

Music from bubblegum to Berlioz

Radio has something for everyone

By GLENNA WHITLEY

The silky, slippery voices of the disc jockeys entertain us with banter, inform us with the news, prepare us with the weather, even irritate us with jingles. But their voices are what ties radio together — they blend music, information, and advertising into the popular media that most of us hear some-time each day.

There are radios in cars, homes, offices, department stores — even restaurants. Some rent-a-cars have radios that cannot be turned off while the car is running. Radio stations and what they play are as varied as the numbers on a radio dial. The Bryan-College Station area is growing and so is the number of radio stations. There are four FM stations (one available on cable only) and two AM stations in this area. A new AM station is being established.

But the market in the Texas A&M University area is different from many other areas because of the college-age audience. Two radio stations are or have been totally or partially supported by the University and do not compete for the advertising dollar. However, that is changing for one of the stations.

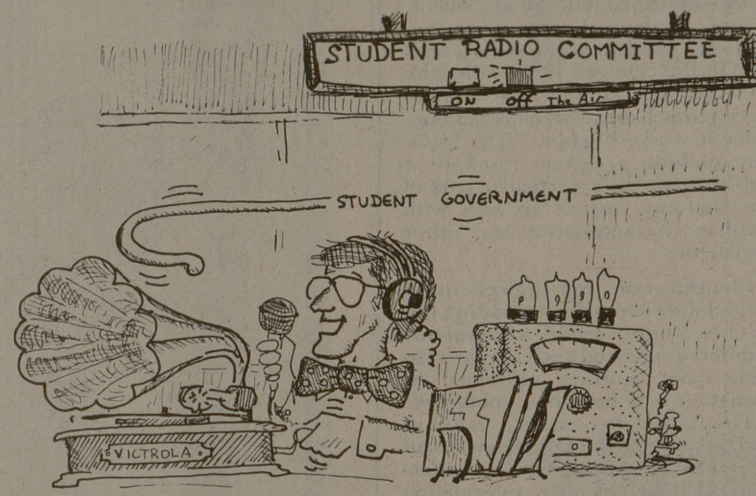
KANM-FM operates in a closet-sized room behind the Ridgecrest Barber Shop on Texas Avenue and is available only on cable at 89.1. A "progressive" station, KANM plays mostly rock, progressive country and jazz. Originally student government radio, KANM is converting to self-sufficiency by selling advertising.

"We haven't had any money from Student Government in quite a while," says Chip Harper, news director and ad manager for KANM.

A look around the record-lined closet KANM broadcasts from indicates money is in short supply. The 40 volunteer disc jockeys hear the records they play on their shifts through two car stereo speakers propped up on the regular speakers.

"Our signal's not very clean," Harper says. "The studio facilities are less than adequate and the production facilities are not good." The control board looks like it was put together with an erector set.

But in spite of the dilapidated equipment, the station is having success selling advertising. Harper says the advertising is geared toward A&M students: cloths, records, shoes, and restaurants. But the station still plays only an average of four minutes per hour of commercials during the evening. Eighteen minutes per hour is the maximum allowed by the Federal Communications Commission.



Most stations play as close to the maximum as possible, depending on the time of day and regular programming.

Melinda Adamez, an afternoon DJ for KANM, says none of the radio stations in the area offer any real competition to KANM, but stations in Houston and Austin (like KLOL-FM in Houston) do.

"What they need in this area is another station like us," Adamez says. "Not one that plays hits like WTAW. I consider us an underground radio."

"No, they won't let us play anything dirty," says Keith Taylor, another KANM DJ.

KTAM-AM plays Top 40 music which appeals to the greatest number of people. It's called Top 40 because the 40 top-selling records in the nation are played. According to the station's market research, it reaches 35 percent of the local 18- to 34-year-old market and 80 percent of the local teenage market.

KORA-FM, affiliated with KTAM, plays country and western music. Most of the station's format is automated or taped. A live disc jockey is on the air for only a short time each day.

KORA claims a 15 percent share of the local audience. Its target market is made up of 20- to 25-year-olds and the 40- to 45-year-olds with an interest in agriculture and rural life.

KAMU-FM is a non-commercial station affiliated with National Public Radio (the equivalent of educational television's Public Broadcasting Service). It has no advertising. KAMU's musical format consists of easy listening, classical, semi-classical, and jazz. It broadcasts from the same campus building as KAMU-TV.

construction permit to expand its broadcasting to 24 hours a day.

WTAW-FM is rock and roll oriented. Unlike KANM, the disc jockeys are told what music to play within a certain framework.

"I tell them what to play and when to play it, but it's loose enough you can still vary," says Jim Miller, music director and disc jockey. "Sometimes when you don't hear your favorite songs it's because I've pulled them. In the back of my mind, I have a sound I want this station to have and playing excess disco or bubblegum music will not get the listeners I want."

Miller said he personally played as much rock and roll as possible. "But the Baron is on the air in the morning as he has to play Top 40."

I try to do requests as much as I can, but I don't care how many requests I get for 'Undercover Angel,' I'm not going to play it," Miller says. "We're not aiming for the kids under 16."

Miller makes up surveys using Billboard Magazine (the "Bible" as he calls it), local sales and requests. He uses the surveys to determine what music should be played when. Most stations use similar systems.

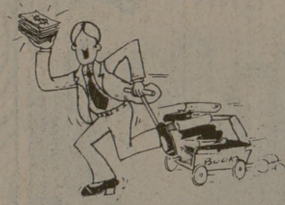
Many Texas A&M students work as DJs at the local radio stations. Some develop recognizable radio personalities, while others, like the KANM volunteers who are only on the air four hours per week, have little broadcasting pizzazz.

Steve Austin of WTAW-FM says he has developed his own particular style.

"The way I'm talking to you now is by no means what's going out over radio," he says. "You gotta act like you're more insane than those people listening to you. You have to be a performer."

The song is over. With headphones in place, he slides into his cheerful banter for the "afternoon drive" — the 2 to 6 p.m. shift.

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