



SEAN ROSS

FRED JACOBS INTERVIEWED

Classic Rock: The Format/Slogan/Future

Many of this spring's most spectacular increases belong to AOR/Gold hybrids. "Classic Hits" WKLH/Milwaukee debuted with a 7.0 share. KKLZ/Las Vegas, billed as "Quality Rock of the '60s, '70s, and '80s," entered the market with a 9.0. Both WKLH and KKLZ edged their market's powerhouse AORs, WQFM and KOMP, respectively.

KKLZ, WKLH, and most AOR/Gold outlets of recent vintage owe something to KRQX/Dallas, which, under Fred Jacobs and Tom Bender, eventually prompted both the "degraftization" of Gold and the gentrification of AOR. KRQX, on AM, led to Jacobs's three FM "Classic Rock" clients: WMMQ/Lansing, (7.0-9.0 this spring), KCFX/Kansas City (4.8-5.9), and WCFX/Washington (4.1-5.3).

As with most consultants and the format booms they touch off, Jacobs profits from only a fraction of the Classic Rock bandwagon. At least two L.A. stations, for example, use the slogan but none of its formatics. Many of those who aren't cannibalizing the format have tried to write it off as a quick-fix solution, an assessment with which Jacobs, surprisingly, doesn't entirely disagree. He talks here openly about CR's development, its role in the radio marketplace, and why, to paraphrase George Allen, the future for many of his clients is now.

San Franciscan Nights

The roots of Classic Rock date back to 1979-80 when those on the KRQX team were all ABC employees seeking a new format for the troubled KSFZ/San Francisco (now N/T KGO-FM). Says Jacobs, "Marty Greenberg told me, 'We may have to put KSFZ up for sale.' And at that time, for ABC to dump an O&O would have been a major move. He asked if there was anything else KSFZ could try. That was the point where it got put down in writing. A lot of that proposal, which was very crude, was done in conjunction with Tom Bender.

"One of the reasons I thought it might be appealing for San Francisco was that city's rich rock and roll history. It would've been a rock station for San Francisco, keying in on a lot of the older groups and the Fillmore West. AOR hadn't developed to where it would be a couple of years later, but there were signs of the corporatization of AOR which, to me, signalled the opportunity for somebody to get back to its roots.

"Obviously, ABC wasn't in the mood in 1980 to gamble on something like this and that was probably a very wise decision on its part. But Tom and I had been talking

One Market Problems

Jacobs still envisioned Classic Rock as an FM format. And there would be differences in the format once WMMQ became its first FM client, but he insists "there really was no concept of 'let's start it here and then build it up.' I was trying to help solve a one-market problem. I had no illusions then that KRQX would grow and become anything significant. When that happened, I wasn't even in business for myself at the time. I was on the tail-end of programming WRIF/Detroit and just working with Tom in a sort of helper capacity.

"At the time, (AORs) KTXQ and KZEW were really both fighting each other in the corporate rock wars and neither one was playing a lot of older stuff. They were also quite metallic at that point. The FMs had completely dropped the ball on servicing their 25-34 year-old, primarily male audience. We felt that there might be a couple of valuable share points and Belo Broadcasting at that point didn't see KRQX and KZEW as competing with each other. The two stations' demos, combined, have made a real good sell on the street for the past three and a half years."



Fred Jacobs

about it so that when something had to be done with WFAA/Dallas (then N/T), it wasn't as if somebody went into a back room and dreamed the whole thing up."

KRQX/Dallas

(February '84)

- SLY & THE FAMILY STONE/Dance To The Music
ASSOCIATION/Along Comes Mary
MOODY BLUES/Nights In White Satin
BOZ SCAGGS/What Can I Say
YARDBIRDS/Under Over Sideways Down
GRAHAM NASH/Immigration Man
TROGGS/Love Is All Around
EDWIN STARR/War
ROLLING STONES/Sympathy For The Devil
CHUCK BERRY/Rock & Roll Music
LOVIN' SPOONFUL/You Didn't Have To Be So Nice
AMERICAN BREED/Bend Me Shape Me
LINDA RONSTADT/That'll Be The Day

KCFX/Kansas City

(August '86)

- SYNDICATE OF SOUND/Hey Little Girl
CROSBY STILLS & NASH/Long Time Gone
CHICAGO/Dialogue
SIMON & GARFUNKEL/Homeward Bound
DAVE MASON/Only You Know & I Know
FLEETWOOD MAC/Say You Love Me
BEATLES/Golden Slumbers-Carry That Weight
NEIL YOUNG/Southern Man
ANIMALS/House Of The Rising Sun
EAGLES/Those Shoes
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN/Growing Up

Not A Kind Industry

"This is not a very kind industry," says Jacobs, "to people with new ideas. A lot of people

don't realize that from the time I put together my sales kits to the point when WMMQ became my first FM client was about 15 months. When I made the announcement to syndicate the Classic Rock format, it was a joke. 'Hot Hits' was everywhere, and yet here's a guy in Detroit nobody's really heard from who says, 'I've got a Classic Rock format and it's going to be a really big deal.'"

During the time it took him to find an FM for Classic Rock, Jacobs did research and consulted other clients, some of them outside the AOR arena. Having set up his Media Strategies during "AOR's dead period," Jacobs says, "I was quite concerned about being stereotyped as only an AOR person." Although he'd like to work outside the format again, Jacobs says he eventually gravitated back there because "it became clearer that I enjoyed AOR more from a pleasure standpoint. And by my industry reputation, there were more doors open in AOR, so I felt I may as well go where the strength is."

By the time WMMQ opted for Classic Rock, Jacobs says he was "at the point of just figuring this wasn't going to happen. Running into (owner) Bob Ottaway and Jeff Crowe was just the luck I needed." It was also a chance break for the station. WMMQ, licensed to Charlotte, MI with severe signal problems through much of the metro, had spent most of the '80s



AVALON ATTRACTIONS — XETRA (69 Xtra Gold)/San Diego was the recent sponsor of a "Golden Boys of Bandstand" concert featuring Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell and Fabian. Seen (l-r): XETRA's Dan Springfield, Avalon, grand prize winner Shawn Mendoza and her guest.

Classic Rock

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as live-assist AC and had also at one point run high-school basketball.

Because of the AOR crisis, WLS had recently gone AC and tough CHR WJXQ (Q106) was softening, leaving Lansing without an AOR for the first time in years. "We had talked about just going AOR, which is where the obvious hole was," recalls Jacobs. "But Ottaway's concern, which was valid, was developing a format that somebody with a better signal wouldn't instantly rip off. With Classic Rock, we felt everybody would just ignore us or laugh at us and leave us alone. That's exactly what happened. Nobody cared except for the audience, who cared very dearly."

Just Like "Alien"

Even with WMMQ's continued gains this spring, new AOR WLNZ and Gold WIBM, both licensed outside Lansing, showed improved ratings. In Washington, it was a different story, as both AOR giant DC101 and Gold WXTR were down. Why do some stations withstand the Classic Rock invasion better than others? "You have to put yourself in the position of the existing AOR when Classic Rock or Classic Hits comes along," Jacobs maintains. "The big consultants are saying, 'Don't worry about it, it's going to go away.'"

"Yet, here these stations are in their own markets and they aren't going away. They hear the new station on the street and in 7-Elevens, they're getting calls from listeners who've switched, the station is being written up in the local newspapers, and it's a really scary thing. It's like 'Alien': what is this? We've never been up against something like this before: what should we do?"

"A key situation here is the demographic game we're all being forced to play. We let the advertising agencies dictate what the demos are going to be, so all we keep hearing about is the 25-54 year-old audience. When you're sitting at an AOR and CR threatens to nail your 25+ core, it's very difficult to just go ahead and play a lot of new music. Nobody wants to go out and sell 12-24s. So it puts a tremendous amount of pressure on

stations being challenged. It depends on where the station that's being attacked is sitting at the moment.

"I'm not sure that DC101 had any major problems except that it occupied a niche that was very different from ours. It's very personality-oriented and very outgoing, and it played a variety of different music, from classics to newer stuff to heavy metal. All we did in Washington was say, 'Fine, we're not going to talk a lot and we're not going to be a major personality station. We're just going to play Classic Rock and that's it.' We ended up as an alternative to DC101 among rockers and also got some listeners from some of the ACs."

Classic Truck Pull

Conventional AORs, says Jacobs, "have had it pretty good over the years. A lot of stations have gotten out, leaving single AORs which say, 'We're all alone playing rock and roll so we can do a truck pull Friday night, broadcast the "Metal Shop" Saturday night, and do an oldies show Saturday morning and get all these guys.' The Classic Rock phenomenon is saying AOR has spread so thin it can now be fragmented; maybe one or two stations per market can no longer serve this large constituency."

Knowing this, how will Jacobs's other AOR clients protect themselves? "It's sort of like creating a Frankenstein and then seeing one come to a place where you don't want it to come. I've been urging all my AORs to take a good look at the markets where CR has been very successful and, in essence, to start taking copious notes. The clients I've been able to successfully influence have done a much better job imaging and making sure their classics base is covered."

"In some situations, it's a little easier because my clients are heritage stations to begin with. If an AOR has been all over the place, if it went too heavy into metal or new wave, if it didn't service its audience well, suddenly dumping in a lot of Jethro Tull isn't going to save things. KQRS/Minneapolis had been around for 16-17 years and yet if you looked at the audience a year



COLLINS AT BAT — Marva Collins, deposed Chicago Cubs ballgirl, was "designated sportscaster" for WRXR/Chicago. Shown (l-r) are ND Steve Scott, PD Tom Owens, Collins, and WRXR's Mike Kenneally.

ago, they were incredibly teen-heavy. There were a couple of stations in the market that were definitely challenging us. One was a Classic Rock station, KJJO, and the other was (eclectic AOR) KTCZ.

"We had to go on a full-scale campaign to make sure that we didn't give up any of our older men; in fact, we had to entice a lot of them back to the station. I think our promotions were savvier and we did a much better job of positioning, selling, and selecting the right kind of classic rock we needed."

Greyer Shade Of Pale

One of the most obvious effects of the classics boom has been the graying of AOR. Gold has become the center of most stations; currents, ironically, have become the spice rocks. As the amount of hard rock decreases, so do the number of rock crossovers to CHR. In Chicago, with progressive WXRT, "male AC" WRXR, "Superstars II" client WCKG, and a very reimagined WLUP, the corporate rock monolith has been replaced by a wall of classics. Says Jacobs, "If you end up eliminating a bunch of material, it's gotta get played somewhere. I remember asking John Gehron, 'Who's going to play Rush and Bryan Adams here? Are we just going to let CHR have them?'"

"The record industry may look at CR as a very regressive thing — it's become a convenient excuse for their problems. But if there's been any regression at all, it's been from the people who've responded to it. The idea of Classic Rock was not to ruin the new music base in this country. That's just been a reaction to the format and I have no apologies for that. All I was trying to do was come up with a new niche for stations in markets that have been overradioed. From that standpoint, it's been a tremendous success."

And, according to Jacobs, the current success of outlets such as WMMQ offsets the much-voiced concerns of others about CR's staying powers. "When the banks get involved to the degree that they have, you don't have a year or two to nurse a format along and hope it explodes. I'm the one who's always telling station operators, 'Look, I don't know how long it will last either.' The response I get is that

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they're looking for something to make them viable, and there's no question that this format can very quickly put a station on the map, make it a button on a car radio, and make it an area of talk."

Not A 12+ Monster

"This wasn't designed to be a 12+ monster; our success has been as much a surprise to me as anybody else. So what if WMMQ can't maintain a 9 share 12+? It wasn't supposed to have one in the first place. Operators who've gone CR where it's been successful are pleased with what's happened: like anybody, they want it to last as long as possible. They're certainly much better off than they were in their previous format."

"This is a very precarious business anyway. We're resting on pop culture as our base and that's very tenuous. There are so many variables that none of us control, and I don't think there are that many operators out there who really

sleep all that soundly at night with any format. The future of CR? It's a viable question, but it's the same sort of question as, 'Is there a supreme being?' Well, I don't know. These are types of questions that I don't think a lowly consultant can really answer."

"The burden is now on each Classic Rock station to continue the buzz: Will they add personality? Will they get more involved in event promotion? Will they contest more? Will they add more currents? Finally, are they going to be financially committed to keeping this thing going?"

Classic Bastardization

Roughly ten years ago, Buzz Bennett stated publicly that he didn't want to be associated with everything that had been passed off as the "Q format." How does Jacobs feel about hearing others attempting their own interpretations of his work? "Everybody is doing 'Classic' now, so you can't even keep up with all the bizarre bastardizations of the concept. There's a lot of people out there who think they can do Classic Rock, and some of them are going to be right. And maybe some are going to come up with a better CR — that's a viable possibility — but I've also heard some very lame radio stations calling themselves Classic Rock."

"I find it flattering more than anything else that 'Classic' has become the word it's become: I'm just really proud to have been a part of the whole thing. It's no coincidence that we now have new product from John Fogerty, Joe Cocker, Peter Frampton, or any of these people who had disappeared from the radio for years."

"No matter what happens from this point on, in my mind this has been a very successful venture. The burden to come up with alternative formats continues to exist. Classic Rock is just one more story in that line of formats."

GOLD EXCHANGE

Broadcast Programming Inc. and its VP John Sherman are consulting KYNO (AM)/Fresno... WFMA/Raleigh becomes "Classic Hits" WTRG under PD Gary Mitchell, formerly of KWK/St. Louis... KRLA/Los Angeles morning man Danny Martinez joined "Entertainment Tonight's" Robb Weller to emcee a recent Sha Na Na concert co-sponsored by KRLA. KKKFM/Colorado Springs morning man John Millinder recently named a female listener the new "President of the Philippines." Listeners responded by calling to volunteer their services, including the manager of a local shoe store... KRTH/Los Angeles con-

ducted a monthlong campaign to rebuild L.A.'s fire-ravaged downtown library. GM Pat Norman presented Mayor Tom Bradley with books and a check for \$5900.

WHBO/Tampa Bay recently fabricated its listener requests and found that Chuck Berry's live version of "Reelin' & Rockin'" was its most requested song. In a much different countdown, "Seasons In The Sun" was voted this year's top "lost 45."

Please send any station information or pictures to Sean Ross, R&R, 1930 Century Park West, Los Angeles, CA 90067.