



# WCMS Flips To Classic Country

## Shomby seeks some space between WCMS and WGH-FM

After 49 years as a current-based Country outlet, on April 10 WCMS/Norfolk relaunched as Classic Country 100.5. But don't let the moniker fool you, WCMS is unlike any other Classic Country station in the country.

The scenario in Norfolk is similar to that being played out in many markets — where there once two Country stations under two owners, there are now two Country stations operated by one owner. And Barnstable is facing in Norfolk the challenge that so many co-owned Country combos face: How do you program the pair in a complementary fashion that maximizes the potential of both?

That's been the task before Barnstable/Norfolk OM John Shomby since his arrival last September. In addition to overseeing the company's six stations in market, he also programs WGH-FM (The Eagle 97.3). Jack Prater is WCMS's PD.

While a new direction was being sought for WCMS, WGH-FM's programming was also tweaked a bit to better position it in the combo. As the changes to both stations are detailed, it's important to remember that this is a work in progress. What we are presenting this week is the combo's formats as they were on April 10; they may well have changed since then.

said, 'Sometimes we go up in the ratings, sometimes we go down.' Everyone said they had problems in crossing the other station's music.

"We wanted to do something to avoid that. Everybody seems to have the same problems, and I wasn't getting any answers about what to do. So, we built something new."

Another reason Shomby and company felt they had to create a new direction for WCMS was the station's lack of a strong brand. "Part of the challenge was that WCMS had a very muddled image," Shomby says. "Everybody knew The Eagle and exactly what it was and what it was here for: to play today's country. They understood what 'Today's Country' was.

"They also knew that whereas WCMS could be old, it could also be new. There was an ambiguity to the station. We felt it needed a handle, something solid for people to embrace, both from a listener and a sales viewpoint."

As he seeks to separate WCMS

perfectly with the Classic Country format.

There were also no staff changes. Anchoring the new format is 49-year — yes, 49-year — morning man and Country Music DJ Hall of Famer Joe Hoppel, who is joined by Jennifer Roberts for wakeups. Prater handles afternoons, and evenings will now be internally voicetracked in place of Jones Radio Networks' Lia. A new midday host is expected to be named soon.

**"Think of the way Classic Rock is presented from a production standpoint — that's how WCMS is being produced."**

The new Classic Country WCMS will focus on music from 1989-94. Shomby says he's focusing on that music because it's from the heyday of country music. "It's from when people were coming from out of the format to listen to Country, many for the first time," he says. "The core artists are Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, George Strait, Alan Jackson, Brooks & Dunn and others who had the bulk of the huge hits of that era."

You'll also hear selected Country hits from the '80s and a very few from the '70s. Shomby cites as examples songs by Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Eddie Rabbitt — the "uptempo hits" — The Judds and Alabama.

What you won't hear is a lot of the music from artists who comprise a lot of the typical Classic Country station's library, like Conway Twitty and Patsy Cline. Further describing the sound he's creating, Shomby says, "We're not going to get too twangy.

"We're not going to get into music by some of the country legends

station and a secondary station. The Eagle will be the primary station on most concerts, but we're also working with local promoters to bring in some folks who will fit better with WCMS."

### A Little Attitude

Setting Classic Country WCMS apart from most other gold-based Country formats is the jock approach and station sound. Shomby describes it as "hip, with a little attitude — a male attitude."

**"WCMS will focus on music from 1989-94, music from the heyday of country music, when people were coming from out of the format to listen to Country, many for the first time."**

Classic Country WCMS will also be highly produced. "Think of the way Classic Rock is presented from a production standpoint — that's how WCMS is being produced," Shomby says. "We're not going to go back and make memories as much as we will be playing this really good music.

"Another place the Classic Rock approach comes in is that we brought in a new station voice — a stronger voice that's not as 'countrified' as in the past. We're also going to position the station with music collages twice an hour as we look to define what Classic Country is for the audience. The jock presentation is hip, up, bright and not too twangy."

And how will success for the new WCMS be defined? "Top seven adults 25-54," Shomby says simply.



**WALKING STRAIGHT ACROSS TEXAS** Mercury Nashville recording artist Billy Currington has been hitting the road the past few months, meeting radio and delivering his debut single, "Walk a Little Straighter." Currington, a native of Rincon, GA, was in Texas recently, visiting KPLX/Dallas. Seen here (l-r) are KPLX PD Paul Williams and Asst. PD Smokey Rivers, Currington and KPLX MD Cody Alan.

that is too twangy either. It's kind of narrowed down. The library is only in the 350-400-record range."

### Classic Rock Flavor

Given the fact that the core gold library for many of today's Country stations is music from 1989-94, I ask Shomby if the musical tack he's taking on WCMS won't rip the heart out of WGH-FM's gold library.

"Not at all," he says. "We've done music tests that show there's a lot of strong music for The Eagle's audience that runs from 1997 on up — songs from Alan Jackson, Tim McGraw, Toby Keith, Shania Twain and others that really test well.

"The strong post-'97 music will be the core of The Eagle. There really hasn't been much music from '89-'94 on The Eagle — we've really only had it going back to '92-'93 for the most part."

Shomby added that the music overlap between the two stations will be only about 20%.

One of WCMS's new "flavor" categories will be devoted to classic rock hits. About once a daypart Norfolk listeners will hear selected cuts by Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Marshal Tucker Band, Pure Prairie League, Charlie Daniels Band, The Allman Brothers, The Eagles and others.

"We're looking for cuts that fit the sound — those compatible with the Country hits," Shomby says. "For instance, The Eagles' 'Take It Easy' fits, but 'Hotel California' doesn't. 'Sweet Home Alabama' fits; 'Freebird' doesn't. The songs in this category are a very small part of the musical mix. They're just little surprises for the listeners."

Meanwhile, Shomby says that the repositioning of WCMS has resulted in some slight adjustments on The Eagle. "It's more of a 'now' type of a station, with less gold and a more recurrent/current mix," he explains. "We want people to know that if they want to hear something new, they should go to The Eagle."

When it comes to positioning the two stations for live music, Shomby says that station involvement would depend on the show. "We'll both take part in the vast majority of concerts that come to town, just as we always have," he says.

"But now there will be a primary

**100.5 WCMS**  
*Classic Country*

### Creating A New Brand

What Shomby and Prater have created in the new Classic Country WCMS is a station perhaps unlike any other Classic Country outlet with which you might be familiar. Shomby says they had to build something new because he couldn't find the model he was looking for elsewhere.

"I talked to programmers with two Country stations in a number of markets," he says. "Most of them

and WGH-FM in listeners' and advertisers' minds, Shomby is aiming WCMS at 40-50-year-olds, while WGH-FM is targeted at the 28-38 age cell.

### Not Too Twangy

Before we get to the changes at WCMS, here are the things that have stayed the same: As you might expect, there was absolutely no need to change the call letters. The 49-year legacy of the WCMS call letters fits