



## WKTU: The Beat Of New York Goes On, Riding A Radio Wave Of Change

If New York's rhythmic top 40 WKTU could define itself in one record, Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" would probably come to mind, although the station did much more than survive in the fall 2002 Arbitron ratings. WKTU was up 3.5-4.1 12-plus in the fall, as well as No. 1 25-34, No. 2 25-54, and No. 3 18-34. During the fall, VP of operations and programming Frankie Blue and APD/MD Jeff Z saw the results of a new morning and night show, as well as some music revisions.

Classic disco titles, including "I Will Survive," had been a part of WKTU from the beginning. In recent years, the station had become more contemporary and slightly more aggressive on R&B. But when R&B oldies sister WTJM became R&B/hip-hop WWPR (Power 105), those songs became more prominent again on WKTU, while most current hip-hop was phased out.

Blue says, "We knew that in order to come out on top overall, we needed to hit the middle of our demo, 25-34. If we could do that, we could be successful [in] 18-34 and 25-54."

Jeff Z adds that "we understand that [mainstream top 40 sister WHTZ] Z100 will be the powerhouse 18-34 and Power 105 will now also compete for that demo... With 'KTU's playlist almost 99% non-rap, I think our focus really helped us this time. We were able to do a test to bring back many of our gold and recurrents, and the audience loves them. [Oldies] come back if you play them for a year, then let 'em sit for six months. All of a sudden, they want to hear 'I Will Survive' again."

### NEW VOICES

When WKTU morning personality/recording artist Michelle Visage relocated to Los Angeles, WKTU teamed longtime morning co-host Goumba Johnny with seven-year WJMN (Jam'n 94.5) Boston morning host Baltazar, returning to the market after a stint at WQHT (Hot 97). Blue says the new team "needed time to work together, and we had a couple of setbacks. First Goumba lost his dad, and soon after he broke his ribs on a station cruise. Now things are better, and they have the time they need to develop. I've always believed that if you can survive in New York radio for a year, listeners will probably accept you."

"The benchmarks they're doing are bringing people to 'KTU,'" Jeff Z says. "When I hear people talking about their benchmarks on the street, it's something I haven't heard from the morning show here in ages." Those include the show's Joke-Off, for both kids and adults, and its prank "ballbuster" calls. They're helped by Mike Opelka, who Blue says is "among the best producers out there anywhere."

WKTU also welcomed Vic Latino to nights, replacing Geronimo. Latino began his career with then-Hot 97 morning team Ed Lover & Doctor Dre, before returning to the market from WPYO Orlando, Fla. A mixer as well, Latino had also performed as a recording artist around the country, including MTV's Spring Break.

### MUSIC MEETING

Both Jeff Z and Blue are quick to admit that it's hard to define WKTU musically: The fewest words Blue can use are "a fun, upbeat, addicting lifestyle of rhythmic pop and dance." Then there are the records that get little airplay elsewhere,



3 P.M.

**Pet Shop Boys, "West End Girls"**  
**Sylvester, "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)"**  
**Tina Ann, "In My Dreams"**  
**Kim Wilde, "You Keep Me Hangin' On"**  
**Pink, "Family Portrait"**  
**Evelyn "Champagne" King, "Love Come Down"**  
**Jennifer Lopez, "Love Don't Cost a Thing"**  
**TKA, "Tears May Fall"**  
**Celine Dion, "I Drove All Night"**  
**The Trammys, "Disco Inferno"**  
**Widelife, "I Don't Want U"**

such as "L'Italiano" by the Sicilians Featuring Angelo Venuto. According to Blue, "the record started in clubs. At first people laughed when we played it, but the clubs kept on and it grew." While Blue says, "I don't try to be first, I don't use ego. I let records come to 'KTU,'" he also believes that radio stations dismiss some potential hits too easily. "I hear too often that [a certain song is just] 'a 'KTU record' from other stations. I pay attention to exclusive records on many stations. You can't argue with a record that's No. 1. Radio stations used to be on the same page with stations in other markets, and we used to share more [secret weapon records] with each other. I hate seeing great music get lost."

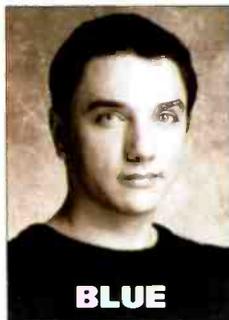
Blue doesn't downplay the importance of his mixers but says, "I've found that mixers for the most part love everything new. I tell them, 'I don't want your pick of the week—I want your pick of the weeks!' Sometimes I wouldn't see a mixer bring the same record back to me for even two weeks in a row. With a cumed of 2 million listeners, I can only deal with records that will continue to make a big impact for some time. I do have key mixers who understand, and I work with them to teach them how to bring a record to 'KTU.'"

Recent months have seen dance-leaning rhythmic top 40s starting to pop up in other markets, although often in a considerably different form. While WKTU might not work in other markets record for record, Blue says that "the formula would. If I were launching something like this in L.A., I would hire [Elektra VP and former KPWR Los Angeles MD] Al Teviera or [KROQ Los Angeles APD] Gene Sandbloom. They understand what listeners out there grew up on—they were there and could relate that. I know from being the music director at Z100 with Scott Shannon. He loved Z100, but he also liked the old 92KTU [now WXRK], and we were able to find so many records. I really had the chance to experience firsthand the music that made the impact back then."

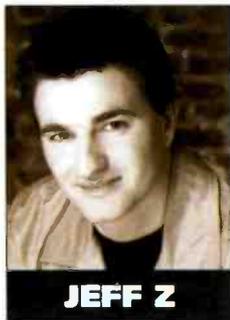
### I BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

Promotionally, WKTU's signature event is Miracle on 34th Street, which celebrated its third year at Madison Square Garden—a long way from its inception at the much smaller Hammerstein Ballroom. "We needed a benchmark event, and Miracle turned out to be the one," Blue says. "We had always done big events like Saturday Night Fever and Last Dance at Studio 54, but we always found ourselves having to come up with something new."

Last December's Miracle drew 19,000 listen-



BLUE



JEFF Z

## THE BRINGBACK FILE

### RECORDS THAT WORK BUT AREN'T BEING WORKED

#### ● Destiny's Child, "Brown Eyes" (KGGI Riverside, Calif.)

While KGGI Riverside, Calif., PD Jesse Duran has always been an outspoken advocate of watching your own market instead of the national charts and playing records that might not end up on other rhythmic top 40s, he doesn't often step out on records that aren't being worked at all. "Brown Eyes" became a hit album cut for numerous rhythmic in late 2001—it's now up to nearly 5,000 spins at Honolulu's three stations, 2,200 plays at two San Antonio stations, and 1,721 spins at KKWD Oklahoma City alone. But at the time, KGGI was doing just fine with "Emotion," the then-current single.

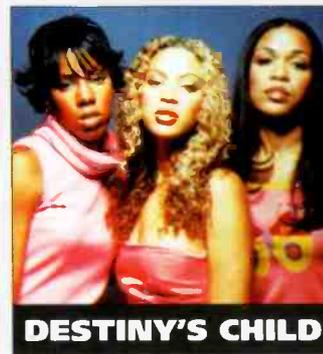
But come last December, "we were doing this early Christmas dinner with Destiny's Child where we bused 20 listeners to L.A. to meet and have dinner with them. While listening to the *Survivor* CD on the bus, all of our listeners were say-

ing how much they loved ["Brown Eyes"]," despite the fact that it was never played in Southern California, Duran says. And after a while out of the spotlight, Destiny's Child is high-profile again, thanks to Beyoncé Knowles' and Kelly Rowland's other projects. As of Jan. 22, the song had received a total of 127 spins and was already "top 10 testing and top five phones, so the listeners agree," Duran says. At the end of that week, it was KGGI's No. 12 most-played record, up to 28 spins from 22 the week before.

SEAN ROSS



DURAN



DESTINY'S CHILD

## RADIO CONCERT MONITOR

DATE	STATION	EVENT	PROMOTIONS DIRECTOR
Feb. 7	WBBM-FM Chicago	Eddie & Jobo's Flashback Party 2	Michael Biemolt
APPEARING: Cynthia, Johnny O, Lidell Townsell			
Feb. 8	KYLD San Francisco	Super Oldies Love Jam	Carlos Pedroza
APPEARING: Deniece Williams, Evelyn "Champagne" King, Heatwave, Moments, GQ			
Feb. 9	KOHT Tucson, Ariz.	Sunday Night Slow Jams Live	Drew Stone
APPEARING: 112, Tyrese, Amanda Perez, Rome, Nu Flavor			
Feb. 15	KOST Los Angeles	Love Songs Live	Stephanie Ross
APPEARING: Kenny Loggins, Benny Mardones			
March 4	WMJX Boston	Concert	Adam Klein
APPEARING: Daryl Hall & John Oates			

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ers. Produced by David Gest, the husband of Liza Minnelli, it was more like a Broadway production than a radio show. "We do it in a different style, with a 52-piece orchestra that accompanies every artist, which keeps expenses down because we don't have to fly in bands for the acts," Blue says. "The plan is simple: The show never stops. If you take a bathroom break, you're going to miss something."

"Each headline artist does two songs, newcomers sing one, and we mix all the artists up so you won't have to wait until the end of the show to see all the big artists and memorable moments," Blue continues. "We also mix the eras and styles. Miracle's music covers the '70s, '80s, '90s, and today. It's no problem to go from Gloria Gaynor to the Sugarhill Gang to Marc Anthony to Deborah Cox to Alicia Keys."

As it was for most stations last fall, Jeff Z says

that finding a lineup "was tough... The Latin [music scene] really slowed down last year and many big acts—like Jennifer Lopez, for instance—were just not doing shows." The economy was also a factor. "We saw the discount tickets move first," he adds. "We all became salespeople, checking ticket sales each morning and praying another thousand or two had moved."

"We noticed that people are doing the lounge thing in Manhattan and sticking with the clubs in Long Island, New Jersey, and Staten Island due to the economy," Jeff Z continues. "The old days of paying 60 bucks to walk in a club and \$15 to drink just ain't there anymore, not to mention driving into the city, paying to park—it's tough. Jersey kids are staying in Jersey, and the Jersey and Long Island clubs are paying to hire the big-name DJs now. The economy is something we think about in everything we do."