

Jukebox programming

Programmers Rip Trend to Long 45

By ANNE DUSTON

CHICAGO—The trend towards longer singles is accelerating according to a study of top records over periods of 1966, 1971 and 1973. Jukebox programmers meeting here recently to help plan the Billboard Jukebox Programming Conference May 19-20 here at the Hotels Ambassador ranked lengthy 45's as a number one problem. Radio programmers are also concerned, according to a spot check.

A survey of ten No. 1 chart spots in 1966 shows that only one record, "Sunshine Superman," Donovan, Epic, soared into the 4-minute class, to 4:29. Seven of the ten titles were in the 2-minute range, and two were slightly over 3-minutes. Five years later, "Magpie May," Rod Stewart, Mercury, was 5:03. "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey," Paul and Linda McCartney, Apple, clocked at 4:41. Five records fell into the 3-minute class, with 3:40 being the mean. Only three records fell into the 2-minute range, compared to seven in 1966.

The current year has seen an even faster acceleration in long records. Four of the top songs covering the period from November to March are above 4-minutes. They are: "Killing Me Softly With His Song," at 4:02; "My Ding-A-Ling," 4:18; "You're So Vain," 4:25; and "Me and Mrs. Jones," 4:42. Three records are in the 3-minute range, and only two are in the 2-minute range, compared to the seven in 1966 and three in 1971.

Bud Hashman, Star Novelty, Springfield, Ill., has boycotted recent hit songs over 3:30 minutes, and

claims that his profits have not suffered. Hashman believes that programmers could unite in a boycott of long records, and force the record companies to reduce time lengths.

Most programmers questioned in a spot survey of the problem deplored the trend, but felt they had no choice because of popularity, requests and air play. John Britt, Blalock Music Co., Pensacola, Fla., noted that on a good location pulling \$200-\$250 a week, long records could cost the box \$20-\$25 per week. He also noted the problem of shut-off by the box. "If you set the box to accommodate long records, short records don't cut off at all. If you accommodate for the short records, the long ones cut off too soon." Gerry Gross, Sunset Automatic Music Co., Coos Bay, Ore., would like to see records under three minutes, but will buy long records on request. One long record she bought for five kid locations was "Layla," Derrick and The Dominos, at 7:10. Sandra Bennett, Kalamazoo Amusement Co., Comstock, Mich., suggested that the 2 for 25¢ play allowed for ample profit from the longer records.

Longer records is also a concern of radio stations. Herb Nestler, music director for WIND-AM, Chicago, said that besides restricting long playing records to certain air times, outside of rush hours, they might also lose radio audience. "Some people might not like the record that is playing for 6-minutes, and radio relies on keeping its audience. However, where

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Boxes Eat Up 'Hard Country'

By EARL PAIGE

NASHVILLE — Jukebox programmers may be the only hope for exposure of hard country records as country stations become more and more like Top 40, according to Barbara J. Starling, general manager, Royal American Records here. The trend to country stations "going pop" has caused her a major headache with the Onnie Wheeler recording "John's Been Shucking My Corn" (Billboard, Mar. 10).

All the same, she said many labels still do not recognize jukebox exposure for what it is. Moreover, jukebox programmers rarely circulate or even have play lists so spreading a record via jukeboxes is difficult. By the same token, since Royal American does push product via boxes, it has an advantage over labels that ignore jukeboxes, she indicated.

The Wheeler recording has been picked up by only a handful of

stations and turned down by several program director who claims it is "too dirty." She said this is a cop-out. "I think the record is just too country for many stations, certainly for many metropolitan country stations. I think many country stations have become more like Top 40, are very selective in what they play and have adopted tight play lists."

Where stations have gone on the record she claims it has done exceptional. She mentioned WIBK-AM, Knoxville, where she said 10,000 copies have been sold. KLAC-AM, Los Angeles, reports it is one of the most-requested records. WPLO-AM, Atlanta, has just gone on it. KENR-AM and KIKK-AM in Houston are both playing it but she has had no luck with WBAP-AM, Fort Worth. She said she was surprised though that KBUY-AM, Fort Worth, went on it because the outlet has a very modern country sound, but PD John Fricke likes the record.

However, some of the strongest breakouts have been from the jukeboxes. Royal American samples all jukebox one-stops, and may soon start sampling the Music Operators of America (MOA) programmer list. She said Davidson's one-stop in Wichita has been doing exceptionally well with the record though there is no local radio action there. In some cases, she has had difficulty with distributors and has gone around them to deal directly with one-stops.

Basically, she said Royal American is happy with jukebox programmers because they buy in blocks and buy early. She said jukebox programmers are buying more cautiously. "They will buy a box, try it, and buy more until it's worked around their routes. Jukebox programmers are more sophisticated than they used to be."

(Next, Royal American's philosophy, more forecasts of country music's relationship with jukeboxes.)

RIP LONG 45

Ore. Assn Watches Jukebox Legislation

By KENNETH W. FITZGERALD

GLENEDEN BEACH, Ore.—Jukebox operators in the State of Oregon are faced with no problems at the current session of the state legislature because of the Oregon Amusement & Music Operators Association has done its spade work and done it well, delegates attending the annual OAMOA convention were told by John Steelhammer, legal counsel for the association.

The association has worked closely with most of the legislators now meeting at the state capitol and has exerted considerable effort in recent years to keep the law-makers advised on the problems, the objectives, and the standards of the industry, Steelhammer pointed out. "They recognize that we are a vital part of the state's economy and that our industry is made up of legitimate, responsible businessmen who don't have to

hide their heads in the sand when it comes to discussing or advocating legislation that effects their well-being," he noted.

There is nothing wrong with supporting legislators or other elected public officials, regardless of party affiliation, if such support enhances the political bargaining position of the association and the industry it represents, Steelhammer observed. "As individuals working independently we can accomplish little," he stated. "But," he added, "as an association united on a

common legislative program, we pack considerable wallop at Salem." The stature of the industry in Oregon, he pointed out, has been enhanced measurably by keeping communications open between elected officials and the OAMOA.

Bob Fallow of the La Grande Amusement Co., La Grande, was elected president of the Oregon association at the two-day annual session at Salishan. Red Boyer of the Del Rogue Music Co., Grants Pass, was elevated to the vice-

presidency and Lon McKee, Hit Parade Music Co., Portland, was chosen secretary-treasurer. Elected to the board of directors for three-year terms at the session were McKee, Boyer, and Nels Cheney, Sunset Automatic Music Co., Coos Bay.

Carry-over board members, with one and two-year terms yet to serve, are Fallow, John Kelley, Kelley Amusement Co., Milton-Freewater; Don Anderson, A&A Amusement Co., Inc., Portland; (Continued on page 40)



JUKEBOX business people from widely separated parts of Oregon attended the recent meeting of the Ore. Amusement & Music Operators Assn. At left, Virgil Shoemaker, Ontario; Bob Fallow, La Grande (new president) and Larry Dolgoff, one-stop chief, Seattle; Don Pedro, Portland, and Steve Kraus, Eugene, huddle (second from left); Nels Cheney (left) and Fred Granger, Music Operators of America, Chicago, were speakers; Al Marsh, shown with his wife, visited from Washington where a new organization may be forming soon.

JUKEBOX MEETINGS

Mar. 22-24—Music Operators of America board meeting, Americana, Miami Beach, Fla.
Apr. 13-14—MOA Notre Dame seminar, Notre Dame, Ind.
Sept. 21-23—Ill. Coin Machine Operators Assn., Playboy Club, Lake Geneva, Wis.
Sept. 21-22—W. Va. Music & Vending Assn., Heart O' Town Motor Inn, Charleston.
Nov. 9-11—MOA, Conrad Hilton, Chicago.

Mo. Jukebox Co. Tailors Music, Leases to Fit Spot

By GRIER LOWRY

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second part of an interview with Tom Bengamini, programmer at B&G Amusement & Vending in Missouri, covering subjects ranging from leasing and new furniture styles to dollar bill acceptors and wall-box operation.

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—Tom Bengamini of B&G Amusement & Vending here has found that programming jukeboxes depends importantly on taking into consideration the individuality of each location. This ranges from favoring a spot because of a good patron to starting some locations on a lease basis until the stop is proven. One of the most optimistic trends of late, he said, is the shift to more oldies, spurred he believes, by the late night TV promotions. But a special effort is made never to overload a location with too much of the same kind of music. Other views of Bengamini's were published earlier (Billboard, Feb. 3).

Renting and leasing boxes is favored by B&G. For one thing, leasing equipment is often a convenient stepping-stone to buying new and better boxes. "You put a new box out on a flat-fee lease, pay for it in a year, then replace it with a new one to the leasing customer and put the year-old box out on commission."

"This represents only one reason the idea of getting as many boxes as possible out on leasing is appealing," said Tom Bengamini, active young head of this solidly-entrenched operation. "It takes that 50 percent commission to the location out of picture. It cuts down on damage and overhead. With his own money on the line, a leased-box customer doesn't keep quiet when a customer starts beating on a jukebox."

"Also the offer to lease is a good way to put the skids on any impression a location may have that B&G has a

windfall in jukeboxes," he says. "When they pay out a leasing fee of \$35 weekly and pick up only \$32 in the box, they know the money isn't quite that easy."

B&G finds leasing a handy gambit for coping with unproved locations. The owner of a location with uncertain potential may resist the idea of leasing and insist he'll hustle the box on a commission deal. Bengamini then says, "Okay, you'll hustle. Then why not hustle for yourself." We'll give you the key to the money box on a leased arrangement. "The leased deal helps us get off the hook on many of these unproved locations," said Bengamini. "We put a new-styled lowboy console, which run about \$350 higher than other furniture, in a nice cocktail lounge and quit worrying about return on our investment."

Bengamini is an outspoken critic of the dollar bill acceptor, laying several grievances at the doorstep of this attachment. Equipping machines with dollar bill acceptors, he contends, doesn't benefit operators or location owners, is more likely to increase headaches for both.

"Assume a customer puts a dollar in a music box ten minutes before closing time and has six or seven tunes coming when it is time to button up," suggested Bengamini. "He waves to the waitress, states the situation, and she makes a cash payment to the customer for the dollar. At some locations we've had six or seven one dollar cash payments to pick up and only \$3 in the box. The location owner is irritated when these problems are incurred. When a dollar bill acceptor doesn't function properly a customer really screams. He'll complain about losing a quarter, but he'll yell four times harder when a dollar is involved."

"But that's not all," said the Kansas City operator. "After a guy punches out six or seven numbers to run out his buck, he runs out of ideas. So he desperately punches the same tunes—his favorites. Now hearing that same number

four or five times may be ace high with the guy who likes it, but it's sheer torture for the rest of the customers. "Our policy is that we don't put the dollar bill acceptors on the box unless the location people insist on it," said Bengamini.

Four full-time mechanics, including a night technician, bear responsibility for servicing machines. Calls are logged and if over five calls are logged in a single month on a piece of equipment, it is replaced. Bengamini said it costs too much to service machines and he refuses to fool around with capricious equipment. The company is exclusively 2 for 25¢ play and discourages individuals who want to switch to five for 25¢ or some other variance. They are told machines are set for two for a quarter at the factory and can't be changed.

Charles Bengamini originally started the business as a shuffleboard specialty operation. He had worked twelve years with the old Music Service Co., one of the largest shuffleboard and music operations in the country. The firm at one time had nine collectors on the streets of Kansas City changing records, making collections on games and music boxes. This was the era of 12-inch records. Then the elder Bengamini opened up a shuffleboard parlor with eight boards. Later he went into partnership with Tony Gulotta, a onetime racing car driver, in coin-operated games and jukeboxes. Eventually, he bought Gulotta out. Tom Bengamini was almost weaned in the business, making deliveries of equipment as a small boy. He recalls those old Wurlitzers with the 12-inch records: "heavy brutes to lug around." The firm had its problems, including those surrounding regulatory restrictions that crop up from time to time, but the long experience combined with emphasis on the latest equipment and careful programming practices has made B&G one of the top companies in the Mid-West, believes Bengamini.

MOA INKS 25

NOTRE DAME, Ind. — Twenty-five delegates have sent in \$70 registration fee checks for the April 13-14 Music Operators of America (MOA) seminar here at Notre Dame. Address is Notre Dame CCC, Box W, 46556.