

Radio

Hugh Heller 'Paints Moods' With His Station Jingles

By ROLLYE BORNSTEIN

LOS ANGELES—Think of jingles and think of quality. It's a good bet the classiest jingle you can recall was produced by Hugh Heller. "But I've never done a jingle in my life," laughs Heller.

Heller's point transcends semantics and money. "A jingle is something you can quickly knock off. Here we sit, it's about midnight, and I'm telling you how great I am. Set that to music and that's a jingle."

"What I try to do is convey a mood, paint this moment. It's what radio stations are constantly doing. They're painting, in sound, the mood of the moment for their city. Their music, the things they say, the production are all part of that montage. Stations that successfully capture that moment win."

Heller's production works because it often creates that mood. "If it happens to be singers and musicians, that's fine, but an image campaign shouldn't be limited to that," says Heller—who has made image and positioning integral parts of his philosophy since the late '50s, when KSFO's "Sound of San Francisco" campaign led to his eventual appointment as national PD of the Golden West chain. "Use of actors, sound effects and comedy also achieve the goal. The reason we don't use them more is that they're expensive. After a few airings, it's over, but we've done a lot of it for KVIL (Dallas) because they can afford it."

Heller's work at KVIL and co-owned WIBC has led many people to



Hugh Heller

credit his identity campaigns with a portion of KVIL's great success. "For one thing," he notes, "we were in stereo, so KVIL could show off our quality better than most AMs."

Stereo production was used by Heller as far back as 1959. "A lot of people asked us about that when we did KSFO, and while you couldn't hear it on the radio, it made a point on all of our promotional materials, such as the presentations we constantly made to the agencies in New York."

"Another thing about KVIL: We took a cocky attitude in our lyrics and general approach. We didn't ask you to listen; we implied you were crazy if you didn't. And then there's consistency. From 1973 through today, four basic notes identify KVIL. Repetition in that sense works. Like the CBS thing."

Heller conceived the simple electronic ID CBS instituted in 1967 and uses to this day every half hour. "It's probably the most recognizable thing I've done," he says.

"Sound is so easy to suggest things," Heller continues. "I guess that's all I do. I show how you can

use interesting sound devices to paint a mood in people's minds to get attention, and I don't care how we get it. But when we get through, we want you to feel we're special."

"I've got to give a lot of credit to Ron Chapman (KVIL PD and morning personality), because he knows how to use our work. Without proper execution and exposure, KVIL wouldn't have had the same impact with our stuff."

It was execution that led Heller, a college-trained musician whose background included the general management of MCA's San Francisco office as well as a successful creative post with George Gobel's GOMALCO, to the KSFO PD post. "We did the identity design, and they had problems programming it. I kept going up to offer programming advice, and finally they said, 'Why don't you move your company back here and program KSFO?'"

That 1959 move led to the Golden West national PD post, which Heller resigned in 1973 to team up with Allyn Ferguson on the first regional videotaped tv show. "But I kept getting calls to do more and more station things because of the success we'd had with Gene Autry. In 1964 the WMAL (Washington) campaign was so successful that the station pressed it on disk, to fill the requests from transient residents such as the ambassador from Bolivia for a copy to take back home."

For a while KVIL tried other "jingle" syndicators, coming back to Heller only recently. "Jim Hilliard (president of Blair's owned stations

division) has always been one of my best customers," Heller laughs. "He sends me a check and says, 'Do whatever this will buy.' He's never even seen one of my studios."

Heller recently delivered a new concept to his newest client, Houston's KRBE. "I walked in, put an 18½-minute tape on and said, 'That's it.' They looked at me and said, 'What do we do with it?' I told them, 'Play it every hour!'" The concept was of course designed to be split into dozens of cuts of varying length, tempo and attitude, all unique to the market.

"That's a problem with the so-

called jingle companies. They got an idea that doing radio campaigns was a good way to make a lot of money. They'd do one and re-sell it over and over. It keeps the price down, they do a lot of business, but as it gets cheaper, the quality suffers. Management is trained to think in terms of the bottom line."

Given inflation and rising studio costs—\$10 an hour in 1959, compared with \$150 today—Heller's current price, compared to KSFO's 1959 package at \$56,000, has actually gone down.

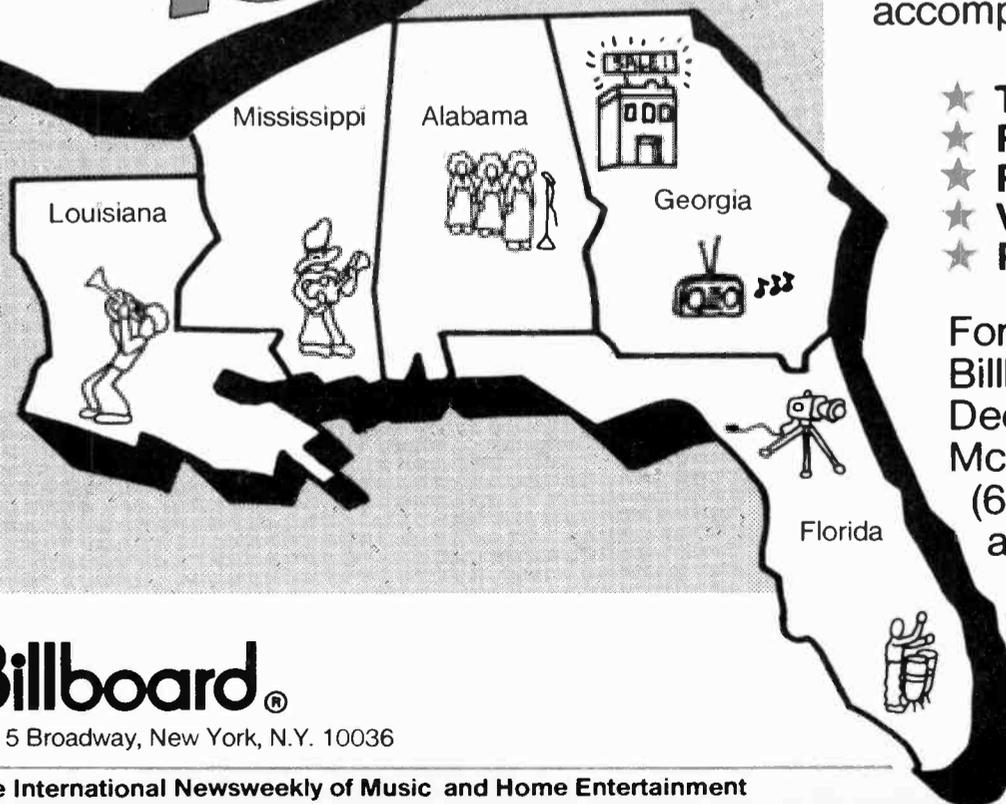
Business ability, however, has not
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SPANKY'S RETURN—Spanky McFarlane, center, of Spanky & Our Gang, visits staff at WMJI Cleveland during the station's "Majic Hall of Fame" concert series. Part of the "Happy Together '84" tour, Spanky joins '60s rock colleagues the Turtles, the Association and Gary Puckett on the road. Shown with her are WMJI program director Dave Popovich left, and music director Mike Ivers.

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