

For the first couple of weeks, KAZN's schedule was quite erratic, with varied programs of Japanese, Korean, and other programs occurring at all times of the day. (Apparently blocks of time were being sold at whatever time happened to be available!) Many days, with apparently nothing more than its Korean programming having been sold, the station signed on the air at 12:00 noon and left the air at 6:00 p.m.!

After the first two weeks, however, KAZN settled into a set schedule, which they announced as follows:

6:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.: Japanese
9:00 a.m. - 12 noon: Chinese
12 noon - 6:00 p.m.: Korean
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.: Vietnamese
8:00 p.m. - 12 mid.: Filipino

[At the time the above schedule was announced, the 9:00 a.m. - 12 noon block of time reserved for American Chinese programming had not yet been sold, and the time was being filled with (American-type) instrumental music. Occasional announcements invited production companies of Chinese programming to contact the station to inquire about purchasing the time.]

Thus, currently KAZN is signing on the air everyday at 6:00 a.m. and signing off the air at 12:00 midnight.

Finally, there is one last interesting thing to note. While KWKW operated on 1300 kHz., the station broadcast with a stereo signal. KFAC on 1330 kHz. did not. Now, KWKW on 1330 kHz. no longer broadcasts in stereo (as of yet, anyhow); whereas the new KAZN on 1300 kHz. does broadcast in stereo! So one can see that--all of the "changes" not withstanding--KWKW has actually just simply taken over the KFAC transmitter, and KAZN now operates KWKW's old transmitter. So, when all is said and done, the F.C.C. standpoint as mentioned earlier is essentially correct: There really have been nothing more than just mere call letter changes!!

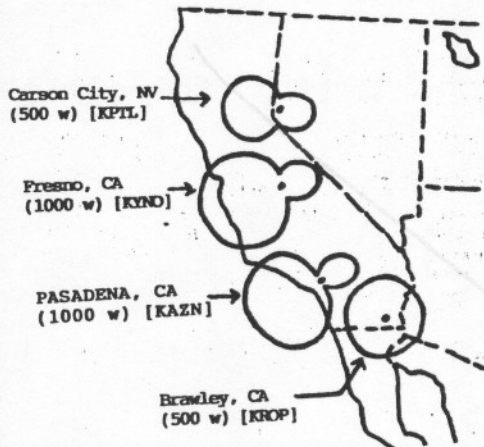
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Addendum: After the above article was written, I had the opportunity to visit KFAC (FM), and the pleasure to speak with Bob Goldfarb, the station's vice president of programming and operations. Mr. Goldfarb mentioned to me that shortly before KFAC 1330 left the air, he had a chance to read the aforementioned article by Jim Hilliker, "Los Angeles Radio History Repeats Itself (Sort Of)"; and, he told me, he took special note of the following passage which Jim wrote: "The roots of ... 1330 kHz. will be remembered by this writer, even if the broadcasting business at large doesn't care. I don't think the owners of KFAC have a sense of what it means to drop the call letters from 1330. ... It will be interesting to see if they make any special announcement when the KFAC ID will be heard on 1330 for the last time." Mr. Goldfarb said that when he read that comment, he decided right then and there that they would indeed make a special announcement! So it turns out that Jim's article actually influenced KFAC at its end to reflect a moment on its historic past and to speak those final words as were described in this article!

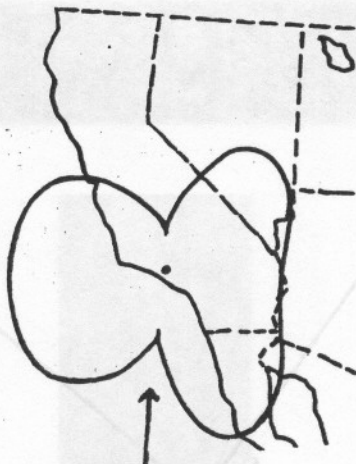
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Below, for comparison, are the nighttime coverage areas of 1300 kHz. and 1330 kHz. Note not only the difference in size of coverage areas, but also the amount of "interference" from other nearby stations which 1300 kHz. is subjected to in its fringe areas.

1300 KHZ.



1330 KHZ.



LOS ANGELES, CA
(5000 w) [KWKW]



KWKW
1300



KfAC
1330 AM / 92.3 FM



KWKW
1330



"La Mexicana"

SERVING SPANISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES OF
LOS ANGELES AND ORANGE COUNTIES SINCE 1942

ASIAN RADIO

KAZN

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KFAC
92.3 FM

KWKW
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RADIO 1330

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Pasadena, CA 91107

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Los Angeles, California 90028-4691

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