

On the flipside: trouble in music-video land

Stations finding that TV jukebox format has not lived up to promise; many stations programming all videos have either gone off the air or changed format; LPTV's hardest hit

Music video television stations, which 18 months ago were popping up across the media landscape like spring flowers in a garden have undergone a withering lately. Within one year after signing on with an around-the-clock music video schedule, several major-market stations have changed their format or gone off the air. Hardest hit have been some of the low-power television stations that saw music videos as an inexpensive way to fill up air time and attract younger viewers.

The latest casualty of the music video genre is WVUE-TV Atlanta (ch. 69), which has announced that over the next two months, it will phase out its music video format in favor of more traditional independent programming as a result of an increasing number of record companies that are charging for the use of their music videos. Until recently, most record companies have supplied music videos to stations without charge because of the promotional value associated with their exposure.

Other stations that have experimented with the music video format but have since abandoned it are WLXI-TV Greensboro, N.C., and KRLR-TV Las Vegas. WLXI-TV dropped its music video format last September and is now running religious programming supplied by Santa Ana, Calif.-based Trinity Broadcasting Network, which has also acquired the station, while KRLR-TV is going the route of the more traditional independent by scheduling such off-network series as *Dallas* and *Knots Landing*.

Another station, KMSG-TV Sanger, Calif., which covers the San Diego market, originally had planned to program music videos when it signed on early in 1985 but backed away at the last moment after studying other stations that were playing the format. KMSG-TV signed on with a religious format. Music video programming "was a bright star two years ago," said KMSG-TV owner Gary Co-Cola, but "all of a sudden, the bloom is off the rose."

Joining the full-power former music video stations were an assortment of low-power stations. Two low-power stations on Long Island owned by Bogner Broadcast Equipment Corp., a manufacturer of broadcast transmission antennas, stopped broadcasting a full schedule of music videos eight months ago. "We had plenty of viewers," said President Richard Bogner. "We just couldn't get any advertisers to buy time." Bogner now leases time on one of the low-power stations for ethnic programming and uses the other as a translator for a suburban New York station.

Additional all-music-video low-power stations have signed off in Phoenix and Reno.

However, a handful of music video broadcasters remain enthusiastic about the format and say the programming is viable in larger markets. The principal exponent has been the team of John Garabedian and Arnie Ginsberg, who own WZTZ-TV Marlboro, Mass., which reaches the Boston market. Garabedian is a former owner of WGTF(FM) Nantucket, Mass., and Ginsberg is a well-known Boston disk jockey. WZTZ-TV celebrates its first anniversary this week (Feb. 12). And Wometco-owned WWHT(TV) Newark became an all-music video television station on June 1, 1985, after broadcasting as a subscription television outlet.

"I believe stereo video music programming can work where the HUT level is large enough to support that kind of programming," said James Flynn, vice president and general manager of WWHT. "Major markets have the greatest chance of success." WWHT broadcasts music videos seven days a week from noon to sign-off.

The broadcasters who tried but abandoned music video programming faced a major obstacle: gaining sponsor support. In addition, several complained they did not want to pay for music videos when the programming was essentially considered a promotional tool for the record companies.

Rick Scott, general manager, KRLR-TV Las Vegas, ran 24 hours a day music videos on his station from August of 1984 to May 1985. Since then, he has gradually de-

creased the music video programming and increased the traditional independent programming. "I can take any regular TV program and put it on in place of music videos and instantly create ratings and revenues," Scott said. He said music video programming took a long time to build. He said he was willing to stick with it but felt hindered by inadequate measurement from the rating services and a movement by the record companies to charge for the videos.

Nonetheless, Scott said the format is workable, if given the opportunity. "I firmly believe there will be a time in several years when there will be several broadcast video music stations," he noted. "I don't think it was a fad that has come and gone."

Indeed, in spite of lower ratings last year on MTV and the closing of the Cocoa, Fla.-based Odyssey Channel—which distributed music video programming to cable systems, broadcast and LPTV outlets—local music video broadcasters remain optimistic about the format. Vance L. Eckersley, vice president and general manager, WVUE-TV Atlanta, said the decision to phase out music video programming had been reached "reluctantly," but the station had no other choice, considering the trend among record companies to charge for the use of videos. "It had always been my contention that if there had been any payment, it should have been the other way around," Eckersley said. "They obviously don't agree with that."

Eckersley also said music video programming was underperforming, with obvious



Pledging allegiance. Wowk-TV Huntington-Charleston, W.Va., will give up its ABC affiliation to become a CBS affiliate on July 1. Celebrating after the signing are (seated, l-r): Scott Michaels, vice president, affiliate relations, CBS Television Network; Lewis Klein, president of Gateway Communications Inc., owner of the station; (standing, l-r) Leo MacCortney, general manager, wowk-TV, Tony Malara, president, CBS-TV, and Mac Borg, chairman of Gateway.