

Goodphone Commentaries

Mike Joseph And The Contrarian Approach

By JIM SMITH

I am fascinated, as an amateur investor in the stock market and elsewhere, by the theory among certain investors, who are called "contrarians," which essentially holds that if the majority is doing it, it may therefore be wrong. Contrarian philosophy can trace its roots to Goethe and Rousseau, but it has only been in the past 50 years or so that it has been applied to investing.

Bernard Baruch understood crowd psychology, and often bought and sold accordingly. Russell Sage described the accumulation of his fortune as "buying straw hats in January."

What all this has to do with radio is my random thought that Mike Joseph has a streak of the contrarian in him. Joseph, for those of you who haven't been paying attention lately, is the programming consultant who debuted the Hot Hits format last fall on CBS' WCAU-FM Philadelphia; they came up with a 6.0 in the first book and a 7.4 in the next. Although his act is not substantially different from what he's recently done in several smaller markets, much is suddenly being written about him because (a) Philly is a top five market, and (b) his next assignment was CBS' WBBM-FM in Chicago.

Unlike Philadelphia, where Hot Hits' direct competitor is said to have rolled over and played dead, Chicago is a trickier situation to be sure... twice as many black stations... several well-established AC's... and WLS, which finally crushed challenger WCFL in the '70s and

has made the cost of entry too steep for each FM top 40 which tried thereafter; which has the established air talent line-up; which has the resources to give away houses to contest winners; which has been format-dominant almost since it debuted in 1960 and continues to be the most listened-to Chicago station; which now has an FM as well; which has a commitment to winning that may be hard to beat. And yet, Hot Hits on WBBM-FM is not unlike WCAU-FM.

For Mike Joseph, one might conclude, has approached the tasks very much in the manner of the contrarian. Take oldies, for instance. WLS has, for years, been about one-half gold in a typical hour. Many stations are, both here and in Philadelphia. One Chicago AC had recently been playing as few as one current per hour, the rest being oldies and recurrents. Going into such an environment, many a programmer might have tried to determine which oldies were best to play on his station. The contrarian Mike Joseph, however, has set up Hot Hits with no oldies at all—becoming perhaps the most written-about feature of the format.

In preserving their 12-24 base, WLS has been leaning more toward the AOR than toward the pop side of contemporary music. It is today one of the very few stations of its kind which regularly programs non-hit single album cuts. But with no oldies at all, WBBM-FM runs a lengthy playlist which includes all the rock biggies plus a substantial compo-

ment of AC-chart items and even a few black hits.

This latter, of course, is downright sacrilegious in this musically segregated city. For quite some time, any sort of research has told white programmers in Chicago to approach black music with extreme caution. Either Joseph didn't do that research or, being a contrarian, he chose to ignore it.

One radio observer expressed surprise that WBBM-FM was not dayparting. I was able, based on my intensive monitoring of their early weeks in the format, to contradict him. He was used to hearing WLS and similar stations which daypart by song texture and/or artist image. Mike Joseph dayparts on the basis of what age group, according to what record store clerks tell the station, are buying those records. The impartial observer may question basing a playlist at all on record sales in these depressed times, much less placing faith in a salesclerk's evaluation of demographic appeal. But the contrarian merely says this alternative method seems logical, and he thus conveniently ignores call-outs or any of the other accepted ways of approaching the situation.

WLS has some of the best-known rock personalities in town, whether 15-year veterans like Larry Lujack or relative newcomers like AOR-expatriate Steve Dahl. Other stations in the market have at times brought in big-buck alternatives, or have mounted extended talent searches for the perfect morning man, or have tried to develop what they have. The contrarian approach here, as in Philadelphia, has been to bring in all-new relatively unproven voices, capable of pre-writing their highly structured raps into fixed seconds-per-break limits such as to include hourly quotas of such items as street and town names.

WLS has literally given away houses. WLUP once handed over half-a-million dollars during one book. WCLR and others each easily spend a multiple of that figure in tv time each year. Hot Hits' "name game" involves a rather small cash prize for knowing the jackpot amount when called, a relatively unlikely occurrence since calls are made cold from area phone books. The surname of the potential winner is given out on-air in advance, and listeners are urged "to call everyone you know" with that last name. Come now, you scoff, who would actually bother to call people in such a situation when they have nothing to win themselves? Nice word-of-mouth promotion if anyone would... but would you? Would any of your friends? And yet here, perhaps, may be the heart of the matter. For "you" are not the target listener, nor are your probably too-hip friends.

What we have here—and this may explain the contrarian approach—is truly lowest-common-denominator radio. This is not aimed at the young professional from the station's soft-rock days. The typical listener may be the housewife who grew up on trashy top 40 in the 1950s (and still wants to hear it on the radio)... and her teenage kids.

If WBBM-FM starts out even half as well as WCAU-FM did, we are likely to see stations committing the sincerest form of flattery from coast to coast... and probably many of them failing at it. I can readily attest, from many hours of observation and

(Continued on page 33)

New On The Charts



MEN AT WORK
"Who Can It Be Now?"—☆

Men At Work have been a favorite on the Australian club circuit for several years. The five-member band came to the attention of CBS Records Australia after a number of sellout dates.

Working with producer Peter McLan, the group's first single, "Who Can It Be Now?" was released in 1981. The single was certified gold in Australia, as was the followup song, "Down Under." Their debut album, "Business As Usual," has reportedly sold more than 150,000 copies and was No. 1 in Australia for longer than any other domestic release except Split Enz' "True Colours."

The group is composed of Colin Hay, vocals; Greg Ham, saxophonist/key-boardist; Ron Strykert, lead guitarist; bassist John Rees; and drummer Jerry Speiser. For more information about the group, contact CBS Records, 51 W. 52nd St., New York, N.Y. 10019; (212) 975-4321.

This feature is designed to spotlight acts making their debut on Billboard's Hot 100 and Top LPs & Tape charts. For newcomers on the black and country charts, see pages 58 and 53.

Out Of The Box

HOT 100/AC

CLEVELAND—"Do I Do" is pure Stevie Wonder," says WWWM-FM music-program director Mike McVay. "It's a little more uptempo than most adult contemporary stations care to handle these days, but we—the post-war baby boom—grew up on Motown and rock 'n' roll, and I see nothing wrong with programming it." He's also excited about Herb Alpert's "Route 101" (A&M), which he calls "a breath of fresh air, really the hottest tune we've seen in a good while. Most instrumentals today are theme songs that evoke mental pictures, but this is light and airy, perfect to drive along to. I find the Latin beat very relaxing."

AOR

DANBURY, Conn.—"Your Daddy Don't Know," the first single from Toronto's new Network LP, "Get It On Credit," has caught the ear of WRKI music director Bruce Goldsen, who feels the Canadian rock group has come up with a rock 'n' roll version of "Jessie's Girl." "It's a tough sound—part Loverboy, part Rush," he says. "I liked it right off the bat." An edited version of "Take A Chance With Me" by Roxy Music from the group's "Avalon" album (EG/Warner Bros.), is another new add. Goldsen says that singer Brian Ferry's voice "is eerie but very catchy. The single certainly isn't as weird as their cover of Lennon's 'Jealous Guy.' After three plays, I was singing it in my car." He concludes that while he's never been a big Judas Priest fan, he thinks the group is looking for older demographics with their new record, "Screaming For Vengeance" (Columbia). "They've put some melody back into their music. In fact, two cuts, 'The Hellion' and 'Electric Eye,' sound like heavy metal but really have a mainstream edge."

BLACK/URBAN

FT. LAUDERDALE—WRBD-AM music director Julian Wright, better known as "Dr. J," believes in the poetic power of "The Message," the new single by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (Sugar Hill). "It's the deepest message I've ever heard on a rap record," he notes. "There's so much inner city tension—I think it's absolutely incredible. They've always sold well on the street, but this record is going to sell everywhere." The broadcaster also likes the new single by the Sugar Hill Gang, "The Lover In You" (Sugar Hill), but he's more impressed with keyboardist Pete Wingfield, who wrote and produced the track with Sylvia Robinson. "He's the real man behind the scenes. I believed in his work for Mel Brooks on 'It's Good To Be The King,' but the record didn't catch here. Yet the response to 'Lover' is like night and day. It really flows." Dr. J adds that he's energized by the bass line to "Dance Floor," the new single by Zapp (Warner Bros.), and that "Imagination" by the BB&Q Band (Capitol) is an instant vocoder classic. "The vocal arrangement reminds me of the group's 'A Time To Lose,' but rhythmically I hear the Petrus Italo-funk sound of 'I'll Do My Best' and 'Feeling Lucky' all the way through."

COUNTRY

PITTSBURGH—Ron Antill likes the smoothness of Gail Davies' delivery on her cover of "You Turn Me On (I'm A Radio)" (Warner Bros.). The WDSY-FM music director says the singer's vocal on the Joni Mitchell tune "warms the record up rather nicely." Another new standout, he feels, is "This Dream's On Me" by Gene Watson (MCA). "We're country-politan when it comes to programming, and we've kind of shied away from Gene in the past. But he's doing well for us now. The new tune is very tight and really strikes my fancy." Antill is also enthusiastic about the crossover potential of "Dreams Die Hard" by Gary Morris (Warner Bros.) and Michael Murphy's treatment of "What's Forever For" (Liberty).

LEO SACKS

JULY 17, 1982, BILLBOARD

Survey For Week Ending 7/10/82

Billboard Chart Breakouts

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Country Hot 100

- ★ **FRANK & MOON ZAPPA**
Valley Girl, Barking Pumpkin 1485 (CBS)
- ★ **PAUL DAVIS**
Love Or Let Me Be Lonely, Arista 0697
- ★ **RAY PARKER, JR.**
Let Me Go, Arista 0695

Black

- ★ **BELLAMY BROTHERS**
Get Into Reggae Country, Elektra/Curb 7-69999
- ★ **TOM CARLILE**
Back In Debbie's Arms, Door Knob 82-180
- ★ **BILLY "CRASH" CRADDOCK**
Love Busted, Capitol 5139
- ★ **NARVEL FELTS**
Roll Over Beethoven, Lobo-X1

A/C

- ★ **LARRY GRAHAM**
Sooner Or Later, Warner Bros. 7-29956
- ★ **THE B.B. & Q BAND**
Imagination, Capitol 5118
- ★ **DENIECE WILLIAMS**
Waiting By The Hotline, ARC/Columbia 18-03015
- ★ **BILL SUMMERS AND SUMMERS HEAT**
Give Your Love To Me, MCA 52077
- ★ **MICHAEL MURPHEY**
What's Forever For, EMI-America 1466
- ★ **ELTON JOHN**
Blue Eyes, Geffen 7-29954 (Warner Bros.)
- ★ **PAUL DAVIS**
Love Or Let Me Be Lonely, Arista 0697

This week's highest superstarred/starred chart entries in the formats listed.