

State and Local

'Rebel' disc jockey fighting B-CS radio format

By Tom Cawthra
Reporter



Lauren St. James "on-the-air" at KKYS.

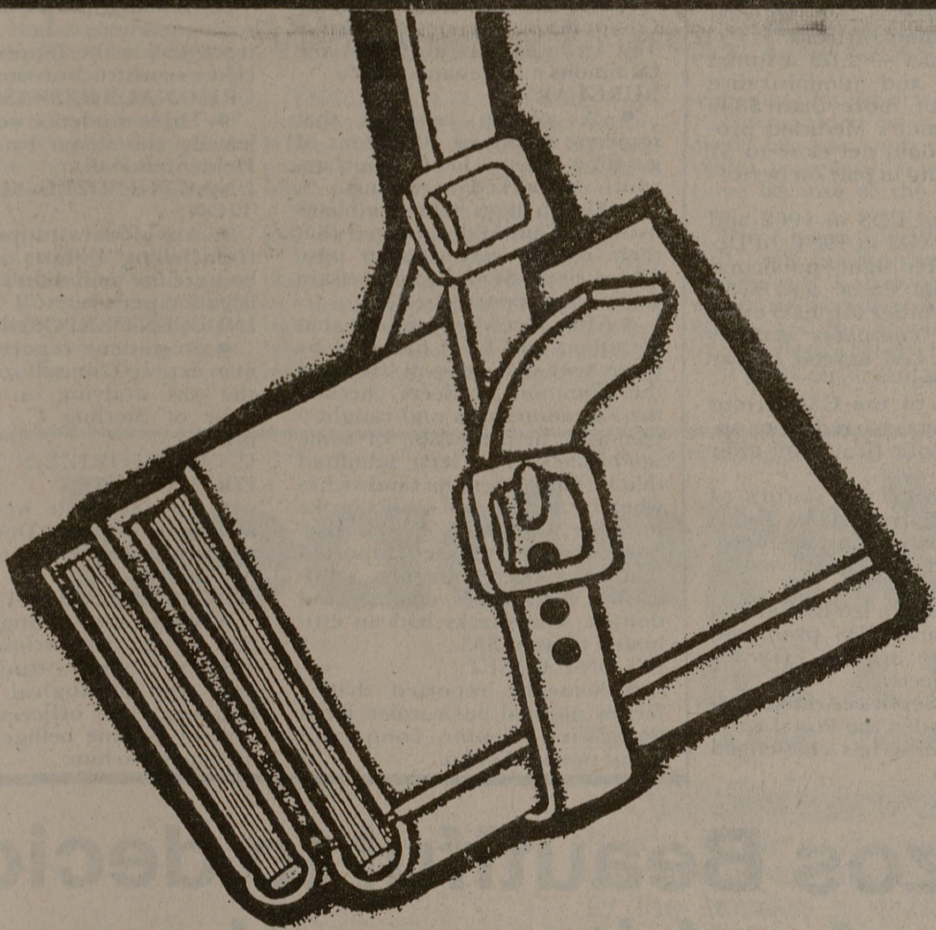
No Michael Jackson.
No George Michael.
And absolutely no Tiffany.
Do not fear local rock 'n' roll fans. Answers to these and other cries for more rock, less talk and no more stuff might be at the end of your FM dial.
KISS 105 (KKYS-FM) has changed its late night Top 40 programming style after realizing its Bryan-College Station listeners were begging for new music.
And Lauren St. James, the 21-year-old nighttime rebel of the Brazos Valley, wants her listeners to help her fight the format.
It's 6:54 p.m. Six minutes before Lauren is to go on the air.
The local night club commercial she was desperately trying to finish in the KKYS production room isn't working the way she wanted.
"I really don't mess up this often," she explains. "I wrote this advertisement for Graffiti myself and now it's really pissin' me off!"
"I hope my show's not like this," she says, glancing up at the clock.
It's 6:59 p.m.
She snags her purse and hurries out the door toward the broadcast booth at the end of the hall. She knows she can make it to the microphone (her best friend) within 60 seconds. She has to.
It's 7 p.m.
She goes on the air screaming — setting the mood for the next five hours — of contemporary-hit radio programming for the twin cities.
St. James, a Sam Houston State University journalism student, says she wants to transfer to Texas A&M's journalism department this spring so she can complete her college education as an Aggie.
"I've met a lot of A&M students on campus and in clubs and some have even been on my show," she says.
St. James is the creator of the often controversial "AggieTalk," a nightly segment where A&M students are guests on her unedited radio program.
The segment centers around University issues and other college-related topics such as women in the Corps, hazing, Greek life and A&M football.
"AggieTalk" airs weeknights at 11:30 p.m. during the fall and spring semesters.
Chuck Redden, the station's program director, liked the results of this controversial show, St. James says.

"Chuck Redden is a very good programmer here," she says, "and he wanted it (the programming style) to be more upbeat, at night anyway."
Redden said, "I believe in the 'ask and you shall receive' theory in radio program-

ming. You don't know what people want to hear until you ask them. And how the hell are we gonna know what nighttime listeners want to hear unless they tell us?"
Redden said the calls following the heated "AggieTalk" helped him program a new format and make some quick changes.
"They (the listeners) were calling and telling us we should play some 'good' music for a change," he said. "I felt that we needed to play a little more rock 'n' roll at night — late at night when I think a lot of the students are out and are partying or what have you."
He let St. James use her creative talents and together they reached an unexpected solution.
That was when "Lauren in the Nighttime" gained what listeners refer to as "star" status.
St. James broadcast a "Screw Chuck Redden" campaign over what she says used to be the dull and quiet airwaves of nighttime radio in the Brazos Valley.
She instructed her listeners to call the station with their wildest music requests and she would do her best to find the songs to break the monotonous Top 40 format.
It worked.
She says callers were ecstatic about the new radio revolution and were satisfied when they heard their favorite heavy metal music on a Bryan-College Station radio broadcast.
So far, St. James and her boss are satisfied with the results.
It's now 7:01 p.m.
St. James introduces herself and addresses her beloved audience with the same sultry voice she uses for making commercials.
"Hi, this is Lauren (first-name basis, that's her motto) in the nighttime," she says. "You're listening to the KISS 105, KKYS — Bryan-College Station's choice for the most music."
St. James says she adds personal feelings to her show because she believes the more she gives her audience, the more she will receive from them.
"I think every jock has their own style," she says as she files an album onto a shelf for tomorrow's broadcast.
"Our main job is to be communicators, and if you're going to communicate then you have to be a person," she says.
People are not mechanical robots, she says, so why should they have to listen to a mechanical radio program?
"I like to break format a lot," she says. "And as far as nights go, you can get away with a lot more on the air because the listeners aren't stuck in an office or asleep at the pool."
St. James says she believes her listeners appreciate her concern for them despite her flare for breaking the rules.
"I don't want to be perceived as a rebel,

but as a listener's friend. I love my listeners so much," she says. "Especially when they're nice."
St. James says the rebellious attitude she adopted on the air is just one side of the real Lauren St. James.
"There's a fine line between your professional life and your personal life," she says while a McDonald's advertisement was on the air. "I'm more of a rebel on the air than anywhere. After I get off the air, I go home and I read a romantic novel, or some other good book and I go to sleep. During the day I go to class just like anyone else my age."
It's 7:55 p.m.
"Okay it's time for the Hot Fast Five at Eight starting off with A Split Second on KKYS," she tells those tuned into 104.9 on the FM dial.
St. James says that her position at KKYS has made it possible to meet on-air personalities at bigger radio market stations.
"Ron Parker from 93Q (KKBQ-FM Houston) helped me so much," she says. "He's always thought I had a good air personality. When he introduces me he says, 'Yeah, she does nights in Aggieland,' and I don't mind."
St. James says she would like to move to a similar large market station, but she wants to finish her education first.
"It was really important to my father for me to graduate," she says. "He died in December and now it's kind of like an obligation I have to him that I can't ignore—even if I want to."
Silence.
The subject of her father seemed to be a serious distraction, and for a fast-paced job like radio broadcasting, distractions create instant problems.
"Dammit! Dead air. My fault," she says.
She missed an ending of a commercial that was on the air and did not begin the next song at the appropriate time.
"I'm a very sensitive and emotional person, but I can't let my audience know I'm upset," she says.
"That's part of being in the entertainment business, though. Nobody wants to hear a DJ complain on the air unless it's funny," she says.
It's 10:20 p.m.
"Oh my legs hurt," St. James complains, ironically, as she begins straightening the studio for the late night DJ.
"I laid in front of the television doing leg lifts last night and now I'm hurtin'," she laughs. "But you have to work to be the best and I want to be the best. I'm not a big star... yet."

Photo by Tom Cawthra



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