

OLDIES CONTINUE TO GROW ON COUNTRY RADIO

(Continued from page 3)

er reason why oldies remain important: "This week it's too difficult to find a lot of hit current songs. At points like this, you rely on the oldies."

Bob English, president of Broadcast Programming Inc., the Seattle-based format-syndication company, notes the record and radio industries are coming from two different points on the subject. "I appreciate where I hear the labels coming from in saying they're not wild about servicing country radio with a great depth of oldies product because they have the feeling that radio is not exposing new product enough to get the job done." English says that if the labels were to issue more compilation LPs and CDs "it would be a huge boon to our business, our industry, and would be good for radio in general."

Daniel praises the increasing amount of greatest hits CDs coming from record firms. "That's the most economical way a record company can get their CD material out there." Neil McGinley, operations manager of WKHX-AM/FM Atlan-

ta, notices an increase in the amount of oldies product available on CD, saying, "The labels have become more aware of it."

Larry Daniels, general program manager of KNIX-AM/FM Phoenix, Ariz., says, "Sometimes KNIX gets rapped by the record companies for playing a lot of oldies. But the top-rated stations around the country—the ones that consistently get good numbers in their markets—play a lot of well-tested oldies." He insists his station spends "a great amount of time and money doing research on what listeners want. And they continually tell us that they want more oldies."

KNIX plays more oldies than currents, reaching as far back as 1953 with Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart." Like most of the broadcasters, Larry Daniels defines an oldie as anything available for more than one year. "Oldies by themselves on our station wouldn't work. But you get a good balance of oldies and currents and reissues, and you can make a heck of a radio station out of it—you can have sounds

for everybody in the family."

Daniel of KPLX reports up to 70% of airtime is given to oldies, adding, "I get more calls during the day from listeners who will ask me about an old song than a new song."

'I get more calls during the day asking me about old songs'

Daniel puts himself in the listeners' position, noting, "If I turn on the radio and I don't hear something I'm familiar with within five minutes, I'll go somewhere else."

Bill Pyne, music director of WQYK-FM Tampa/St. Petersburg, views the reliance on oldies with a critical eye: "That's a criticism of radio in general because so-called contemporary radio relies pretty heavily on oldies. Contemporary is a misnomer in some respects." The Florida station programs about 50%

oldies, dating back to "I've Been Everywhere" by Hank Snow, Johnny Horton's "North To Alaska," and "Big Bad John" by Jimmy Dean. WQYK covers the gamut from the new traditionalist movement to pop-oriented contemporary country records. Says Pyne, "As long as it's done well and you don't blatantly offend a country listener with a real rock'n'roll arrangement, they'll accept quite a bit."

Examples of this programming philosophy are the playing of the Allman Brothers' "Rambling Man" on WHN-AM New York; Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" at KIKK-AM/FM Houston; "Lyn' Eyes" by the Eagles on WKHX-AM/FM Atlanta; "Fairytale" by the Pointers on KPLX Dallas; and B.J. Thomas' "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head" on KNIX Phoenix.

Says Daniel, "Hell, I grew up with the Eagles greatest-hits album—that's what I listened to in high school." Therefore, it's no surprise to find an Eagles nest at his Texas station, hatching such songs as "Take It Easy," "Best Of My

Love," "Take It To The Limit," and "Desperado." The 26-year-old music director says, "People in country music like to hear stuff they grew up with."

The oldies thrust—particularly the increase in rock-oriented songs—adds fuel to the age-old questions, What is country music? and What is a country radio station?

Among the country acts frequenting the oldies bins are Alabama, George Jones, Exile, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, Jimmy Buffett, Hank Williams Jr. and Sr., Glen Campbell, Anne Murray, and the Everly Brothers. Billboard's survey reveals varied rotation levels within the oldies category, with the newer entries gaining more playing time than the classics of the '50s and '60s.

The programmers are enthused about the explosion of new acts gaining stardom and plan to merge the new faces with the old reliables in achieving a healthy mix to lure more listeners.

KMET ABANDONS ROCK, POSSIBLY FOR JAZZ, NEW AGE

(Continued from page 1)

work on time.

"I really can't comment on the new format," says KMET-cum-KTWV program director Frank Cody. "We've all taken vows on this. Our philosophy is to simply reveal it on the air Saturday [Feb. 14] and let people judge KTWV for themselves."

Cody does say, however, "The format will be in a chronologically logical direction," which could be interpreted as a format that would appeal to original KMET fans, whose musical tastes have changed and matured over the years. Cody suggested that the format would be in a revolutionary realm, and many in the industry have long associated Cody with his interest in putting jazz and new age music on commercial airwaves.

Before joining KMET last year, Cody was instrumental in developing the successful "Jazz Show With David Sanborn" for NBC Radio En-

tertainment while he was a programming chief there.

If the new age/jazz rumors prove true, it would mark the first time a major-market commercial radio station tried the format on a full-time basis. The move would be particularly bold because of KTWV's Los Angeles locale. The market is ranked No. 2 according to Arbitron population and is the No. 1 market for advertising dollars spent.

Additionally, the move would involve a broadcast group—Metropolitan Broadcasting—that is highly regarded in the industry for its past and present radio successes.

Formerly known as Metromedia Radio, the group's name changed to Metropolitan early this year when an in-house buyout of the radio group was made for \$285 million. In addition to KTWV, Metropolitan owns album rock legends WNEW-FM New York and WMMR Philadelphia as well as WNEW-AM New

York, WIP Philadelphia, KRLD Dallas, WWBA Tampa, Fla., WOMC Detroit, WASH-FM Washington, D.C., and the Texas State Network.

As KMET was also considered one of rock's "legendary" stations, the decision to retire the calls was a difficult and well-researched one. The dominant rock outlet in Los Angeles during much of the '70s and part of the early '80s, KMET's ratings began to slide in 1983. In the fall 1986 Arbitron ratings, KMET's market share dropped to a 1.6.

According to Cody, it was only very recently that he and KTWV vice president and general manager Howard Bloom decided which of two format alternatives to pursue. Shortly after Cody arrived at KMET in October, he says, Metropolitan president Carl Brazel Jr. "commissioned a KMET revitalization project [and a] separate project to assemble what the components of a great radio station are, the basic consensus of which was that an entity had to be *truly different*." A number of format possibilities were narrowed down to two, says Cody. "The first was a logical extension of what KMET has been doing, with original air staff intact." The other was the "new concept." Pursuing the first alternative explains why some of KMET's original air talents—especially night talent Jim Ladd—were brought back in the last year or so.

"Research confirmed that Southern Californians have a preconceived notion of what KMET was... [That listeners would see] KMET as a contemporary station being a contradiction in terms." The research was coupled with the fact that Los Angeles shares for album rock stations have been on the decline for a while.

"There was no way Metropolitan could look at us and say, 'Yeah, this is going to work [as KMET].' When a company has resources like ours, we can't settle for a 1.6 share. We can't settle for anything." (For a roundup, see Vox Jox, page 15.)

COLUMBIA, E/P/A CUTBACKS

(Continued from page 10)

get to familiarize the music so that top 40 can go on it and get all the promotional support," he says. "I think this will encourage people to use their ears more, and now we can let top 40 pick their own damn music."

"I've been an advocate of this policy for a long time," says Greg Gillespie of the Burkhardt/Abrams/Douglas/Elliott consulting firm. "It may force people to listen to records a little closer. In the long run, I think it could be very beneficial to our format." Gillespie says the move may give programmers more input on selection of label's "work" tracks. "It's really a way of marketing an album that's tailor-made for our format," he says.

Like several programmers, Gillespie says he hopes dollars saved on 12-inches will be spent on CD service and extra promotional support. Financial savings as a result of 12-inch cutbacks, however, are not expected to be dramatic, say both McKeon and Leeds.

WKLS Atlanta PD Bill Pugh says, "Twelve-inches used to be great because they were usually a hotter press. It's no longer the case now that CDs have become such a big part of our libraries."

Buzz Knight, PD of WKRI Danbury, Conn., says 12-inches are not a factor when he is determining a label's commitment. He says that any promotional effort "is only as good as how good [the label's] local reps work you. It's the rep who represents the label's commitment."

Knight concurs with E/P/A and Columbia that album reseriving may encourage more listening. "This business has become very 'one-cut' oriented, and it shouldn't be because it's *album* rock. This type of service plus the cassettes and CDs should help."

"Twelve inches don't show extra commitment to anything," says WFBQ Indianapolis PD Marty Bender. Album reseriving is a nice idea, he says, but it should be accompanied by constant label contact and information on artist touring, video release dates, and other rele-

vant topics.

With such a warm reception from radio, other labels may follow Columbia and E/P/A's lead. "This has been a point of discussion for a long time," says Judy Libow, Atlantic VP for national album promotion. "Possibly, we'll follow suit depending on how it works out for CBS."

The 12-inch issue carries an inherent Catch-22, Libow says. "We always hear from radio that they don't want another 12-inch. And then, we're asking why they're not on a track and they say, 'We're waiting for the 12-inch!' So radio, too, has vacillated on the subject. And perhaps it's just going to take one label stepping out and doing it."

Bill Bennett, MCA VP for album promotion, says, "I've never heard the complaints about simply too much vinyl caused by 12-inches. I'm very happy for CBS if they feel compelled to make this announcement. But, MCA has always used 12-inches only when they make sense, and we'll continue to do that."

RCA STOPS VINYL PRESSING

(Continued from page 1)

pressing facilities to announce a complete cessation of in-house vinyl production (Capitol quit pressing vinyl in February 1986), RCA/Ariola says its decision is the "result of a steady decline in consumer preference for vinyl records, which now account for less than 25% of sales, while compact disks and audiocassettes have grown to nearly 80% of sales."

RCA/Ariola is currently seeking

arrangements with independent pressers to take over the label's vinyl needs. "We're talking to a group of them, and their names are familiar to all," the spokesman says.

The vinyl phaseout, announced in Indianapolis on Feb. 6, will affect about 700 of 1,100 employees at the company's 30th Street complex. RCA/Ariola will continue its commercial distribution operations for its record club's fulfillment.

RCA/Ariola says it has contacted city and state officials in the city and will be working with local and state agencies to assist employees in outplacement retraining.

RCA/Ariola's 2-year-old cassette-duplication facility in Weaverville, N.C., is not affected by the decision to stop pressing vinyl. The label does not manufacture its own compact disks.

Although CBS quit making vinyl product at its plant in Pittman, N.J., last year, it still produces LPs and 45s at its Carrollton, Ga., facility.

MGM/UA

(Continued from page 6)

ware from total camcorder sales, Cott notes that an effort is under way to that end this year. The EIA has said that total camcorder sales [portable VHS, VHS-C, and 8mm] were 1.17 million units in 1986, an increase of 126.2% over the previous year. The EIA further notes that at least 1.5 million total camcorders will be sold this year. JIM McCULLAUGH

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