L.A. RADIO WARS

- Why Spanish Station KLAX Is Numero Uno
- Music Vs. Talk Radio: Is There Room For Both?
- MC Survey Challenges Arbitrons: Who's Really Tops In L.A.?

PLUS
First Artists:
4 NON BLONDIES (Interscope)

A&R Report: Def American's GEORGE DRAKOULIAS

Clockwise from bottom: Rush Limbaugh, Mark & Brian, Howard Stern & Rick Dees.
20
L.A. RADIO WARS

The L.A. radio world was shocked when Spanish station KLAX and an unknown, Juan Carlos Hidalgo, achieved higher ratings than veterans Rick Dees, Mark & Brian, Ken & Barkley and Howard Stern. Find out who’s winning the war to control the L.A. airwaves.

By Various Contributors

22
CLAIRE WEST

It’s difficult enough promoting a record when you’re with a major label, but try doing it as an indie. Claire West has mastered the art of indie promotion with her aggressiveness and large doses of charm and wit.

By Oskar Scotti

Cover illustration: Allen Mudgett
The creative synergy that Kabrich, noted that Burns Group, analyst from over millions of dollars, will drop to the point where music-loving renegades will inherit the airwaves once again and the cycle will repeat itself. Let the screw turn.

PREVIEWING THE BATTLEFIELD: L.A. RADIO OVERVIEW —Oskar Scotti

When Marconi, Italian inventor of the vacuum tube, unleashed his cryptic invention onto the world, he germinated a seed destined to affect humanity. And, while the repercussions of radio are felt in slumbering hamlets and metropolises alike, nowhere do its tentacles sink as deep into the collective consciousness of the masses as in Los Angeles.

Here in the Southland, we are truly a captive audience begging for bracing stimulation. Our prisons are the bucket seats of cars, where we stew in a seemingly endless series of gridlock and traffic jams. Nowhere does radio sway the thinking process more completely than on the freeways and thoroughfares of this oxygen-starved environment. Yet, this very familiarity has rocketed station payrolls to new heights, taking away the element of spontaneity from the genre and ushering in the era of over-consulted, over-analyzed radio stations.

A respected radio analyst from the Alan Burns Group, Randy Kabrich, noted that two key statutes failed to deliver the delicate creative synergy that once made radio such a fertile playground for the imagination. First, he stated, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) abolished the three-year provision which decreed that new station owners hold on to their properties for a minimum of three years, ensuring that the new owners wouldn’t merely buy the stations with the intention of turning them around for a quick profit.

Secondly, Kabrich noted that in the mid-Seventies, the FCC also forced the smaller mom and pop outlets, who were often the most experimental stations on the dial, to upgrade their power and equipment or lose their licenses. So, the smaller owners either complied or sold their stations, more often than not to boring corporate types. In effect, they insured that maverick renegade ideas would perish.

Here in 1993, the vast majority of spontaneous fun that once made radio in this town so refreshing has all but slipped into the pages of history. But such has not always been the case. As little as fifteen years ago, the Number One station in the market was KMET, a haven for imagination and experimentation, where air talents ran their shifts with the devil-may-care attitude of Pete Rose running the bases. These upstarts were not mindless automations that sat behind microphones, they were artists as well, and the public in L.A. welcomed them with open arms.

The word "consultant" was not even in KMET’s vocabulary. It was a special world where each jock ran his own show, spinning music he picked himself. Their music sets told a linear narrative of the topics and politics of the day, and in many ways, the station played the soundtrack of a lifestyle we scarcely recognize today. They took chances just as the players on Saturday Night Live took chances on television, and the excitement was contagious.

Today is the era of talk. Music, once the lifeblood of the airwaves, has been swept back into the shadows, and for good reason. It’s interior nature warrants little attention. This is not to say that there aren’t good music out there, merely that pop radio refuses to acknowledge the vast majority of it.

So be it. Let the Limbaughs, Sterns and Mark and Brians babble away. The end result may be that the value of stations, now in the hundreds of millions of dollars, will drop to the point where music-loving renegades will inherit the airwaves once again and the cycle will repeat itself. Let the screw turn.

CHR/TOP 40

“None of us can deny the fact that Top 40 radio is going through a lean period,” states KIIS-FM Assistant Program Director Gwen Roberts, donning her best pair of rose-colored specs. “Looking over the history of the format, we’ve always gone through tough times and managed to rebound. We’ll snap out of it this time, too.”

Well, the vast majority of radio listeners over the age of twenty in Southern California certainly hope so. For as she’s recounting the format’s woes, Gwen Roberts’ voice trails off slowly as if she’s hoping that her prophecies will come true, but secretly doubts it. For things in contemporary Hit Radio Land look anything but rosy at present time. Roberts’ station has resorted to giving away a Porsche 944 a week to try and lure listeners into their lap of despair. Certainly, the music makes poor bait. Check out what KIIS, or for that matter, Power 106, or the Beat (FM 92) is serving up these days and the outcome is all the same: repetitious dance grooves, lacking in both substance and versatility.

Try to envision what music from this era the classic rock stations of the future will inherit, and you’ll really be stumped. I asked Roberts if she and Program Director Jeff Wyatt ever put a record on the air based on sound alone, and she stumped for words. “Well,” she murmured, racking her memory banks, “I guess it was ‘Achy Breaky Heart’ by Billy Ray Cyrus, which was over a year ago. We heard that and knew it would work for us. But most stuff outside of the dance/beat genre doesn’t test well at all for us. That’s why we rely so much on our research.”

While there is very little variety on KIIS these days, there is even less on cross-town rival Power 106’s playlist. The Music Director at the dance-only station, Michelle Mercer, also admitted that Top 40 radio is definitely going through some problems, but said, in this day and age, that’s inevitable. “We’ve left forever the era where a mom and her daughter can sit around the house and listen to the same station while they’re baking bread in the kitchen, ‘stated Mercer matter-of-factly. The problem is that everything is so niched nowadays. We’re doing what we have to do: Go out after a certain target audience and give them what they want—which, in this case, is dance music.”

Mercer said that the tech wave of last year affected Power’s...
programming philosophy only slightly: "We still play some techno hits, but none of the new techno stuff tests well for us at all." Mercer agrees with KIIS that research is an extremely important programming tool, but he thinks the research people should not be the ultimate decision makers. "We look at things like outcall research and sales to determine what music we play," she says, "but we only look at cassette return sales when we're making our music decisions. Rick [Cummins, Program Director] and I use our guts, too. We have a unique situation here because a lot of white kids listen to Power as well as Hispanics and blacks."

What neither Mercer nor Roberts mentioned is the station in town that is selling them both out of the water, is of all things, a Spanish-speaking outlet. It's KLAX, and its Number One weapon is morning man Juan Carlos Hidalgo, who mixes light humor, ranchera Latin music and country charm and recently wrestled the top spot away from morning drive ratings' leader Howard Stern. Hidalgo attributes the lofty numbers to the casual and amusing approach he takes in relating to his listeners, who, he quickly mentions, are not all Hispanic, but "who want somewhere else to turn; something different than what they're being fed on the other stations in town. Hispanics play a major role in my success," he admits, "but a lot of it is due to the fact I just relate to people in general. They may not come from my background [Hidalgo spent his first summer in the United States picking strawberries] but they know that what I say comes from the heart."

AN ECLECTIC MIX

There are places disenfranchised listeners can turn to, one of those is at 89.3 on the dial where KPCC Music Director Freddie Johnson serves up a tasty menu of everything from Sun Ra to the Ramones. We try and give all those people who are sick of the stuff on commercial radio some intelligent programming," states Johnson. "We don't have the budget to give away Porches to our listeners, but we think we offer them something a lot more important: an intelligent and eclectic music mix."

Commuters traveling around Los Angeles may have noticed KPCC's placards in buses and on their jocks handing out promotional material at events like the Topanga Blues Festival. Johnson maintains that while they can't "bang a big drum like the megawatt giants, we bang the little one we have with absolute dedication and intensity." Every evening from 9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m., KPCC offers up a tasty blend of classical American music, including everything from new artists like Natalie Cole to jazz greats like Hermet Ruffins. In addition, they also play a lot of reissues like Dinah Washington. "I'm really proud of what we do," he states with his ever-present good nature. "Listeners who may or may not like talk radio but who still want music with some intelligence can thank Johnson for keeping integrity instilled in Los Angeles area radio. "The station pulls in anywhere from 40-50 calls a day from new listeners asking for programming information and scheduling," he claims.

While KPCC and Santa Monica College station KCRW are holding down the ultra eclectic position in town, KROQ labors doggedly at the right hand side of the dial, playing out a steady diet of mostly ten- to twenty-year-old Adam Ant and Depeche Mode gems.

Stating the obvious, commercial radio in Southern California hasn't been this non-commercial since Bill Drake invented Boss Radio at KHJ in the late 60's. If you happen to win one of the Porsche KIIS is awarding to tone deaf listeners weekly, then you're one of the lucky ones. Just make sure that the station that gave you the car isn't tuned in on the car radio and you'll drive away a wiser and happier person.

TALK RADIO

While CHR radio in Los Angeles is at its nadir creatively, its downswing has radically boosted awareness of talk radio in the area. At present, there are two talk stations vying for the winner's circle, with incumbent KABC enjoying a healthy advantage over upstart KFI and its overwhelming ace airman, Rush Limbaugh.

Two months ago, it looked like a third talk outlet, KMPC, would challenge the two front-runners with its sport talk format, but at this writing, the all-sport pull-up is showing signs of flaring around the edges.

George Green, GM at rating's leader KABC, insists that consistency has played the key role in his station's prosperity. "We're the Warner Bros., or MGM of talk radio," boosts the overtly confident Green of his station—the first talk station to take root in L.A. "That comes from putting top-notch people on the air and letting them explore both sides of controversial topics. No one else in this market has been able to match our shift to airshift.

"KFI has just one ace in its arsenal with Rush Limbaugh," adds Green, "but our roster is stocked from dawn till dusk."

★ THE SPOILS OF VICTORY: KLAX  ★

KLAX-FM is Los Angeles radio's equivalent to the Miracle Mets of 1969, coming literally out of nowhere to shake up their fierce and formidable competitors and winning the championship. Since debuting its current format of Mexican ranchera (country) and banda (wind instrument-oriented) music on August 1, 1992, the Spanish language station's 197.9 FM has sent shock waves through the local market with record-setting victories in the last two quarterly Arbitron ratings.

In the fall '92 period, KLAX (5.3) edged mainstream powerhouses KOST and KPWR (both at 5.0), and in the recently reported Winter '93 charts, "The X" increased that margin substantially in beating those same stations with an unprecedented 7.2 (as compared to 5.5 for KOST and 5.0 for KPWR).

The most surprising aspect of KLAX's seemingly overnight rise to Number One has been its consistent ability to top the mega-exposed, ultra-controversial Howard Stern and his syndicated KLAX morning show, as well as veterans like Rick Dees at KIIS-FM.

Though never imagining such quick and resounding success for his show (which, from stations 5-10 away), Juan Carlos Hidalgo attributes his lofty numbers to the casual and amusing approach he takes in relating to his listeners. And, in clear contrast to the racy sleaze which seems to be Stern's bread and butter, Hidalgo attracts many young people by keeping his humor squeaky clean.

"The first thing we do is have fun on our show, but we stay away from dirty jokes," says Hidalgo, who in no way considers himself a star. "People don't want to hear about problems and bad news first thing in the morning," he adds. "We make them feel better about the things they face by simply making them laugh."

The laughter comes from the natural, unassuming and seemingly unrehearsed way Hidalgo wields his sidekick, "El Peladillo," approach ordinary, everyday topics. While working within a format and playing the music the station's program director dictates, the morning team prides itself on its disarming non-seriousness and unpredictability. "When you stick to a certain routine, people get tired of it," insists Hidalgo.

"We've won over a lot of Hispanic kids who were listening to the Anglo stations because they are more comfortable listening to a station that relates to their own culture," Hidalgo reflects. "Parents now feel better that their children are listening to music that their own padres listened to. They're happy that the kids are hearing Spanish music and they, in turn, listen to us."

Now that he, "El Peladillo" and KLAX are Numero Uno, having lifted the station's previous Cuban-oriented incarnation KSKO's rating of .5 to 7.2 in less than a year, is the pressure to maintain the success manageable? Hidalgo is optimistically cautious: "When we got the November ratings, it was like a bomb going off. I thought I'd do well here, but nothing this big," he says. "Being first is not easy. I have a big responsibility and I have to work that much harder. And you can't get too excited because radio's always up and down."

—Jonathan Widran

FRONT LINE HEROES

★ Rush Limbaugh ★

KFI 640 AM
Weekdays 9-Noon

Green's faith is buoyed by the fact that the recent Arbitron poll showed his morning team to be even up with notched shock jock Howard Stern. "He's merely afad, a passing phase," said Green of the omnipotent bad boy Stern.

"A lot of people think Stern's audience and Ken and Barkley's audience are exclusive, but that's not true," he continues. "Twenty-five percent of our audience samples what he's doing, and Stern's audience checks out what our guys are doing from time to time as well. I guess it depends on what they're [the audience] in the mood for."

25

Juan Carlos Hidalgo and "El Peladillo"
Howard Stern: if we tried to, we’d lose. What we try to offer people is a variety of information and entertainment. We don’t believe you have to be shocking to be entertaining. The ratings back us up!"

SHOCK JOCKS

"Howard Stern is not a shock jock," barbs KLXS Promotions Director Scott Segelbaum. "I take offense to him being lumped in with all these other disc jocks around the country who are really just imitators." Segelbaum may have a valid point. When Stern first took to the airwaves of Los Angeles, he was, to many Southlanders unprepared for his seemingly misogynist shick, something of a shock. But those days are gone. Now that Howard has softened, Angelenos have merely grown accustomed to his brassy New Yorker approach.

What used to constitute radical dialogue is now considered merely status quo. Segelbaum maintains that Stern is not—as KABC GM George Greens insists—a passing fad. When you consider that he has been Number One in a number of the East Coast cities, including New York and Philadelphia, for the better part of a decade, you can understand his adamantine stance.

In almost direct defiance to what blasts over the airwaves every morning during Stern’s shift, Segelbaum maintains that his boss is neither a racist nor a misogynist. "He’s just having fun," he says of Stern, who Segelbaum describes as a truly decent fellow who "has been married for nineteen years to the same woman and neither drinks, smokes nor indulges in drugs." Segelbaum adds that Stern’s sidekick, Robin Quivers, is black and he’s very loyal to her. "If he was a racist, do you think she’d be on the payroll?"

FRONT LINE HEROES

Ken & Barkley

KABC 790 AM

Weekdays 5-9 a.m.

Howard Stern; if we tried to, we’d lose. What we try to offer people is a variety of information and entertainment. We don’t believe you have to be shocking to be entertaining. The ratings back us up!"

SHOCK JOCKS

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Meanwhile, next door on the dial to Heckling Howard are Mark & Brian, the less than dynamic duo who seem to lose listeners as fast as Stern gains them. The pair who stole the hearts of the city when they arrived five years ago have used up all their tricks of late and even failed on TV. Fortunately, they're lovable lads and are rarely offensive enough to repel the more conservative elements of the Parent Teacher Organization.

Another key radio analyst privy to the red hot radio scene is Sheena Media's Cheryl Broz, who, like Segelbaum, Green and virtually every other luminary in the industry, believes that—like it or not—shock jocks are here to stay. "You do what you have to do to attract people, and if it takes shocking them, then so be it," says Broz, who consults a dozen of the biggest pop stations in the country with the Houston, Texas-based firm. "The audience that makes up a lot of Howard Stern's audience consists of disenchanted baby boomers who don't feel like they can relate to what's on commercial radio today. They're frustrated because they've heard Korner Supremes on a thousand times and this, the talk radio shock jock thing, gives them something new to hang their hats on."

She went on to say that while the Stern-led group of hellraisers are popular in large cities like L.A., they have failed in mid- and small-sized communities for a few key reasons. "In this town you have a lot of people who feel like they're living under the gun," said Broz, who discussed radio with me over lunch while she was visiting the City of Angels recently on business. "Residents of L.A. feel like they have crime, drugs and disorder dogging them on every street corner and really need someone like Stern to help them blow off steam. Through Howard, they can vent all their aggressions every morning while they drive to work. He's the madman in all of us."

**ROCK FIGHT**

Twenty-five years ago, rock radio was called "free-form" radio, but today it is divided into every type of musical genre, from alternative to classic rock. In the Eighties, DJs started screaming when radio consultants began programming stations with formats and set lists. While consultants aren't as hip today, their formats are the latest thing at most stations, and the idea of labeling a station with a specific genre of music is stronger than ever, especially in rock radio.

Album rock station KLOS is one of the only stations on the West Coast that hasn't changed its format in 24 years, but veteran DJ Geno Michellini says the way the music is programmed has. "We have a set list we have to go by that I stay from," he says with a laugh. "When I first started, it was free-form radio and we played everything. Now, each of the different genres has its own expansion of music, so there's no way you could cover the whole ballpark. You can't go back to the old way either, because there's too much music. If you want to be successful, you have to program for ratings. It's a business, and people forget that."

"We had a program director about six or seven years ago who was trying to get the audience, and it worked," he continues. "We gave away Porsches and $1,000 bills without ever having had their attention, but when we ran out of cars and money, they went away. Within a year, this PD got as the KLOS was never ever had and the lowest. So now we do promotions like concert tickets, but they are things that are station-oriented, and we don't use that as the main thrust of the programming. We rely on the music."

Like Michellini, KLSX DJ Jim Ladd was also part of the free-form radio era, but he hasn't given in to corporate programming. KLSX focuses on classic rock, and while he must stay within the realm of classic rock, Ladd's shows are probably the closest thing Los Angeles has to free-form radio. "Everybody else you're listening to is playing a list of songs that was given to them by somebody else. That's why I was off the air for two years, because I refused to do that. KLSX has always been enough to allow me to follow a list and not follow a structured format," Ladd explains.

I'm trying to save an art form and I know it's working because the audience has responded to it. I get my songs from inspiration. If I come in and something has affected me, like a news story, I'll begin there and then find a song that follows up on that subject, whether it's politics, sex or religion. That song will then lead to the next."

KNAC concentrates on playing heavy metal music rather than relying on personalities, and Program Director Bryan Schrock says that L.A. is one of the few places a radio station such as his can survive. "There are enough people out there like the style of music that we have formatted on our station, and enough people selling airline so we can survive."

KROQ is a station that relies heavily on its format. Billed as an alternative album rock station, Program Director Kevin Weatherly says they have their own mix of music, from alternative to mainstream rock, to bring in listeners. "Right now, with the exception of KNAC, we are the only current rock music stations in Los Angeles. We play different types of music, from some of the heavier, more industrial music to traditional rock."

Weatherly says one of the reasons they have been able to survive for fifteen years is, "We stay in touch with what our listeners want, and that's constantly evolving. In this city, it's really easy to get caught up in the whole industry hype. You have to stay objective and step away from that and get out there with the real people and find out what they like and don't like."

**AC POWER**

Targeting an audience from 25 to 54, most non-listeners only hear adult contemporary music when in their dentist's office or on elevators.

Going under the moniker K-Light, KLIT 101.1 uses direct mailing and on-air contests to promote their station. Their "Money Music Medley" contest usually gets up to about $2,000 to $3,000 before it is won, according to Program Director Scott O'Neil. The station uses a lot of features in drive time, including reports by Entertainment Tonight's Leza Gibbons and music reviewer David Sheehan. Also, Jay Leno does a morning monologue for KLIT Mondays through Fridays.

Regarding the Arbitrons, O'Neil states, "We view the Arbitrons as very important, mainly because they're the only..."
From shock radio to Spanish humor, Los Angeles has become a mecca for breaking new ground. No other city in the world has as many high-profile morning shows as L.A. When KLAX bumped Howard Stern out of the top spot earlier this year, the news took the radio industry by storm and the competition got hotter than ever.

KABC is the only AM station in the middle of the morning radio war, but they have been solidly in the Top Five for years with Ken Minyard and Roger Barkley’s show. “The thing that sets any show apart in morning radio is the personalities,” Barkley says. “I think when someone come blazing on the scene like Howard Stern, people get curious, but after a while, when you’re not shocked anymore, you have to deliver more than shock value, and I think people return to places that are more comfortable for them.”

Minyard adds, “This is the most competitive market in the world now. It’s the same number of morning shows, but they’re a lot more high-profile. You need to have the right environment for the audience to stay comfortable. When you’re out a long time, I think sometimes, if you don’t stay current, people will take you for granted, so you have to keep challenging them and be willing to change when you need to.”

Neither Minyard nor Barkley sees the morning competition subsiding soon, “but I think the tendency for shock radio has already leveled off,” Barkley claims. “I think it’s going to go in the direction of more communication of fun, the kind of values that have always been around.”

Rick Dees is one of the most successful morning show hosts in the country. His humor has kept him situated at or near the top spot since he joined KIIS in 1982. And while he admits the morning drive time is more competitive than ever, Dees says he doesn’t harp on the ratings too much, nor does it bother him that he is picked on by other DJs. “I wear it as a badge of honor. I think it’s a wonderful, flattering feeling, and it does mean that while they’re talking about me, they’re not doing a good show of their own,” Dees says. “It’s kind of sad. They all come in and start talking about our show like it’s bad or it’s something that needs to be thrown out with the rest of the garbage, and we’ve been very fortunate because they have forgot themselves thrown out with the rest of the garbage. I don’t like what’s happening with radio, though, because there’s a whole generation of young personalities to be thinking that being mean to people and shocking people with things that you don’t even say in your own bedroom to each other as a married couple are cool. I don’t agree with it, and I don’t understand it. I could do it myself, but I don’t think we ever will. It’s just too easy to do. It’s harder to make people laugh with humor that’s thought out.”

While the rise of KLAX surprised Dees, he has found a way to compete with the Spanish station. “I’m talking Spanish,” Dees says. “Most DJs and stations, and of course, I use Spanish words as often as possible,” he laughs. “I’ve put together a whole group of bamba jingles and stuff. It’s my way of saying, ‘Hey, people! Listen to this!’ If I can catch a couple of them and have them come over, then that’s fine,” Dees says.

As part of the morning team of Juan Carlos Hidalgo and El Patadillo, Hidalgo admits he was surprised by the sudden surge of popularity his show received earlier this year, but says the station hasn’t compromised its focus. “We’ve always focused on the whole family, and we try to get everybody hyped,” he explains. “We don’t do sex or drug jokes. We play Latin music with a lot of small jokes. We talk about family problems and everything that’s happening in the world, but we keep the focus on family.”

The rise in popularity of KLAX has thrown the spotlight on Spanish radio, which many executives in radio say is long overdue, especially in Los Angeles. “There is such a big Spanish population in Los Angeles, and we’re giving them what they want,” Hidalgo says. “We don’t do contests or giveaways. We concentrate on family entertainment.”

While the other stations have well-known DJs on the air during drive time, Hidalgo says that because they aren’t known, they are able to relate to their audience better. “We’re just regular guys on the air. We don’t feel like we are the stars, but rather the music. The Spanish population in Los Angeles is very big, and we just try to give them what we like to listen to,” Hidalgo says. KLAX morning stars Mark and Brian refused to be part of a story which mentioned other radio personalities and stations. They also asked that their production staff not talk to us as well.)

Howard Stern’s show has garnered more publicity—good and bad—than perhaps any other in history. His outrageous manner and shock value have become known worldwide, but there has been a price. KLXS is in a heated battle with the FCC over some of his shows, and the station came under fire several months ago when they edited some of Stern’s comments. KLXS Program Director Andy Bloom wouldn’t comment on the FCC case, but with regard to editing Stern’s shows, he says, “It’s not something that has actively been done. It has happened in the past, but it’s not a regular part of what we do.”

In spite of these problems, Stern’s numbers have continued to rise and “shock radio” seems to be as popular as ever. Howard is the most successful morning radio personality in the history of radio. We’re seeing Howard pull away from the pack and the rest of the major personalities, and I think he’ll be the King of L.A. Radio for a long time, just as he has in other cities where he’s been on the air for a long time. Radio can be very bit as entertaining as prime time television or other mediums, and Howard is an example of that.”

—Sue Gold
Ross feels that urban radio is fractional-ized by the highly visible CHR stations. "This makes everything more fragmented for the urban listener. CHR's playlist is 90% urban, but because they know you're advertising a game, they call themselves contemporary hits radio. And what's more contemporary than black music?"

KJLH was recognized nationwide for its strong up-front coverage of last year's riots. Indeed, much of the burning and rioting took place right outside of KJLH's broadcast windows on Crenshaw Boulevard, providing gripping on-the-spot reports. "We have strong, solid community affair involvement," Ross says. "We have a gang talk show called 'Peace Treaty' every week. Plus, we have the only full-time news staff in urban radio, headed by Carl Jones."

When we spoke with Anne McCullon, General Manager of V-103, the station was undergoing changes in its program and music directorship, and McCullon was eight days into her new position. She assured us, "We are not making abrupt format changes [because of the reorga-nization]. But black radio, because of its popularity, has the responsibility of super-serving the community."

V-103 (KACE) is simulcast in San Bernar-dino which makes serving both communities a little tricky. "V-103 has a commitment to serving its city of license [Inglewood]," McCullon continues, "however, every community needs the same kind of information and service." —Gary Jackson

**URBAN WARRIORS**

African-Americans, who comprise about 10 to 25 percent of the L.A. population, appear to be among the most loyal of radio listeners. There are four stations, KJLH, KGFZ and V-103 (KACE), that vie for the ear of its listenership. Add the urban-formatted though -station's Power 106 and KIIS, and you have a fragmentation that has caused confusion among listeners—as well as anger and disgust among the urban stations who fight over a piece of the advertising dollar.

KGFZ-AM is programmed by Don Tracy. The station has a mix of mostly older tunes (so-called "dusties") with new songs to attract younger listeners. He sees competition coming from the urban crossover: "Pop stations pick up on urban acts quicker than ever. That's pulling urban listeners away, but by default, the audience that hung with us over twenty years."

As we take a look at the charts, and very few listeners do that, you'll find that fifteen of the Top 20 songs are urban. So there's a fierce fight to maintain the audience we have."

KBBT is programmed by John Monds. Its powerful signal (43,000 watts boosted by strong antenna placement) gives KBBT (FM92, The Beat) a decided reach advantage over its urban competition, thus, higher ratings. "It's too bad ratings can't be more consistent," says Monds. "With twelve trends [ratings periods] a year, anything can happen. It's aimed at a crap shoot. So you have to be strategic and new all the time."

"We keep ahead of the competition by keeping an ear to the street," Monds continues. "We take an aggressive ap-proach to music and our station's pro-motion. We create events such as con-certs and community appearances so that, in turn, we can create an aura that makes people feel they must listen to our station to know what's happening in music."

The venerable KJLH-FM is the oldest urban station in Los Angeles. Owned by Steve Wonder, KJLH is programmed by Frankie Ross (who used to be at KBBT). The casual listener might have a tough time distinguishing between the stations. All feature a mix that is heavy on music from the mostly mid-Sixties, some hits from the late Fifties and interspersed with variable amounts of the Motown catalog. Asked to clarify his station's identity, Edwards fell back upon research showing people consider KCBS to be a more upscale older station. At KRLA, their calling card is their standing as the "soul surviving rock & roll radio station in Los Angeles" with a history starting on Labor Day weekend in 1959.

In the competitive world of oldies radio, KRTH (recently purchased by Infinit-y Broadcasting for $110 million) is the station to beat. It is also the station that took the biggest beating during phone interviews with its busy competitors. According to KRLA's Wagner, KRTH speeds up its records to make them sound "faster and brighter" than versions on other stations. According to Edwards, when KCBS started to promote and exploit veteran DJs, KRLA came in and hauled away one of their high-profile alumni.

All three oldies stations recognize the importance of having well-known DJs on staff. KRLA employs Robert W. Morgan and the Real Don Steele, KCBS has Charlie and the Real Don Steele, KCBS has Charlie and the Real Don Steele; Edwards notes that, according to qualitative re-search, listeners to this station tend to be "upscale with a large amount of disposable income."

**COUNTRY SHOWDOWN**

Right now, there are over 2,500 radio stations playing country to a demographic group ranging from 18-55 years old. Market research shows that the country audience is also the fastest growing listenership with over 30.2 million listeners daily.

How does country music play in L.A.? According to John R.J. Curtiss, he recently returned Program Director of KZLA, "I see things really happening in the L.A. market for country. The record companies are sending a lot of product to the club scene is very hot. But for country radio, it hasn't been great for us. That's one of the things we're working on."

I don't know that KZLA has been perform-ing consistently and servicing people with the music that they've been going out and buying. People are using country music, but they aren't accessing country music via the radio here. That's what we have to accomplish."

KZLA's AM counterpart, KCLAC at 570 AM, is a great listen. On KLAC you can still hear the artists that made country music great. Marble Haggard, Tommy Wynette and Johnny Cash are still staples here. The jocks are allowed to have a little more personality and maintain some of the fun that used to be FM radio.

KZLA's cousin competition, any kind would be little KIK-FM 94.3 on the FM dial. They also play the Hot New Country with at least one classic per hour. Liz Phair, an air personality and promotion person there, claims they consistently beat KZLA in their shared market.

KFRG 95.1 FM in San Berdoos plays a mixture of Hot Country hits and is running almost even in the ratings with newcomer K-HITS in that area. Both stations are barely audible in greater L.A., however, when driving through that area, I've found them both enjoyable.

Peter Carleis, the announcer for Rod Piazza & the Bandidos, hosts a very fine local music show on KPRO 1570 AM in Riverside on Wednesday at midnight. His New West Country Show highlights the best of L.A.'s original music scene. People want to tune into the last of the old and the new, listen to Citybilly on KPCC 89.3 FM Monday nights at 8:00. Hosted by Rene Engel, it is L.A.'s best listen for modern and original Engel feels. The biggest problem with country radio is it is over specialized. Too much time is spent on how to sell advertising and not enough time is spent developing good radio." Citybilly will often feature live in studio performances with candi artist interviews. It's what good country programming is about." —Billy Black

**STANDOFF: MC VS. ARBITRON**

Considering this is Music Connection's Special Radio issue, we thought we'd conduct our own survey to see who are the most popular radio stations in Los Angeles and compare our results with the most recent Arbitron ratings. MC correspondents polled several hundred people—in malls, restaurants, concerts—and asked each one to simply name his/her favorite L.A. radio station. Below are the results of our poll as compared to the April 20th Arbitra.

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A quick analysis of the two polls reveals that the Number One station in Los Angeles according to the Arbitron ratings, Spanish station KLAX-FM, didn't place at all on the MC poll. The popularity of morning veteran Rick Dees solidified KIIS-FM in the #4 position of both polls, while KOST-FM (#2 Alps) and KFI-AM (#5 Alps) didn't make the MC poll at all.

The three stations that pulled in the most votes in the MC poll were KROQ, AOR champ KLOS and Classic Rock formatted KLAX.

The emergence of talk radio across the country seemed to have little mean-ing to those polled in Los Angeles by Music Connection correspondents as neither KMM-FM (#5 Alps) nor KABC-AM (#6 Alps) received enough votes to finish in the Top 15.

(These are two of L.A.'s favorite college radio stations. More on these stations in MC's Back to College special issue coming in August.)
WE'RE KICKIN' OFF THE 105 DAYS OF SUMMER WITH A TRIP TO HAWAII!!! AND YOU ALL WILL WIN A FREE NIGHT AT THE HAWAIIAN AIRLINES INN-OUT BURGER!!

ON YOUR CAR!!

IF WE SPOT YOUR CAR, WE'LL READ YOUR LICENSE PLATE NUMBER ON THE AIR! CALL-IN WHEN YOU HEAR IT, AND YOU'LL BE QUALIFIED FOR THE GRAND PRIZE DRAWING FOR 5 DAYS/4 NIGHTS ON OAHU! WE'LL EVEN BUY YOU LUNCH!!

51