

Record World Presents

APRIL 22, 1978

THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY

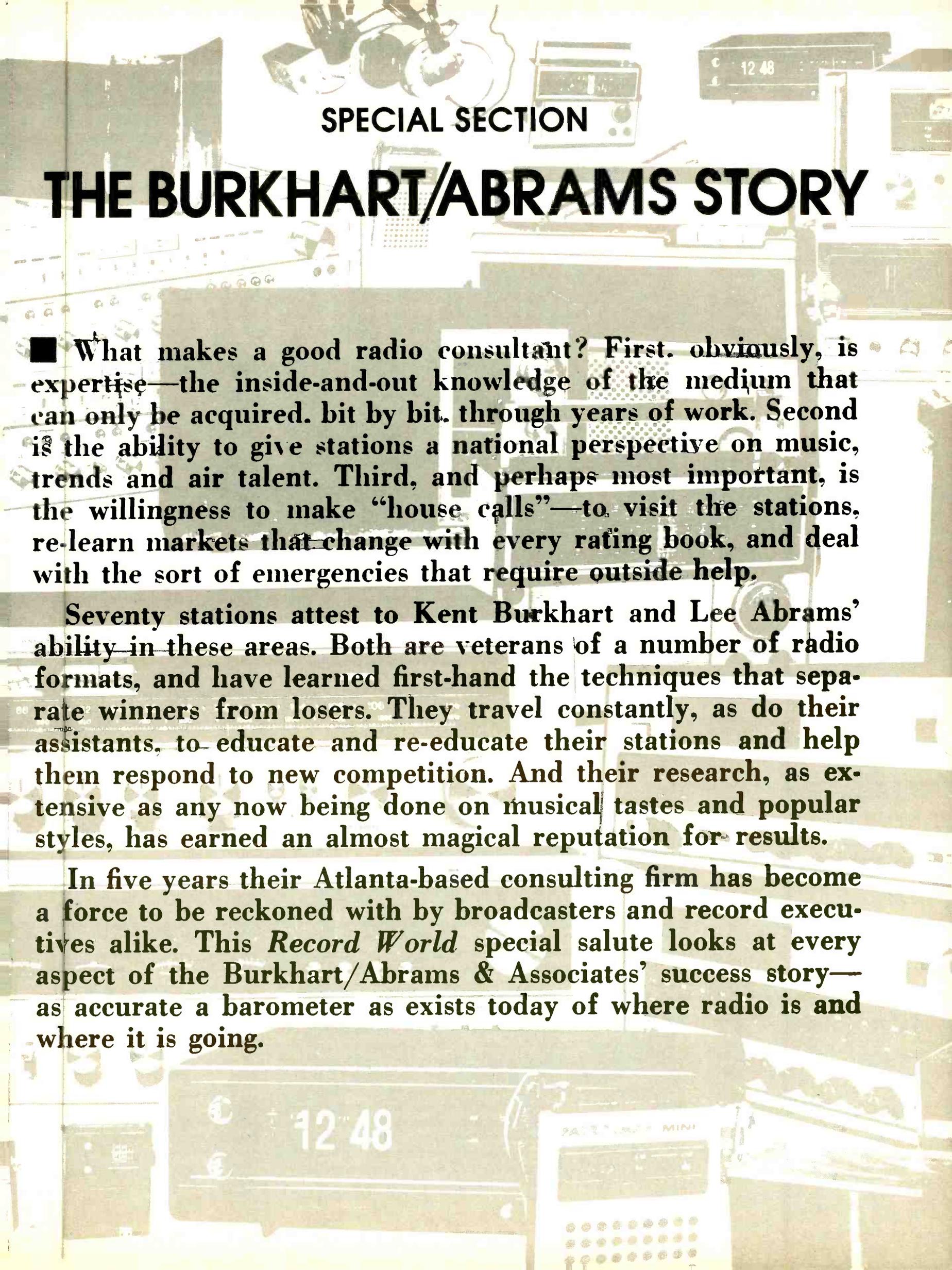


Burkhart & Abrams.
Quality does not go unnoticed.



Wherever they go, B/A and *Superstars* attract audiences, with a continuing commitment to the highest quality programming. That's something to be proud of.

Best wishes for continued success, Ken and Lee.  Warner Bros. Records and its family of labels



SPECIAL SECTION

THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY

■ What makes a good radio consultant? First, obviously, is expertise—the inside-and-out knowledge of the medium that can only be acquired, bit by bit, through years of work. Second is the ability to give stations a national perspective on music, trends and air talent. Third, and perhaps most important, is the willingness to make “house calls”—to visit the stations, re-learn markets that change with every rating book, and deal with the sort of emergencies that require outside help.

Seventy stations attest to Kent Burkhardt and Lee Abrams' ability in these areas. Both are veterans of a number of radio formats, and have learned first-hand the techniques that separate winners from losers. They travel constantly, as do their assistants, to educate and re-educate their stations and help them respond to new competition. And their research, as extensive as any now being done on musical tastes and popular styles, has earned an almost magical reputation for results.

In five years their Atlanta-based consulting firm has become a force to be reckoned with by broadcasters and record executives alike. This *Record World* special salute looks at every aspect of the Burkhardt/Abrams & Associates' success story—as accurate a barometer as exists today of where radio is and where it is going.

THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Burkhart /Abrams: Superstars Among Radio Consultants

By MARC KIRKEBY

■ NEW YORK — Where did radio consultants come from? Although a few of these specialists antedate this decade, they are largely a seventies phenomenon, born of the increasing competition and sophisticated research that have reshaped the medium in the past 10 years.

When programming a radio station was as easy as listening to records, or at most surveying a few record stores, no demand existed for the high-priced troubleshooter heading an army of researchers. But when the pursuit of audience tastes began to resemble a science, paralleling the growth of market research as a field of university study, the stakes increased dramatically.

Top 40, the original "mass appeal" format, showed the earliest interest in radio-as-science, but today no significant format remains untouched by reliance on statistical methods. Even in small cities, the station manager who has rejected research as too expensive or just unnecessary may wake up, like Rip Van Winkle, to a world that has no place for him.

Pulling such stations into the present is the work of Kent Burkhardt/Lee Abrams & Associates. From their Atlanta base, Burkhardt, Abrams and their small staff guide the programming of over 70 AM and FM stations, providing counsel on matters ranging from how excited disc jockeys should sound to what slang words currently hold sway over the nation's teenagers.

The dramatic growth of their five year-old firm testifies not only to their skill at what they do, but also to the burgeoning need for their services. Abrams' clients, for example, have swelled from 17 to 42 in little more than a year.

Each partner now has an assistant, and they will surely need more. And what began as strictly a radio consulting operation has now expanded to movies (through their affiliate, Marketing, Advertising, Research Services, Inc. of Los Angeles) with other products and media in the offing.

The personal styles of Kent Burkhardt and Lee Abrams differ markedly, and each man brings a complementary expertise to the

company. Burkhardt, a brash, talkative Texan who admits "I've got a ham streak in me a mile wide," virtually grew up in top 40, learning the format under such pioneers as Todd Storz and Gordon McLendon. He has worked as a disc jockey, program director, station manager and station owner, making contacts in the process with most of the country's leading radio executives.

Abrams, by contrast restrained in his manner, is a Chicago native who discovered his fascination with research while trying to determine what songs should be played by a rock band he managed. Choosing radio over college, Abrams quickly moved from disc jockey jobs to programming research. His background in the development of "album-oriented rock" (AOR) FM formats parallels Burkhardt's in top 40: Abrams had a hand in the construction of the ABC-FM "Rock'n Stereo" format in the early seventies, which later grew into his successful "Superstars" rock format and its current spin-off, "Soft Superstars."

Burkhart, Abrams and their assistants, Mike Scott and Lee Michaels, travel three to five days a week. Implementing their tech-

niques at new client stations takes most of that time, but emergencies—a crucial rating book, the unexpected loss of a program director, a contest stolen by a competitor—also demand their personal attention.

Along the way the firm has become something of a clearing house for air talent in a variety of formats — disc jockeys can move through the Burkhardt-Abrams stations as if they were in a large corporation, going from small to large markets, from on-air positions to program or music directorships.

Even those most skeptical of Burkhardt-Abrams' talents find it hard to belittle the firm's impact on American radio airwaves. Abrams' "Superstars" format, or imitations of it, have certainly spread the album-rock sound from a handful of "progressive" rock stations, mostly in big cities, to almost every market of any size. At the same time, few students of radio would dispute that "Superstars" has hastened the decline of those same progressive stations to the handful that remain today.

Burkhart - Abrams' impact on the record industry has been no

less profound. The rapid expansion in album sales in the seventies surely owes much to the growth of AOR radio, and more than one manufacturer has been compelled to add album promotion to the departments of his company simply because of "Superstars."

But for record labels "Superstars" is a two-edged sword: while the format has brought some albums to listeners who otherwise might never have heard them, its success has also meant the rapid dwindling of "open" formats. Where a local promotion rep might once have gotten airplay for five new albums, he may now have to settle for one or two.

Still, the "Superstars" stations have shown a consistent willingness to take chances on new records that fit their sound, and have earned the gold records that have often followed.

A live concert series (that has led to several radio-only promotional albums), with special tapings made for the "Superstars" stations, and the practice of airing a new album in its entirety at midnight on many of the "Superstars" stations, have made Burkhardt-Abrams a major force in the exposure of artists who are not yet superstars themselves. And Abrams' inclusion of a limited rotation category in his system for untested records has provided artists with some platform from which to reach their potential audience, even if that platform is smaller than it was at the height of the free-form era.

Rapid Escalation

Kent Burkhardt, Lee Abrams & Associates mirror, then, the major trends in radio, most importantly the rapid escalation of competition — competition that is now not just for sheer numbers of listeners, but for listeners in demographic groups that particularly appeal to advertisers. Increasingly, it seems, good local management isn't enough to provide that competitive edge. Supplying it has become the job of the consultant, the professional researcher — and Kent Burkhardt and Lee Abrams have demonstrated convincingly that they rank at the top of their profession.



Kent Burkhardt, Lee Abrams

THE PROGRAMMER'S PROGRAMMERS.

COLUMBIA RECORDS SALUTES
KENT BURKHART AND LEE ABRAMS,
AND EXTENDS ITS BEST WISHES FOR THEIR
CONTINUED DISTINCTION IN THE
BROADCASTING ARENA.



THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Abrams On Research, Radio and The Future of 'Superstars'

■ There is probably no radio broadcaster more talked about these days than Lee Abrams, whose name has become synonymous with album-oriented rock (AOR). Although he has emerged as a public figure only in the past year or two, Abrams has been in on every significant development in the AOR format in this decade—he has worked at WMJQ in Miami, the first FM "Q" format, at WRIF in Detroit, where the ABC-FM "Rock'nStereo" format was developed, and at over 40 other FM outlets where his "Superstars" and "Soft Superstars" formats have been introduced. A recent profile in "People" magazine confirmed his growing celebrity. In the following Dialogue, Abrams talks about changes in "Superstars," forecasts upcoming radio trends and outlines his own goals for the future.

Record World: Has your expanded client list changed the way you are able to do business?

Lee Abrams: No, not really because, one, we've added Lee Michaels which helped out a lot. Also, we've been able to systemize things to the point where we're able to handle things a lot more efficiently now. Also, a lot of the stations we deal with are at a different stage in their evolution, where they need a different type of attention. In many cases it doesn't take the time that some of the newer clients take. Still the same kind of energy but sometimes not as much of the detail work, so that helps, too. Some of the clients we've been with three or four years just have different needs than some of the newer ones. Those needs just don't require the same kind of intensity as some of the ones we've only been with a year or two.

RW: Has Superstars changed over the years?

Abrams: Tremendously. When we first went into it, we wanted all the stations to sound kind of the same. Then we realized that it would be much better if every station took on its own identity, and the program director of the station didn't feel intimidated by the consultancy and could use his own creativity. So it has changed in that respect, to where each market is totally separate from another one. There is no one real standard sound, and it's also evolved from a musical standpoint. Initially, it was just extremely tight, and it has opened up, and now it's back into a little tighter frame, but it has evolved.

RW: Do you still have your conference call with 42 PDs?

Abrams: No, we talk separately. We tried that once but it was just mass confusion, especially with everyone doing something a little bit different. It just ended up in confusion so that was a short-lived experience.

RW: Are you finding tougher competition with so many other FM stations putting on copies of Superstars, or their impressions of what Superstars is?



Lee Abrams

likely to go through to start up?

Abrams: The first thing we'll do is get together with the management of the station to see if it's going to work. Sometimes we will talk to a station and find out that the station is in a market that is super competitive, and that they are just not willing to do what's necessary. There might be a few personnel changes or changes in logo or something, but if we can get past that stage—which we usually do—the next phase is to study the market a bit, make some phone calls, talk to people on the street to find out where the station's at and where the market's at. Then we would discuss program directors and talk with the one that is already there in hopes that we'll be able to work out or find him another one, a couple of candidates for him to hire. Then we come into the market for a set-up period which usually takes anywhere from three days to a week. At this time we go through the whole format, A-Z, cover promotion, cover research, jock meetings individually and as a group and by the end of that one-week period the station should be pretty much on the air and rolling. Then it's the continuing process of feeding the station information, promotions, talking to them about the music and jocks and getting into the market as thoroughly as possible.

RW: To what extent are you providing them with research, and to what extent are you showing them how to do their own?

Abrams: Initially we'll give them starters on research systems that they establish locally. The idea here is for every station to do their own local research and for us to act as sort of a clearing board. If everybody reports in information, that's 42 stations reporting information, so in effect we put together our own chart and then we feed back the information to each station.

The music selection process is a kind where no one person really decides. It is sort of systematically decided. In other words, when you talk to a station we'll say okay, what's happening locally, and run through that, and I'll tell them what's happening nationally and just sort of get it together. Certain program directors do have good ears and those are taken into consideration also—guys like Max Floyd in Kansas City. We keep batting averages on program directors just to see how everybody's ear is and we'll tell them what their batting average is. Certain guys have tremendous batting averages, picking hits. So that's taken into consideration also. That's important because if one guy finds a record in Kansas City, he can spread that to other markets maybe weeks or months before the competitors might get word on that record.

RW: Do you find that most stations need a full-time research person to do the job properly with Superstars?

Abrams: Every station needs one. Some stations in certain financial situations have other priorities, but ideally every station could use
(Continued on page 16)

We keep batting averages on program directors just to see how everybody's ear is . . . Certain guys have tremendous batting averages, picking hits.

Abrams: Right—it used to be where we could go into just about any market in the country and it would be really a snap. Just say here are the records, put them on and we would go. Now it's getting to the point where the FM band is super competitive, and in many cases the stations are much like our own. It creates additional problems that we can't overcome, but it makes the job more challenging.

RW: Have you turned your attention more to other elements of the radio station, rather than just how the music is programmed?

Abrams: Actually we always have. Music, jock presentation and promotion are the three important areas for us. Of course, engineering is more important than any of these three, but we don't get too involved in that.

RW: If I'm a station owner and I want to hire Burkhart/Abrams Associates to consult my station, what are the steps that you are

To All Burkhardt/Abrams PD's and DJ's:

ON MAY 12th WE PRESENT NEW MUSIC FROM 4 SUPERSTARS:



PABLO CRUISE
Worlds Away
Produced by Bill Schnee



RITA COOLIDGE
Produced by David Anderle



QUINCY JONES.
Sounds... And Stuff Like That!
Produced by Quincy Jones

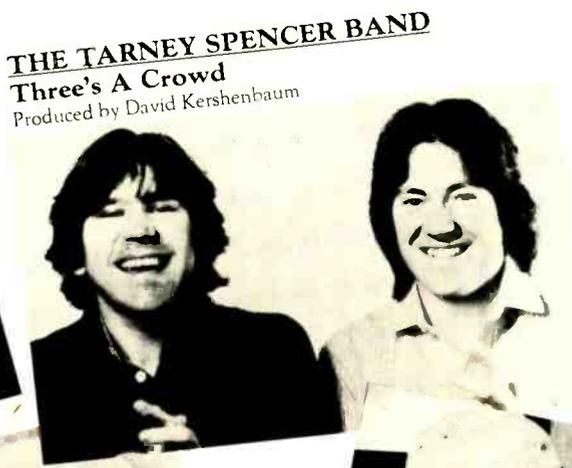


L.T.D.
Produced by Bobby Martin

AND 7 FUTURESTARS:



U.K. SQUEEZE
U.K. Squeeze
Produced by John Cale & U.K. Squeeze



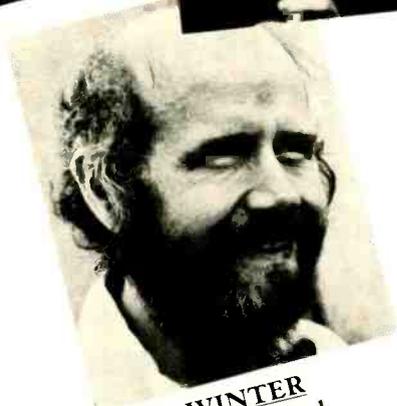
THE TARNEY SPENCER BAND
Three's A Crowd
Produced by David Kershbaum



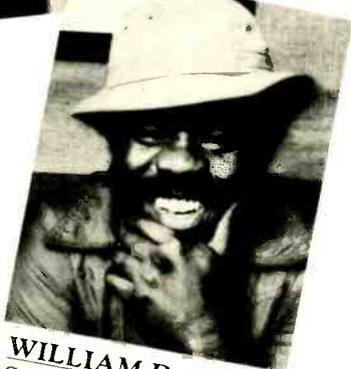
THE STRANGLERS
Black & White
Produced by Martin Rushent



SYLVIA SYMS
She Loves To Hear The Music
Produced by Don Sebesky & Dick Duane



PAUL WINTER
Common Ground
Produced by Paul Winter, Oscar Castro-Neves & David Greene



WILLIAM D. SMITH
Smitty
Produced by Terry Woodford & Clayton Ivey



GAP MANGIONE
Suite Lady
Produced by Larry Carlton

Superstar Music On A&M Records & Tapes



THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Kent Burkhart: This Radio Doctor Makes House Calls

■ To say that Kent Burkhart found his calling early in life may be understating his case: he worked for a radio station in his hometown, Bay City, Texas, before he was 12 and was filling in at major stations in Houston before he entered college. In the years that have followed, Burkhart has seen the radio business from almost every conceivable angle, from small stations on the prairie to the skyscraper offices of broadcasting conglomerates. When top 40 began to transform the medium in the fifties, Burkhart was there, and he has since had a hand in many of the notable changes in that format. In this Dialogue with RW, Burkhart talks about what that experience has taught him, about his consulting business (one of the first and one of the largest such enterprises) and about the state of the radio marketplace today.

Record World: How long have you been working with movies?

Kent Burkhart: We're in it about a year and a half.

RW: Is it a national thing?

Burkhart: The first one we did was a test for Universal, called "Car Wash," and we had real good success with it. We knew we had a hit soundtrack. We took the soundtrack and tested it. We have an ear testing process in four or five markets in the country where we do panel testing, and we knew we had a hit in the soundtrack so we knew we had something to work with. The movie did a heck of a lot more than Universal thought that it would do. That's sort of how the marriage began. We're delighted. I really enjoy it. It's a fun sideline so to speak. We're taking our research and applying it to something else and to see it work makes you feel good.

RW: Do you specialize in any particular kind of movie?

Burkhart: No, we just want to get some. We want to get as much box office as we can for them in a very commercial way. We found that generally like most advertisers, they really don't know as much about reaching an audience as radio people do. I mean, there's no way that they could conceivably know. We know more about radio than they do. What really shocks me is why Coca Cola and some of the other companies don't come and talk to us. We can give them new key words out of research so that they can put those words on the air. They are called motivational words to get people to go buy their product. I don't understand why they don't come around. It's beyond me. If I were a product guy and if I wanted to sell Kawasakis I would come to the 18-24 male adult experts to find out how to sell them real fast. It wouldn't take very long.

RW: Is it the same basic research as your radio work?

Burkhart: Motivation of 18-34s. You motivate 18-34s to go see a movie just like you motivate them to listen to radio. Same basic approach.

RW: Have you consciously kept a low profile for your firm in the industry?

Burkhart: If you will note we have never run an ad for Superstars. We have never hired a publicity agent for Superstars, for this company—we have never done that. We have been underplayed guys. It's not that those things won't work, because advertising pays. We know that, we're in that business, but the fact is that we didn't have enough people to handle what we thought the advertising would bring to us. I mean, it was just Lee and I for a long while. Now we have two other fellows and we are just about to hire a third. We knew we could not take the impact. It was something that we wanted to be smart about. We did not want to be a large syndicated type of deal with streamers. That was something that did not appeal to either one of us.

Our concept was to esthetically build a strong format, to esthetically build a strong consultation firm that would be Superstars or country programming or MOR or top 40 or whatever it is.

So that's sort of how it is until today. In the first year, year and a half, we worked right out of my house, and then we got some offices—and you'll notice that they are not super furnished. We call this nonplush offices, and the reason is that we don't want to get too comfortable. If we start getting too comfortable, we'll start letting down and we know that. That's why we keep aggressively at it.

RW: Do you make sure you like a client before you take his station



Kent Burkhart

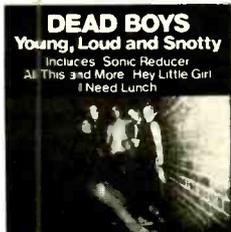
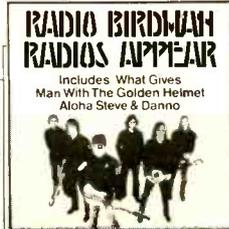
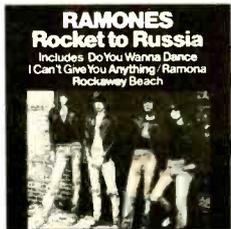
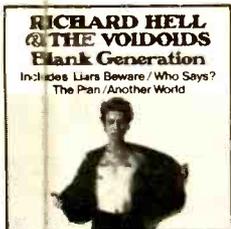
on?

Burkhart: We have some fantastic clients—some clients who are just tremendous, good people, good stock. And then we have some clients—most of them we have resigned or they have resigned us, people that we should not have been in business with to begin with. In the beginning we were a little greedy because we needed the bread to keep operating, we don't need that per se any more. We want all of our clients to stay. If we have somebody we don't like because the person is not doing a good job with us, if we don't have that harmony and cooperation to make a station work, then we resign the account because it's crazy to spend your time and effort with somebody who is not going to try to do well. Because we are trying to do well and it becomes a blemish on our record. Some of the best operators in the country are the Smith people, KJR, KJRB—fantastic unbelievable, heavy. The Kaplans over at WAYS and WAPE—between WAYS and the FM station in Charlotte, they were looking at a gross figure last year, well, let me just say this, it was at least a third of the market. It was extraordinary. I have a country station in El Paso that takes a third of the market from a revenue point of view and Spanish people, Mexicans and Chicanos do not like country music, so I have a real fight in El Paso which is a 50-50 ratio. We are number two there in that market, I'll admit that. Our country station is behind the Spanish station but only by two points. They have a 14 and we have a 12 and I think that's a pretty good challenge. That's up from a 7 and I think we've done a neat job there. I'll tell you the kind of work that we try to do. We not only play offensive, but we have to play defensive games. Lee Alan Smith, WKY in Oklahoma City which has

Our concept was to esthetically build a strong format, to esthetically build a strong consultation firm that would be Superstars . . . or whatever it is.

been a very fine station, a wonderful station for many years—he started getting competition about two years ago. He said hey what can you do for us and I said well I think we can fight and he said okay let's fight. There have been 18 new rock points, rating points, share points, percentage points introduced to that market in the past year or year and a half. 18 new points, he has lost three. That is in our view fantastic holding against huge fragmentation odds. That is really hanging in there. That is not all us, a lot of that has to do with the image that WKY has had for 20 years then it was a mass display of this image all at one time to the public to let them know, hey guys we have been there for a long time and I got to tell you we're pretty good. That kind of approach that kept us from being fragmented

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SR 6037

SRK 6042

SRK 6050

SRK 6048

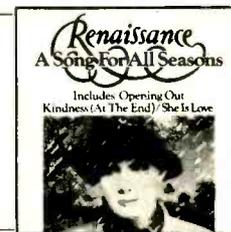


SRK 6052



SRK 6053

OUR THANKS TO THE SUPERSTARS NETWORK FOR REVOLUTIONIZING THE WAY WE HEAR OUR MUSIC.



SRK 6049

SRK 6056

SRK 6051



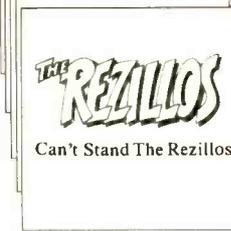
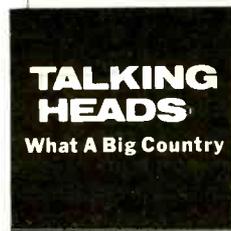
SRK 6060

THE SIRE RECORDS FAMILY
SIRE RECORDS, INC. MARKETING BY WARNER BROS. RECORDS INC.

SRK 6036

SRK 6057

SRK 6055



THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Program Directors Praise Burkhart's Expertise & Experience

By WALTER CAMPBELL

■ The role of a radio consultant is sometimes difficult to define. In some instances, he virtually runs the show; in others he gives advice which is either used or discarded. Whatever the situation, the critical factor is results. That is the main concern of the 30 country and top 40 program directors across North America whom Kent Burkhart provides with music research, promotion ideas, program critiques and other valued services.

And results is what he provides, according to those program directors, results which come from working relationships, expertise and experience, and sound advice based on thorough studies on the key elements in the radio industry.

The usefulness of any service provided hinges on the relationships maintained between the providers and the clients, and that relationship is one of the most valued aspects of Burkhart's services for many programmers. "As far as a program director working with a programming consulting firm, it's been a great relationship," said Charlie Brown of KEND, Lubbock, Tex., which changed to a country format one and a half years ago with Burkhart/Abrams' help. "We get a lot of valuable information from them, of course, and we have all the opportunity in the world for our own input. And they always provide a reason for every recommendation they make. It's as clear as day, and there's absolutely no confusion between KEND and Kent Burkhart because we know why everything is being done. Every time they come up with an idea or a policy they want us to initiate, they don't say 'do this, no questions asked,' they say 'do this because it worked here, and it worked here because.' They give us an in-depth background of every suggestion, so it's easy to work with them. It's well thought out. They listen to us and we listen to them very carefully."

"Basically it's just good to have somebody on the outside who can come in who has your interest at heart but yet can look at your overall station objectively and tell you what they think is either right or wrong with it,"

said KYTE's (Portland, Ore.) Mike Davis. "His friendship is the best asset as far as I'm concerned. I don't know how he interacts with other people across the country, but the fact that you can call him up on the phone when you can't make up your mind on something is really nice. There he is with a friendly ear and an optimistic outlook."

John Sherman of KJRB, which has used Burkhart's services for nearly two and a half years, also voiced appreciation of the working relationship established by Burkhart. "One thing he's really good about is realizing there are a lot of differences in marketplaces. He kind of takes an overall viewpoint and is able to funnel all the information to us and then we talk about differences and uniquenesses about our market and decide what we want to put in. He doesn't run the radio station, and he doesn't try to dictate to us. He offers us different ways to do things. He's an information source and a damn good one."

PDs generally expressed recognition and appreciation that Burkhart and his people go out of their way to meet their needs. "Their concern is a little more in-bred," said KAMC's Randy Robbins from Anchorage, Alaska. "I can call Mike Scott, who works with Kent, any hour of the day or night with a question and he'll answer it. They're a very sharp outfit."

Of course a sharp outfit which provides its clients with positive

Basically it's just good to have somebody on the outside who can come in who has your interest at heart but yet can look at your overall station objectively . . .

results needs more than friendships to work, especially with the increasing complexity and competition in radio today. "I want to know when a song has expired and when a song is hot, and those are two very important things when you're putting a country music station on the air," said Dave Charles of CFGM, Toronto, Ontario. "Determining the longevity and the life of a record is critical today. Radio is a science, especially in a market like this where there are 22 radio stations. You've got to be damned sure, and I want to be damned sure, and that's the reason I engage consultants who can give me that extra piece of research on a national basis to say whether a song is hot, it's climbing and it looks like it's going to be around for a while, or the song is stiff, it's died. Research, music choice and promotions are the three things we value from Burkhart. Also critical overviews of on-the-air tapes help us with an overview. These people get around to the people who are in touch with good research techniques. We like to get a feel of North America, and the States especially. There's safety in numbers and it helps us a great deal."

"Their concept on music is their strength as far as we're concerned," said KLWW's Don Weir in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "Because of their research into music, they're very helpful even though our music is what is currently selling and heavily requested and heavily wanted right here in the Cedar Rapids area. On spot placement and positioning of where to go with the heavy emphasis on news, where you cluster the commercials, everything, their expertise is really in all those areas. So many of the things they do are so logical, but a lot of stations don't implement them unless they have fine consultants that have done the necessary research on how to program a station to make it sound better. They've cleaned up our air sound tremendously, and we feel our listenership not only has grown, but the listeners we had before we went with the consultancy will, we feel, stay longer with us now because we have fewer objectionable things on the air that cause tune-out because they have alerted us totally to the things to watch out for."

"We primarily deal with Kent Burkhart on music," said Mike Matthews of KMEN, San Bernardino. "Being able to sample a million people like they can, they are able to give us a much quicker and a much more accurate readout. We've got a lot of faith in their research."

Different stations rely on Burkhart's services to different degrees. Some follow him all the way down the line; some, like KMEN, use part of his services, tailoring it to their individual needs. KYTE, in Portland, Ore., uses the services of Burkhart/Abrams for its AM and FM stations with pleasing results. "Opening up with a brand new station and just getting rolling on the air last summer, we opened up in the October-November book with

(Continued on page 32)



Kent Burkhart with staffer Diane Fradin.

There's no need for burnin' books
now that they are ignored.
I'm tryin' to reach your mind but
Howdy Doody keeps answerin' your door.*

DIRK HAMILTON



Meet me at the CruX

Congratulations Superstar Format

Music that gets to the heart of the matter
on Elektra records and tapes



6E-125

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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Burkhart /Abrams' Record Industry Impact Has Been Great

By SOPHIA MIDAS

■ NEW YORK — The viability of today's record company is as directly related to radio airplay as any other factor, including its roster of artists. Given the interdependence of radio and record companies, coupled with the powerful emergence of the Superstars radio format during the last few years, Kent Burkhart and Lee Abrams have had a significant impact upon the recording industry. During interviews with *RW*, promotion executives from leading record companies discussed the impact of Burkhart/Abrams concerning the direction of their companies and the music industry in general.

Dick Kline

The size and national scope of Burkhart/Abrams' stations, 42 all-told in major markets across the country, represent a powerful venue by which to present product—providing that product is picked up. Dick Kline, senior VP of promotion for Atlantic, commented, "If Abrams is behind you, it can mean nothing short of a tremendous boost for your product. You could conceivably pick up over 40 stations in one swoop."

Also commenting on the strength of the Burkhart stations was Lenny Beer, VP of promotion for 20th Century: "Burkhart and Abrams have enough power to break an act all by themselves. If they get behind a project, and stay behind it, it'll break."

Mike Scott: Getting a Radio Overview

By DAVID McGEE

■ NEW YORK—How does an 18-year radio veteran find happiness after admitting he's reached all of his goals? Try this answer on for size: "I would say the most pleasing thing to me is being able to get a tremendous overview of what's going on in radio as a whole, which I was never able to do before I joined Burkhart-Abrams."

Second question: why is the above answer true? Answer: because the speaker, Mike Scott, self-described right hand man to Kent Burkhart and advisor to most of the B-A stations, had spent the better part of his career in radio flitting about, performing a variety of functions—"even janitorial services" Scott says facetiously—

The greatest thing is the communication that occurs throughout this large network of stations. These people are all working together, and this provides for a type of nationalized radio.

Although the success of Burkhart/Abrams is largely due to the devising of individual playlists for each consulting station, Ray Tusken, national AOR promotion manager for Capitol, explained the feasibility of regional or national exposure: "The greatest thing is the communication that occurs throughout this large network of stations. These people are all working together, to some extent, and this provides for a type of nationalized radio."

Scot Jackson

The job confronting all promotion people is to first get their product picked up, a task which has apparently become more difficult since the onset of formatted radio: "The Abrams stations are responsible for speeding up lp cuts on radio," said Scot Jackson, heading promotion for Arista, "but they're also responsible for making it initially more difficult to get a record added. The record has to meet up to the parameters of Burkhart and Abrams." Rick Swig, director of national album promotion for Epic added, "Burkhart and Abrams stations definitely have tighter playlists, but

they also allow for greater rotation once the cut has been picked up."

Breaking Acts

All promotion people agreed that the rotation system and national exposure that may result from the Abrams stations have played a part, to one degree or another, in breaking an act. According to Tusken, "Most of the groups that Mercury has launched have had varying degrees of exposure on the Abrams stations, and every one of our acts have been helped by them." Jim Sotet, in charge of national album promotion for Mercury stated, "The featuring of lps at midnight has been influential in breaking our acts. This feature furthermore opens up a line of communication between record companies and the audience; so you are able to get excellent feedback from the local program directors, if you have developed a rapport with them. It can work both ways, however; sometimes an unknown act can get lost if they release their lp during the same week as a group with a track record."

Singles

According to promotion people, Burkhart and Abrams have been helpful in determining which single should be released off an album, particularly in light of the consultants' research and the resulting feedback. Billy Bass, director of promotion for Chrysalis, stated that Burkhart and Abrams have been influential in helping his company choose a single, but he was quick to add, "Sometimes we disagree with Abram's choice. Our research is much different than his; we're obviously concerned with sales, whereas he's concerned with audience compatibility. The important thing, however, is that it's not hard for me to get Abrams on the phone, so we can both share each other's viewpoints. There's a definite line of communication, and we help each other." Swig also com-

mented on the communication between his company and the two consultants: "When we have a hunch that a particular cut is the correct one to release as a single, and they agree, we go with it." "You have to respect the fact," added Tusken, "that they research individual cuts off an lp in order to discover what people are responding to, and record companies have to consider this information."

Album Promotion

When asked if their style of promotion had changed as a result of the predominance of superstar stations, the general consensus was that a promotion person's style was not contingent upon changing radio formats if he were good; however, most spokesmen interviewed believed that the growing popularity of AOR necessitated a change in orientation in terms of promotion. According to Swig, Epic Records has put a much greater emphasis upon lps as a result of Burkhart and Abrams. "We now have a department specifically geared to the promotion of albums," said Swig, "and up until a year ago this was not the case. In the past, we were more single-oriented—just as every other record company was. For example, we used to only release seven-inch singles, but now we release a 12-inch, 33 1/3 rpm disc to make it easier for lp radio stations."

In as much as promotion people have readjusted their styles to meet the needs of AOR, the significance of maintaining a human element in promotion was strenuously emphasized: Mike Pilot commended that they "believed that the program director was still the most important person to deal with at each radio station, and that the individualized human element was important to maintain." Swig articulated his commitment to this philosophy by stating, "Although I've elaborated my style to adhere to the changing radio formats, and despite the fact that scientific research must be recognized, the human element is still our main thrust. Music is still our core and focus."

Program Directors

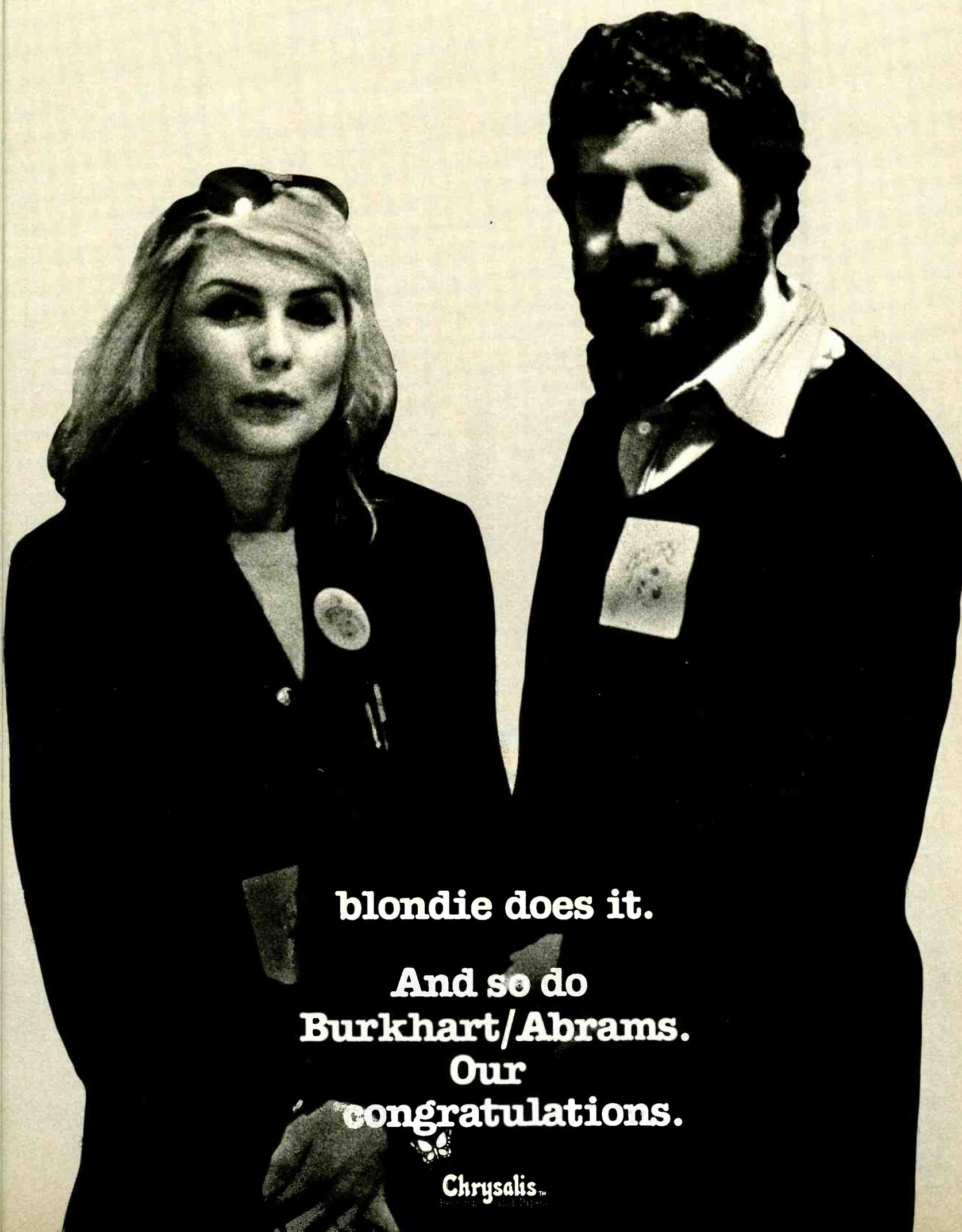
Gary Davis, VP of sales/promotion, cited the role of program
(Continued on page 38)

for a dozen-plus stations prior to joining B-A on June 1, 1976 in a position requiring him to recognize quickly the nuances and developing trends in virtually every U.S. market.

California-born and bred, Scott claims that upon hearing his mother's radio for the first time—"I was about four or five years old when she was listening to Jack Benny and all the rest back in the early '40s") he was hooked: "I said That's it; that's fantastic; that's what I want to do. And until I finally got on the radio in 1960, I was doing my own shows—pre-tending, of course—at home."

It was radio station KIST in Santa Barbara that opened its doors for Scott with a seven-

(Continued on page 44)



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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



PDs Cite Abrams' Awareness, Accurate Appraisals

By ALAN WOLMARK

■ "Lee Abrams brought a great deal of science to radio," says Keith Allen, program director of the Superstar network's "flagship station," WKLS-FM (Atlanta). "He brought knowledge and a more realistic approach to the idealistic views of '60s radio."

Right Lesson

With over 40 FM stations in his domain, there's no doubt that Lee Abrams learned the right lessons from his experiences as a program director and an early '70s radio consultant. FM radio, since its mid-sixties birth as a marketing force separate from AM, has been a plaything for creative thinkers, yet for years could not produce a dominant format. WDVE (Pittsburgh) program director John McGhan points out that after years of experimenting "radio for once is being done right." The key to the Abrams concept is a conscientious awareness and accurate appraisal of the listener. McGhan continues, "AM ignored its audience 10 years ago and we got FM. Then FM played holier-than-thou" and Abrams put his thumb to the pulse. Borrowing heavily from the progressive rock concept and the extensive market research that goes into the successful merchandising of any product, he synthesized a mass appeal contemporary rock format adaptable to markets coast to coast.

In the less profit-conscious golden days of FM programming, free-form stations could exist by appealing to an elite/select group and riding the social climate. "People thought AOR had to be down-oriented. There was a negative attitude because of political connections," says Chris Miller, program director of Raleigh's WQDR. "Abrams took that and did away with the negativism and made it more palatable. He clearly made it a better mass media."

First Station

WQDR became the first of Abrams' Superstar stations when it hit the air in January of 1973. Lee Abrams was hired to consult the station, not take it over as is the common misconception, and it proved an immediate success even in the crude form in which it originally appeared. "At first we were experimenting," says Miller. "We didn't have any of

“ Abrams . . . did away with the negativism and made it more palatable. ”

the special features which now characterize the Superstar network. We didn't do feature albums—special features weren't defined. Things have gotten more defined and we've experienced a logical growth." The latest overall ARB shows WQDR with a 10.7 share of its market making it one of the half-dozen outlets Abrams regards as firmly in an advanced stage of his programming strategy.

As the Abrams process became clearer and more defined, so did the individual stations involved, to the extent that the immediate and prime objective in firmly implanting a station in a marketplace is to establish a strong image with maximum appeal. Abrams thoroughly researches a market with his "undisclosable" methods and then exercises his art by interpreting the data into a winning image via which to present contemporary rock to a particular area. Many rock for-

mats approach their music haphazardly as did Detroit's WWWW a year ago when it had a 1.3 ARB rating. It recently scored a 5.0 and a 3.5, says program director Jim Johnson, who credits the station's turnaround to "a big subliminal change in image. We had no image but now we feel that things are happening. We're always involving and interesting."

Abrams plays with stations' images in a number of ways—the most direct way, of course, is with the bill of fare, the music. Record libraries are scrutinized from the perspective of the research data for each market and, with an eye on the quarter-hour clock, material is weeded out. The Superstar network structure is virtually a disciplining of the undisciplined '60s rock formats, according to WKLS' Keith Allen, so many of the longer cuts are removed. He adds, "We're not progressive, but we're cleverly done. We disguise what we do."

For example, a midwestern station, KQRS, appealing to a rock-oriented market, programs The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again" (8:31) but dropped Elton John's "Funeral For A Friend" (11:05). Carefully zeroing in on each marketplace's musical preference is a crucial step with which a station's initial image is set, and the results can be rather sensational: WLRS (Louisville), which currently dominates its area with an 11.8 (see separate story), jumped from a 4.6 to a 7.0 with its first book as a Superstar station, and WQDR (Raleigh) debuted at about 9.0.

Solidifies Image

Jesse Bullet, program director of KPRI (San Diego), sees Abrams' work with a station's image in stages. "The music is laid down and we're crawling at first. Then we walk—a little more budget, some more manpower. It's a slow and involved process." But once the music is in, an Abrams station begins to solidify its image by maintaining high visibility. Promotions are a primary function in the Superstar network and with extended budgets and manpower the station begins to walk.

(Continued on page 40)

WLRS: Dominating in Its Market

By ALAN WOLMARK

■ Amidst the overwhelming and largely consistent success of Lee Abrams' Superstars network is a station which has totally dominated its market, presenting the unique circumstance of a #1 rated AOR. Louisville's WLRS, owned and operated by the sister-brother team of Edward and Louisa Henson, has had to deal with this very desirable situation and with no obvious models: What do you emphasize? Can dominance be maintained?

Community Involvement

"What we're really talking about is basic community involvement," says Louisa Henson, WLRS' general manager. "AOR stations generally being successful in a market is new. The maintenance factor and programming go hand in hand with community involvement. Look at MORs in any market."

As a basic philosophy, Lee

Abrams outlines his strategy thusly: "Once the basic music thing is laid down, which WLRS grabbed the basics of very quickly, we can look to widening the station's appeal." With WLRS riding an 11.8 ARB, preceded by a 12.8 and 11.0, gaining appeal is of little consequence, but to maintain a hold on the market gets into Abrams third stage of attack "to establish a long term image. The community element in a dominant radio station is important to maintain visibility. Once 'in' the process is to get 'out.'"

Grassroots Promotions

To "get out" into the community WLRS, in its third year of employing Abrams, has commandeered what Henson calls "grassroots, psychographic promotions which involves being conscious of tuneouts and music balance and transferring it to promotions." The station has

worked with the March of Dimes, run a Walk-A-Jog-A-Bike-A-Thon, and collected 25,000 toys in four days in a Toys For Tots campaign.

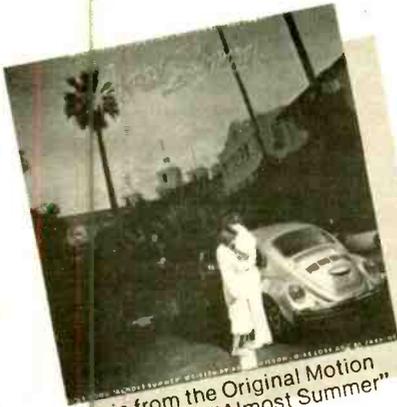
"Until we did something that mass," says the general manager. "we didn't realize how we were really getting into the people. You have to roll your sleeves up and serve as a backbone of the community." Maintaining this sort of high visibility keeps the station in the public's eye making it one of the first AORs to hold a double-digit ARB for three consecutive ratings periods.

Local Project

Its community strength is a major force when it is considered that another local Louisville project, a voter registration drive, credits WLRS with registering 3200 persons and largely accounting for the 30 percent turnout of voters.

Henson attributes WLRS' long (Continued on page 40)

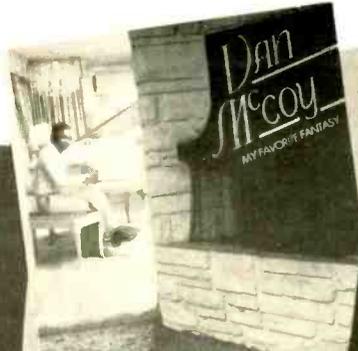
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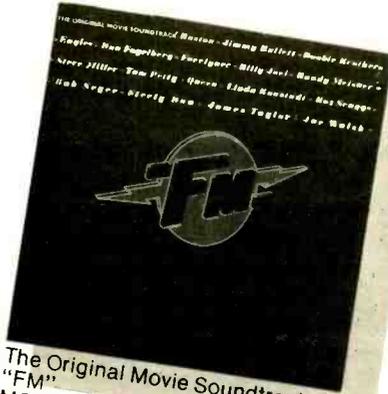
B. J. Thomas Everybody Loves A Rain Song MCA-3035



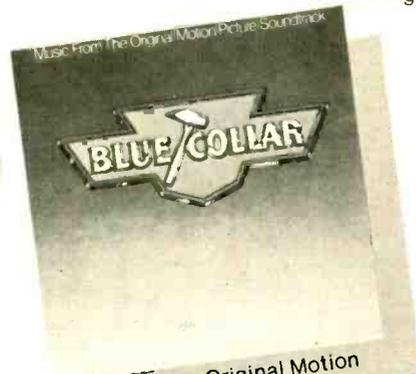
Silver Convention Love In A Sleeper MCA-3038



Colosseum II Wardance MCA-2310



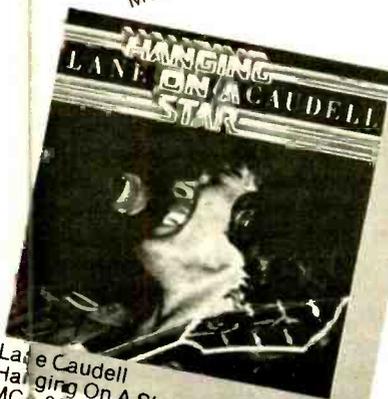
The Original Movie Soundtrack "FM" MCA2-12000



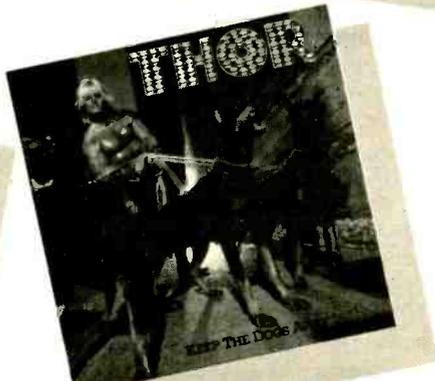
Music from the Original Motion Picture Score "Blue Collar" Original Music Composed, Arranged and Conducted by Jack Nitzsche MCA-3034



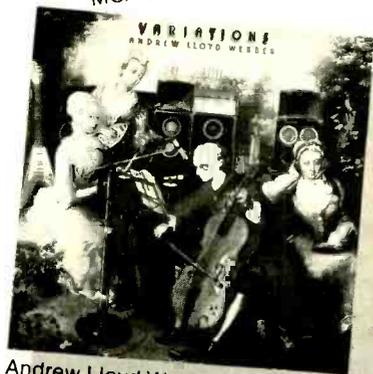
Lisa Burns MCA-2361



Late Caudell Hanging On A Star MCA-3C39



Thor Keep The Dogs Away MCA-2337



Andrew Lloyd Webber Variations MCA-3042



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MCA RECORDS

THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Abrams On Research, Radio and The Future of 'Superstars'

(Continued from page 6)

one.

RW: Is the basis of it sales research or is it call backs?

Abrams: On the local station level usually it's finding out what's happening retail and discovering any local or regional trends. From our standpoint, we do more 'on the street' kinds of things trying to find out what non-record buyers are into, because that's a little tough, but easier for us to do. The main responsibility of the average station would be to find out what's happening retail-wise. Some of them do have the staff to find out some non-retail information, but unfortunately not everybody has that luxury.

RW: Are you still doing your callbacks with cards filled out in record stores?

Abrams: We sure do. We find the interesting thing with the average mainstream album is that the response of the person who buys the record—his favorite cuts are almost universally the same as the person who didn't buy the record, like with a Fleetwood Mac or Steve Miller. The only time the record buyer differs from the non-record buyer is the more esoteric stuff, jazz rock or orchestral rock, Genesis kind of thing.

RW: What sort of panel testing are you using?

Abrams: This is where we'll take people right off the street, sit them down at a panel, and they'll have a radio. There'll be different buttons, and each button is hooked up to a tape of a different kind of music or a different station, all prefabricated with a production studio. The little device will tell how long each person stays on which button and exactly at what point they punch out of any button. It

registers that information so we can tell exactly what songs they like and what they don't like. We punch around and we might find that 60 percent of the people tune out at the midway point on tape #3 which is button #3, and find what is played at the midway point, that's one of the things. Another thing we do: we will take somebody right off the street, Joe Schmoe, never been in contact with a record or radio person in his life, and we'll give him a record. They keep the record for a week, we go back to their home at the end of the week and say what do you think of the record? Out of the 100 people that we do this with, 20 of them have track records of everything they say is good becomes a hit or pretty close. So what we then do is throw away the other 80 percent and just work with those 20 percent knowing that for some reason they have natural hit instinct and we can tell amazing things from them. When we tested Foreigner, this was a test pressing we got two years ago, and instantly "Feels Like The First Time," "Cold As Ice" those were great cuts. And we went back a year later and said, hmm, those guys were right. The same people picked "Carry On Wayward Son."

RW: Do you still find that your response rate is about the same—are more people inquiring about now about Superstars than in the past?

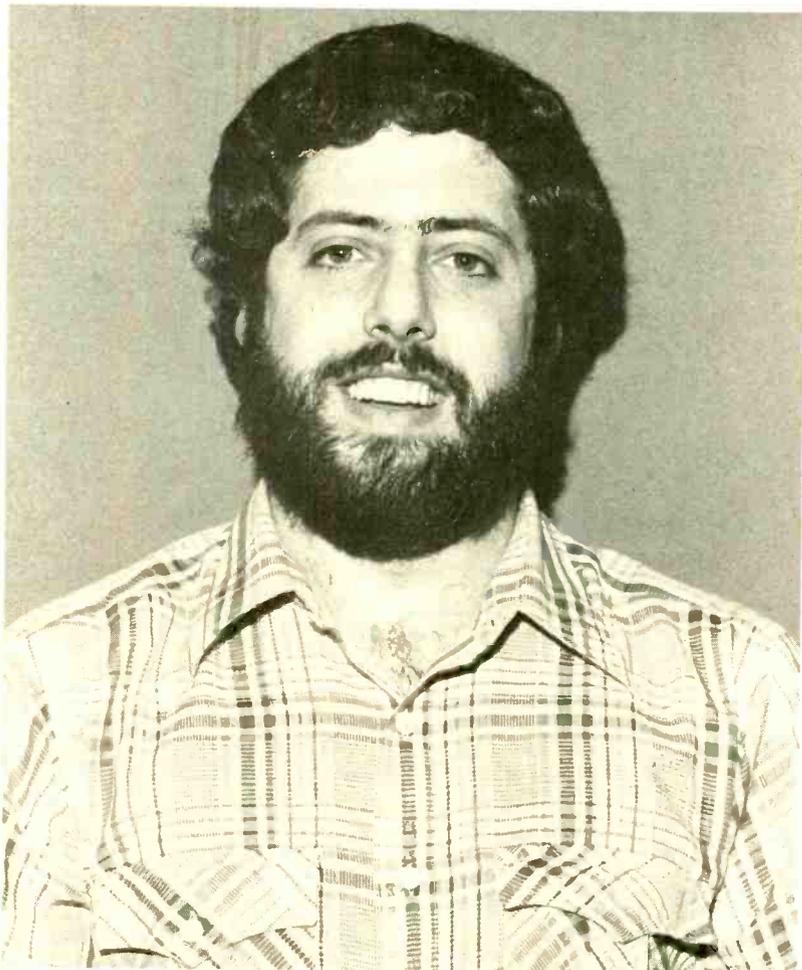
Abrams: I would say more than ever. In the last six months, for example, I would say 90 percent of the stations we've added have been call-ins.

RW: How long has Soft Superstars been in the works?

Abrams: We saw soft rock stations starting to happen a few years ago. However, the main incentive for us getting involved in the Soft Superstars is that we're seeing a trend much like we saw in album radio several years ago. In 1969, we saw what we called vulnerable top 40 listeners: people who listened to top 40 and liked it to a certain degree and had been listening for years. These people would really love the Moody Blues when they would come on, and Chicago when they came on, and didn't care for David Cassidy or the Osmond Brothers. They had tried the progressive station at the time but it was too bizarre for them so they are back at the top 40 station, vulnerable. They like it but don't love it, if something came along and played Moody Blues and Jefferson Airplane and avoided the Osmond Brothers, that would be just right for them. We put together the Superstars thing which was an aid to vulnerable top 40 listeners, giving top 40 listeners something that was accessible but progressive. Now we are finding that there are a lot of album listeners, album rock listeners who like the AOR station, listen to it, love Jackson Browne and James Taylor, Fleetwood Mac and Steve Miller, don't particularly like it when Aerosmith, Ted Nugent or the Zeppelin comes on because it's too hard. But if a station came along that played nothing but Jackson Browne and James Taylor and Fleetwood Mac, they would listen to that. It kind of corresponds with the vulnerable top 40. So Soft Superstars is geared toward that person. He tends to be 18-24 female and 25-34 male and female. Also we're designing Soft Superstars to be a tool for the background listening environment. In other words, not a foreground station at all, strictly geared for background listening. The Soft Superstars is actually quite a bit unlike a lot of the other soft formats, in that the softness is important to a certain degree but we're not let's say obsessed with the need to be soft. Which means that there are certain records that might appeal to the demographic that may not be all that mellow. An example might be some of the Steely Dan tracks, which really aren't mellow rock by definition.

RW: How do you ascertain what those older people, who probably aren't buying anything but greatest hits albums, want to hear?

Abrams: Well, it's strictly a matter of on-the-street questionnaires,
(Continued on page 22)

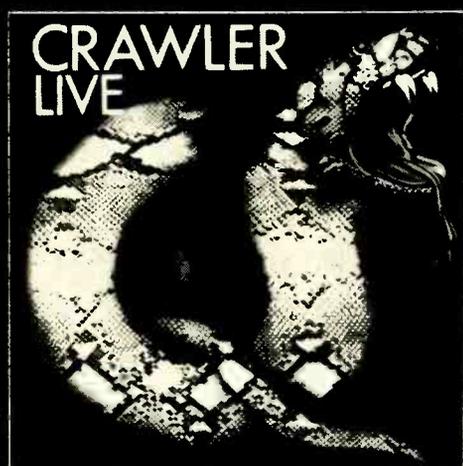


"We put together the Superstars thing which was an aid to vulnerable top 40 listeners, giving top 40 listeners something that was accessible but progressive."

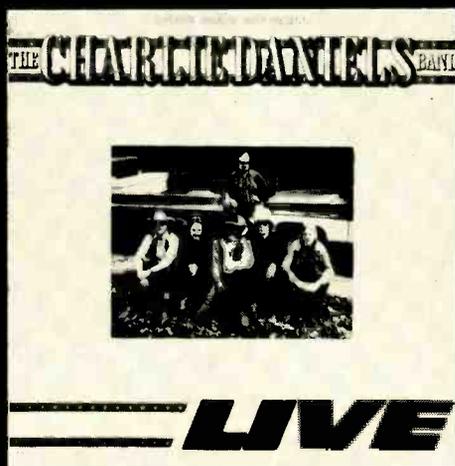
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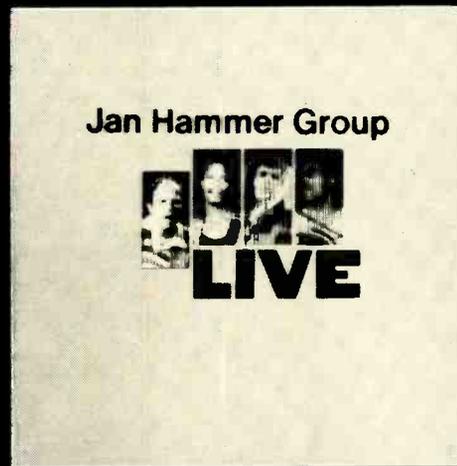
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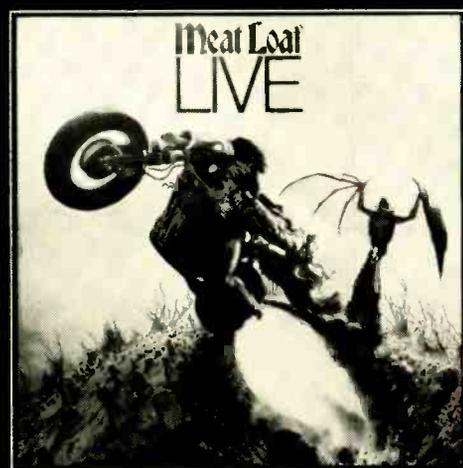
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AS 407



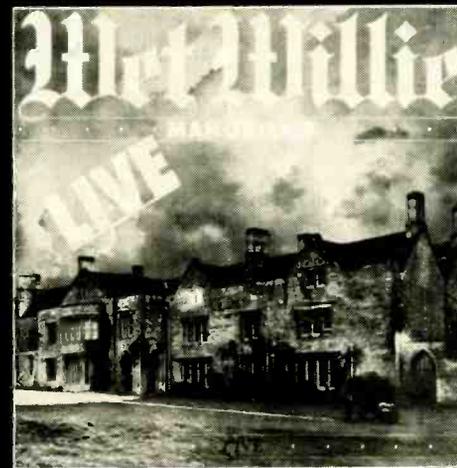
AS 424



AS 406



AS 410



AS 428

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thank you and congratulations on a job well done.

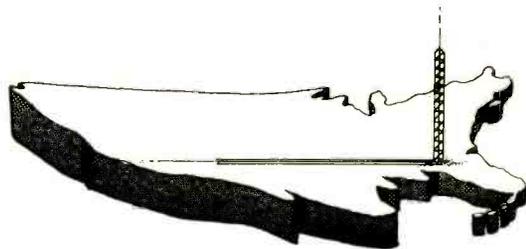
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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Michaels on Working with the Superstars Stations

By MARC KIRKEBY

■ It was just chance that Lee Michaels decided to leave his native Dallas and move to Seattle to look for a radio job after college, he says. Soon after arriving there, he took a job at KISW-FM, which later became one of the first of Lee Abrams' "Superstars" clients. The rest, as they say, is history. Michaels became Abrams' program director at KISW, held that position for two years, and moved to Atlanta last summer to join the expanding staff at Burkhart-Abrams & Associates. In the following conversation with RW, Lee Abrams' right-hand man gives his impressions of "Superstars" and where it is headed, and outlines his work with Abrams' client stations.



Lee Michaels

Record World: How long have you been with Burkhart-Abrams?
Lee Michaels: I have been working for them since June 10, but I worked for Lee for a couple of years before that because I worked with a station that utilized the Superstars consultancy. That was in Seattle at KISW. I was there for a little over six years and PD almost

the entire time. When I graduated from college in Dallas, I just got burned out on Texas and said what the hell, I'll go somewhere else. As a suggestion from a friend I just moved to the northwest on a whim and stayed there for 7 years. I have been in Atlanta since June. My furniture is there, but I'm never there.

RW: Has the travelling been rough?

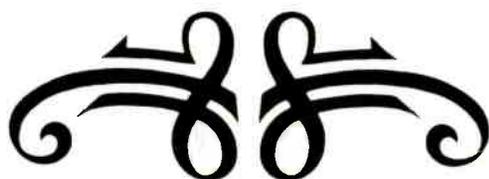
Michaels: No, actually it took a while for me to discipline myself to get this travelling trip down to where it can be done without it being a big chore. It's a matter of getting a day's work done while being in the air, keeping up with a station on the ground while I was in the air and realizing that while I was in a certain market I would concentrate on that market but at the same time I have other stations calling my office, leaving a message, needing advice or assistance on something.

RW: Are there certain Superstars stations that are only your responsibility or do you deal with all 42 of them?

Michaels: Neither Lee nor myself are exclusive to any stations but there are some stations, about ten or a dozen of them where I am the person that does most of the correspondence. At the same time, Lee and I both put out memos to all stations quite often so there is a lot of crossover. For instance, I have never visited WDVE in Pittsburgh. Lee has worked with them for years and he keeps going there. I have never been to YSP. But other than the set-up visit, Lee has never been to Memphis; Minneapolis; Tampa; York Pennsylvania and Toledo, Ohio. Usually we set them up together and one of us will

(Continued on page 35)

England Dan & John Ford Coley
Le Blanc/Carr Band, Hot
Pete Carr, Johnny Rivers, Jimmie Mack
Belle Epoque, Marilyn Scott



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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Kent Burkhart: This Radio Doctor Makes House Calls

(Continued from page 8)

away and that was also the strength of the morning man who had been there for many many years in the market which is extraordinarily valuable.

In Nashville we have a station—WLAC—and we made a deal with them three or four years ago and when they still had gospel on from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Our challenge was to get their 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. up enough in ratings so that they can make enough money to take the 6 to midnight gospel off to get the ratings up and therefore get the revenues up. Then if that happened then we would get the midnight to 6 gospel on. That was the challenge. That was not an easy one. Those are the kind of tasks that drive you crazy, but we got it, and we are in the upper echelon of ratings and have been for the past three or four books.

We have a new challenge in the metroplex of Dallas-Fort Worth, we have a station that is a disco station which we have never done one of before. We were hired by Earl Graves and his group to do the station. Earl said what do you think, and I said I think we can do it. We do not have an Arbitron out yet, but the Media Trends have gone from like a 2 to a 6 and we're in significant percentage position in the market. I think we're going to turn out real good.

RW: How many formats do you do?

Burkhart: We do everything.

RW: Anything with music.

Burkhart: Anything with music. We have not done all news and we

To hear some of the best radio go to the northwest — Seattle, Spokane and Portland. It makes the rest of the country, for the most part, look shameful.

have not done all polka, but I'm expecting all polka to fall for us any day.

RW: Where in this country am I likely to hear the best radio?

Burkhart: There are a lot of hidden guys, programming guys and good guys, good stations in the country. Not many people know about the northwest. If they want to hear some radio, they ought to go to the northwest, Seattle, Spokane and Portland. It makes the rest of the country, for the most part, look shameful. They're tough and they're mean and the reason that they are is because once people get in that part of the country, they rarely leave and they have to keep trying to self-improve. They don't want to leave because they like the environmental part of the country and they don't want to leave so they have to keep improving and keep working and the challenge is always there. It's really sort of an interesting thing, but you can move at least the top four stations in Seattle into any top five market in the

(Continued on page 26)

MERCURY'S PROMOTION STAFF SALUTES

BURKHART/ABRAMS

Jim Taylor

Al Privett

Jim Sotet

Mike Bone

Chris Hubbarth—Detroit
Pat Mileanse—Philadelphia
Danny Davis—Baltimore/Washington
Wayne Cordray—Seattle
Paul Power—Boston
Michael Wright—San Francisco

Daryl Crum—Dallas
Roger Sayles—Atlanta
David Kragoskow—St. Louis
Dave Smith—Houston
Larry Ferris—Miami
Tony Autuore—Cincinnati
Don Stowne—Los Angeles

John McNamara—Chicago/Minneapolis
Steve Greenberg—New York
Debbie Towsley—Nashville
Doc Remer—Cleveland
Jay McDaniel—Charlotte
Don Zucker—Denver



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Subject: A powerful thank you to the
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Lee

WATERGATE BUILDING, 1200 AVENUE OF THE STARS, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Abrams On Research, Radio and The Future of 'Superstars'

(Continued from page 16)

usually conducted in shopping centers on busy weekends.

RW: How long did that take?

Abrams: About two years now.

RW: It's taken you this long to be ready to go?

Abrams: Well, yeah, and we've been so busy with the regular Superstars that we really haven't had the time. 'KTU is the first soft Superstar station. We are working with a soft format in Los Angeles, KPOL, although in this situation they were already established as a soft rock station and it wasn't the kind of thing where we could go in there and change it all around. We just added some modifications.

RW: Do you have other Soft Superstars stations lined up?

Abrams: At this point no. Just really want to see some action first.

RW: Has it surprised you that that format hasn't caught on? KNX and WKTU have been in it for years, and yet it doesn't seem like a format that's taken root in every top 50 market.

Abrams: Well, I think there are a couple of reasons. One is that there are about 20 different versions of it. There's no real one soft rock sound. Secondly, I think that KNX-FM did it right from a marketing standpoint and just the overall sound of the station is just right. A lot of stations heard the format in Los Angeles and brought it back to Wheeling, West Virginia and tried it, but just didn't have

(Continued on page 28)



"We are working with a soft format in Los Angeles, KPOL, although in this situation they were already established as a soft rock station . . . we just added some modifications."

Ken Burkhardt and Lee Abrams We Thank You

Tommy Mottola
and



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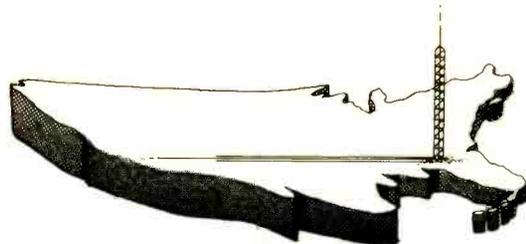
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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Abrams On Research, Radio and The Future of 'Superstars'

(Continued from page 22)

some of the fine points down. I just don't think it's the kind of thing that would work in every market, because there aren't a significant number of vulnerable AOR listeners.

RW: If you were going to project what the FM band in a medium to big size city would be like 10 or 15 years from now, what sort of formats are there going to be?

Abrams: I think it's going to be fragmented all over the place. I can see mellow rock stations, mainstream AOR stations, hard rock stations, I think eventually there may even be new kinds of country stations, new kinds of pop classical stations, all sort fragmented from contemporary radio. 15 years ago there was one kind, top 40 and now of course there's top 40, "Q" top 40 as it used to be called, there's the mellow rock, New York has got a jazz-rock station, oldies, and I think it's a fragmentation trend that is continuing. What it will mean is the end of the 10 and 15 shares and most radio markets will become more demographics oriented. We are already seeing that right now. Soft Superstars probably won't ever be the number one rocker in the market, but it will have, very, very prime demographics.

RW: Is that likely to become the adult contemporary or MOR station of that time?

Abrams: I don't really think there's going to be MOR stations like we know now, that reaches everybody 45 to 60, just because it will be fragmented and everybody will have their own little chunk. If it

“As long as the music and the engineering is right, the real bottom line there is presentation.”

does happen, where there are going to be MOR stations, I think they are going to be the stations like WRLS in Louisville which is just capturing tremendous loyalty among the listeners now at a relatively early age. If that loyalty grows up with those people, that's going to be the MOR station.

RW: When the 10 and 15 shares are gone and everyone is doing their homework as they should and nobody is programming their station from the seat of their pants, what's going to make a good station stand out over a bad station?

Abrams: As long as the music and the engineering is right, the real bottom line there is presentation. Just among the stations we work with there are some that sound good and some that just sound unbelievable and excellent. The difference is usually the magic in the presentation. There are some jocks and some program directors and some stations that just make it sound great, and that's not easy to do. It takes chemistry inside the station, and stations that have that really

(Continued on page 36)



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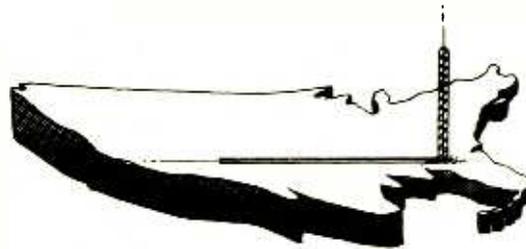
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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY

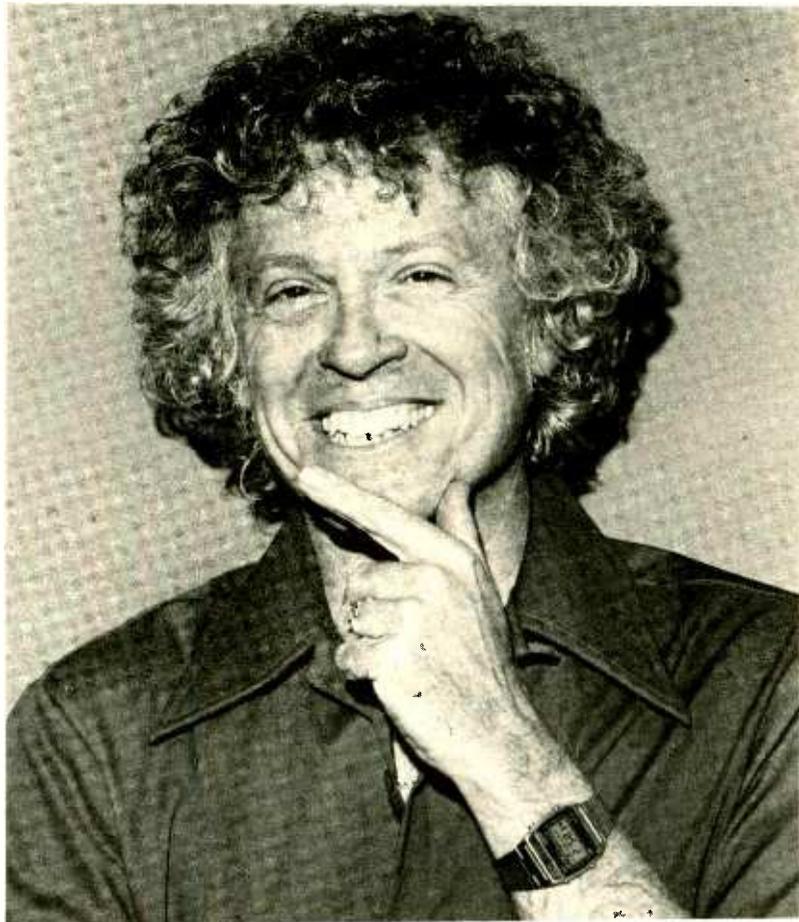


Kent Burkhart: This Radio Doctor Makes House Calls

(Continued from page 26)

Thursday. Now Friday is sort of an option day, in that, maybe I need to go to New York to talk to some sales representatives in behalf of some clients, they may want me to do that which I'm happy to do. It may be that since I'm in Washington that day or Harrisburg or wherever I was the last day that I would flit up there on Friday and talk to those guys and explain what we're doing and how we're doing it and then I would come back here. Saturday I spend in the office until about noon or three going over the paper work for the past week. Lee and I normally have a meeting sometime on Saturday. It might be by telephone—he may be in his house and I may be in mine, but maybe after we both miss each other independently at the office, we'll get together. So we're able to have a very short conversation and know where the hell we are and know the progress. That's sort of how it goes.

On top of that you have the convention problems, because there are now four or five a year, and you must attend those to meet your clients there or people who want to buy your product. You also have a problem that a guy does not want your service for a one-year deal but he wants an analysis of his market. I will do those. I charge tremendously for those. One day costs a person \$2,500 and expenses. I'll go analyze his market for him, I'll give him a good one, but that's all it is, but that's how much it costs. Because I don't really like to do those. The reason I don't is because it takes me out of my routine with my regular clients and that's why I priced it high. We normally only do four or five of those a year. Then we have the MARS situation, and there are films that I must go see in Los Angeles. I know I'm bringing new money into the radio business by doing this and that makes me feel good. Universal is buying more radio and I like that, that turns me on.



"We are now going into a new rate structure which is up considerably, about 25 percent and two-year deal period."

RW: Are most of your arrangements with radio stations on a one-year basis?

Burkhart: Right. They have been in the past. We are now going into a new rate structure which is up considerably, about 25 percent and a two-year deal period. We're not going to do any more deals for less than two years. It is not worth the hassle. People get mad at each other, they try to overnegotiate on a contract. We're sort of non-negotiable. I mean, we've got a price and that's where it is and we waste a lot of time that way and they waste a lot of time.

RW: Are your rates the same whatever the market size?

Burkhart: It varies from market to market. Here is the monthly rate—from \$3,125 a month in New York City to \$700 for markets underneath 200. If a guy has got more than three or four stations or even more than one we do discount, there is no question about it. We've got to, at 10 percent per station. I mean that's only the right thing to do because if not, many times a guy steals information from one place and puts it in the other anyway, but that's how we run our structure.

RW: Now there's yourself, Lee Abrams, Lee Michaels and Mike Scott?

Burkhart: Right. We're just about to bring another guy, a major PD in this country, who will announce his resignation soon. We've already made the deal. There's some political reasons he can't announce it right now to anybody and so we have to keep our mouths shut.

RW: Are there other entirely new areas that you would like to get into?

Burkhart: Yes, I want to get Perikhal in here from Canada to work with us on pure research techniques. That guy is flat good, and he's different from any researcher I've ever seen in my life. He thinks of new ways. He's incredibly good. Number two thing is I would like to move our research beyond the movie business into the Gallo wine business, into the Coke business, into whatever where we could bring about more sales, where we can create better words on the radio for retail sales purposes. That turns me on tremendously. Number three is, there is no question that we are going to buy some radio stations. I mean, there is no doubt about that. Number four is that somehow or other, I'm not quite sure how we are going to do this yet, we're going to go into the syndication business and one of the things we are going to syndicate is Soft Superstars. That is a softer version of the regular Superstars, and that is flying for us.

RW: By syndicating, you mean tapes.

Burkhart: Yeah. I don't want to become a full service syndication house, but if I have a couple of formats like Superstars on four stations—regular Superstars automated—if we've got 10 or 15 Soft Superstars, I'd like to do that because it's a worthwhile approach to radio broadcasting and I like that, it sounds good and it sells merchandise and that's what it's all about.

RW: Are you employing full-time people to do your research?

Burkhart: I farm it out in a way that I know all these people from eons so I know who they are. One well I go to a lot is the university well. I find those people to be contemporary thinkers, because they are surrounded by contemporary people all the time and so they are thinking in a positive way. Out of the 5,000 responses we get back a week it's so amazing the kind of information you can dig out. There are little image things that work which are neat. We're able to get words. Let's say that if you personally interviewed 5,000 college students tomorrow morning, if you had the time to do that, talk to them each for a minute, after you got past your 500th one you would start hearing certain words start popping again and again and again that they use in their vocabulary. We call those key words. Those are communication words and when you define them even more, they become motivation words within the sphere of those key words

(Continued on page 34)

**Atlantic Records salutes
the Burkhardt/Abrams 'superstar'
format as one of
the most creative and
productive approaches to
album rock programming.
We wish to thank both its
originators and its participants.**



THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Program Directors Praise Burkhardt's Expertise & Experience

(Continued from page 10)

a 7.5 over-all quarter-hour share. With change and heavy restructuring, new ownership and everything you start with ground zero. We burnt everybody out and went to a zero and came right back to a 7.5 in our opening book. That's not small potatoes," said PD Mike Scott. "Kent is really up and travelling around the countryside and finding us people and really helping us out. It's quite a chore finding good people and obviously when Kent Burkhardt contacts some people that are pretty decent and wants to place them in here, and I ask him to find me someone, it's really a big help to us to have a name like that going for you."

"They help us with our music research on a weekly basis," said WAPE's Steve Rivers (Jacksonville, Fla.). "They tell us what's going

on around the country; we compare notes. They may suggest records that are happening elsewhere. They also invite us to give them information about successful promotions that we've run so that they can pass them on to their other stations, and they tell us of other things that have been done around the country that have been successful that we may want to try."

"He does mass research on music for us," said WCSC's Bob Casey in Charleston, S.C. "And they are really involved in just about everything we do. We work very closely with Kent and consult with him on everything we do. We consult with him on all the promotions we do, the whole number, and we're very pleased." WREC in Memphis also uses Burkhardt's services to a large ex-

tent, according to PD Leonard Blakely. "He's got good research, probably the best research that I've ever seen. Whatever mechanism he uses for his research, it's ok. That's proven and tested. He can help us to see things we wouldn't ordinarily see. It's like not being able to see the trees because of the forest sometimes, and he overcomes that problem for us. That's the best reason to have him. We have him 100 per cent; we use his entire services."

"It's like having an expert assist you and offer you input which you can weed through and use what you like or dislike. We rely quite a bit on his research, he's got a very good record," said WKY PD Bill Burkett in Oklahoma City. "As a program director you try to become knowledgeable with what's going on elsewhere

and you're looking for fresh ideas all the time, and Kent functions as a source. He deals with so many radio stations, he's almost like a book of knowledge you can refer to."

However much a station relies on Burkhardt/Abrams' consultancy, results seem to be happening. The long list of loyal clients confirms that. "I know there are some people who follow them to a T, but we don't. We share ideas," said KJR's Steve West (Seattle). "But we value their input and are happy with what they produce. Things are fine. The station is doing very, very well, both rating-wise and billing-wise. We couldn't be happier."

"Our ratings are excellent, and our demographics are young," said Charlie Russell of KHEY (El
(Continued on page 40)

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April 1978

Kent, Lee, Lee, & Mike:

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Phil
Phil Rush

(NOW will you increase Sea Level's rotation...)

MEMORANDUM

From One Superstar To Another



WHITFIELD RECORDS

Thanks For Everything



THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Kent Burkhart: This Radio Doctor Makes House Calls

(Continued from page 30)

and that's what we use in our advertising technique. We take the key motivational words and utilize them. So we use that, we use colleges I like a lot. At some of our stations we'll even hire other researchers to confirm what we found. WLAC in Nashville has been thinking about doing some changes and we've given them some research and we've been successful with that station anyway, they wanted to know about the marketplace and so they hired a local researcher to do the deal. I helped them in the formulation of the questionnaire, etc. The local research guys were good, incidentally. The results were very predictable in my view. They came back and they looked just exactly like I thought they were going to look, right on the nose, and it was money well spent because it verified to management that we were absolutely giving them the straight poop. As a matter of fact, WLAC-AM looked much stronger than indeed it looks in the ARB.

RW: Do you own broadcast properties now?

Burkhart: I own stock in WAYS in Charlotte, WROQ in Charlotte and WAPE in Jacksonville, but I want to buy some others. Radio is really a lot of fun if you really want to play it, if you don't take it too seriously. If you start taking it too seriously, then you become a defeatist at it, because you get too innerbound with frustration. You almost have to play it as a game.

RW: But when you had your station in San Angelo, didn't you find yourself taking it seriously?

Burkhart: Absolutely. What I needed to help me was a me. I needed a me to come in from the outside and say, hey, look, here's what you ought to do, do this with the sales department, do this with the engineering department and do this over here and do this over here, don't take it all so seriously, it's all coming together, I can see the percentages are coming together. And it would take me out of the forest and put me into the prairie so I could look at the forest to be sure that I was really on solid ground. That's one of the reasons that I know this is a valuable business for broadcasters.

RW: Consulting a station means checking out the competition—are the stations getting better, are more people more in tune with what it takes to be competitive today? Is the talent stronger?

Burkhart: There are so many more, radio stations are much better. They're much better than they were 10 years ago. A lot of that has to do with automation. At the same time I must tell you that there are fewer good guys in the broadcasting business—they have gone into television and they have gone into the music business. This has taken place over the past 10 years. If I get a phone call from one of our managers today who says that we have lost our program director to another station, it is much harder to dig out a young programmer now, who wants to look at the entire programming spectrum, than it was 10 years ago. No doubt about it—it is much tougher. The same way with disc jockeys. Try to find me a morning man in this country that you can hire for less than \$60,000 that's worth a damn. They are very hard to find and the major markets have them locked up and there are only five in the country or less. To me only five, to other broadcasters maybe 30.

Gordon McLendon years ago had a seminar in which he looked for seven guys that he was going to train. They were going to come to Dallas to be with him for 60 days or 90 days and out of that he got two or three good programmers, and I've sort of been thinking about the same thing. Maybe we ought to screen this, maybe we ought to have it even if they are currently employed by a station wherever, their boss man would really want them to come here for a month to learn as much as they can learn in one month. The disadvantage to the boss man is that this guy will go back to Oshkosh or wherever and I would call him in three months and say, listen, I've got a gig for you, you're in Louisville or wherever it is. I'd move him up a market size and I would already know through his personality at one month whether he can handle a job.

I don't have time for anybody in this business who doesn't want to work. If I find a guy who doesn't want to work more than eight



"I don't have time for anybody in this business who doesn't want to work. If I find a guy who doesn't want to work more than eight hours a day, then I figure he's no good . . ."

hours a day, then I figure he's no good, that he's really not the kind of guy that's going to come along, he's interested in the paycheck only. When you start talking in terms of working 15 hours a day you begin to talk my language.

I sat in the Atlanta airport and hired a guy for a friend of mine, this is recent and this guy had wanted to be a PD for a long time, he'd been bugging me for one year, intelligent guy, really bright. He had had some knocks on him here and there about being a little flighty and a little rough inside the station with his manner, with his language, and doubting the program director's word, etc. I throw all those things out the window when I look at brightness and when I look at a guy who wants to do something—I mean, that's what it really gets down to. I'll give that guy a chance, normally, somehow, somewhere. I will caution management that it is a chance and I did.

Anyway management met with this person at this other property, got the same impression that I did that he's full of anxiety, but that he would probably be okay. He convinced both of us that he was cool, that he was not a hothead, that there was no problem, that everything was right, that he wanted this more than anything in the world, that he would do everything that I laid out for him. So he was hired for this station. He got up there. The first day I got a phone call—he said, well I don't know about this. This station sounds terrible and I think we're going to have to replace some people. I said, well, fine who do you want to replace? He said I want to replace three guys and I said well okay. He said I want to bring in two guys of my own. I said who are they? He told me and he played some tapes for me on the telephone. I said that's fine if you want those guys, they sound okay to me, go talk to your manager. So he did. The next day he called back and he had another complaint and the next day another. So it was that in a very short number of days he had destroyed his credibility inside the radio station by unloading some guys, by becoming by being a non PR non smiler, by having dramatic conflicts with the manager in which he accused the manager of lying and the manager accused him of lying, who knows which is right and I really don't give a damn. What I'm getting to is the guy obviously was not ready or mature enough to be able to handle the gig. I would like to give young guys a break, but I can't give them a break when they don't have the maturity to handle the job or the pressure.

There are some good guys that you can't move so you have to look for 21 or 25-year-old guys who are coming up strong, who you believe to be morally and ethically sound, who will not stab you, who will not hurt management, who will not hurt the station, who will try to work with people, who have pure maturity to try to make something work. That, my friend, is hard to find in any job. ☺



THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY

Lee Michaels on Working with the Superstars Stations

(Continued from page 18)

try to keep up a weekly contact with that station, but we will cross-over. Sometimes, if I'm in a market area in the region I'll go visit the station and sometimes Lee will visit mine. There are about a dozen stations that I visit consistently.

RW: Could you tell me some of the things that you are likely to do with a station during your weekly travels. What are some of the reasons you would visit a station that has already started with the company?

Michaels: A lot of the times it is to indoctrinate new employees. In other words, to give them the full background of the format in a meeting environment that we gave the original employees the day they went in there. Let's face it, in six months in this business the faces at a radio station can change dramatically and before long, everyone who's doing the format on the air has learned it kind of second hand. It doesn't mean they aren't doing it right, it may mean they do not understand the background of it. Then if they went in there they had to make a value judgement they would understand what the value we were trying to reach was. So that's one thing. Another area is helping to design and create promotions. A station might sound good but not have any excitement, so I would go in there and help with some promotional ideas. Sometimes during the pre-ARB visits, it's just a visit to sit down with everybody and get everybody up to that 100% level and retouch upon some of the fine points of the format that are easily forgot. Sometimes it may be to listen to the competitor. If a book comes out and we look real good

and the competitor has a bad book, it's real easy for us to say, 'They've changed. They've gone top 40.' Unless we listen to them closely they may not really have gone top 40 and they may still be a major threat. Sometimes, it's just going in to see what the competition has done since we've come into the market. And then sometimes it's to work with the sales department.

RW: Do you work with the sales departments?

Michaels: Yes. Sales departments come and go as well. Sometimes they go out and can sell numbers and such but sometimes they need a good explanation of how and why the format works so they can pass it on to their accounts and sell off something besides just the ARB results. Probably the fun part of this whole thing is that every visit can be different. What I am doing today may not be what I will be doing tomorrow, because tomorrow I will be in Tampa and the next day I will be in Hartford. Not only is there a geographical difference but there is a difference in the needs of the radio stations. Sometimes I set up research projects. We will sometimes sense a trend with something that is happening in one marketplace and we don't want to overreact and assume that it is happening everywhere else, but we want to check and see if maybe it is. Sometimes it will be going into a market and work out a research questionnaire and project and set deadlines to get it done to make sure that we suddenly aren't doing radio that may be antiquated.

RW: Are there changes in Superstars that you can perceive in just the nine months that you have been in the home office? Is the format

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CONGRATULATIONS



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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Abrams On Research, Radio and The Future of 'Superstars'

(Continued from page 28)

stand out.

RW: Do you put a lot of emphasis on personality?

Abrams: Definitely. Ideally we would be pure personality stations. The problem is, personality has to be reinterpreted for 1978 standards.

RW: What are those?

Abrams: Well, that's one of the problems. We have it down to a certain degree. It's just finding out what personality means today. Sometimes when we think personality, we think back to wild tracks and one liners, whereas it's changed a lot right now. I think the ability to be loose, a party feel is important today. The big problems, of course, are reinterpreting personality for today and getting the jock who understands that. Secondly it's just finding people who are capable of that. Our format is one that is easy to get overmechanized—in other words, former top 40 jocks, and we're definitely trying to stay away from that.

RW: If you're hired as a consultant at a given station and you go in and assess the air personalities, what sorts of things are you likely to mark people either up or down for?

Abrams: Some negative points would be jocks who sound "radio." In other words, have a sound about them that instantly qualifies them as a disc jockey, a DJ sound. Another thing is the jocks who don't have the ability to pull off the mechanics. First the mechanics have to be pulled off flawlessly before they can evolve into another stage of their presentation and there are certain people, many of them extremely talented, who just can't really get it right from a mechanical standpoint which is really phase one. As far as positives, it's jocks who can let's say interpret the mechanics of the format in their own style. From a mechanical standpoint do everything right but at the same time, have their own distinctive sound. Do everything right but he's also himself, really exposing his own personality. Also another positive with jocks is that he can talk the language of the streets. "Here's a selection from Steve Miller" really isn't street talk. Nobody uses the word selection. "Get down and kick ass with Nugent right now" is more of a street feel, somebody who can relate to what's going on in the street. It was real hip several years ago for a jock to say "far out," a lot of jocks are still saying that, whereas the term is passe from a street standpoint.

RW: How's the talent market? Obviously you are called upon to fill a lot of vacancies at one level or another.

Abrams: I think the talent market right now is only fair and I suppose our kind of radio is one of the reasons for that. One of the misinterpretations of that whole concept is that we are only looking for mechanical jocks. Actually that's not right at all. One jock should do mechanics plus get funky. That's the problem, finding jocks who can do those two things.

RW: Where are most of them coming from?

Abrams: Two areas. One is the top 40 jock who just gets burned out on top 40. That type of jock is great from the standpoint that he really knows mechanics, he knows the technical aspect of the formats and at the same time goes home at night and instead of listening to the station he works for, goes home and listens to Emerson, Lake and Palmer records. That type person is great because he understands mechanics but in his own head he's really into our kind of music. The other type of jock is the free-form jock who is ready to make the transition. One problem with that type jock frequently is that they feel there's sometimes been more about the music than the research. But more and more we're finding this kind of people just bringing over their natural talents and accepting the mechanics. We're finding really poor training generally on a college level, which is unfortunate. It seems the college stations are preparing the jocks for jobs on stations that don't exist any more, or don't exist like they used to. I wish they would be preparing people for our kind of station.

RW: It seemed that for a while you were staying away from the top five markets. Now you have a station in New York. Are you more anxious to get into the bigger cities now?

Abrams: We always have been. One of the big problems has been the stations with the big signals in the larger markets are usually owned by the networks or large corporations and generally shy away from outside help. Just recently we've been able to crack into some of those markets, but we've always wanted to be there.

RW: Are there trends in music now, or in radio, that you find particularly interesting, that might make a format or a new spinoff somewhere down the road?

Abrams: We are doing a lot of studying on specific music trends, treating the trends just as important as artists. One of the trends we see is the sort of AOR/MOR—this type of music is trademarked by image groups. Groups that have an unquestionable progressive identity like Fleetwood Mac. Nobody questions that their roots are progressive but at the same time they put out super pop songs. We're also seeing a trend toward orchestralized hard rock music, such as Styx or Kansas, which is pretty sophisticated, classical-oriented arrangements made very accessible for a midwest rock and roll sound. I can see that type of music perhaps evolving into a format.

RW: I'm sure that in your sales research and call-back research you get to talk to a lot of black listeners. Is there any possibility of a Superstars r&b format? A hipper black radio sound might be successful in many areas.

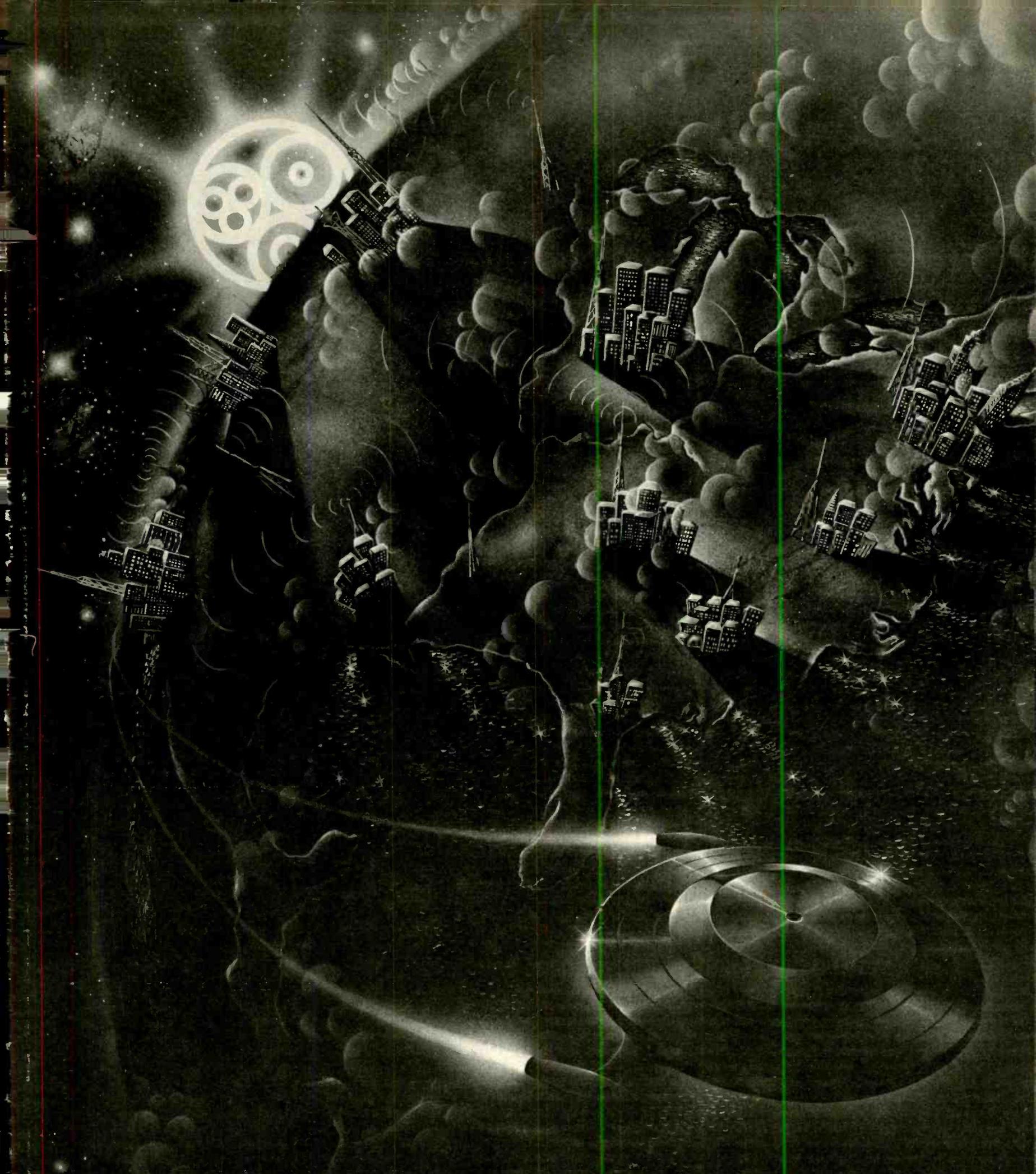
Abrams: I think definitely there's a great deal of potential for that, but I think it would realistically be the kind of format that should be executed by blacks. There are cultural differences, and part of the

(Continued on page 42)

THANKS!



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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Burkhart /Abrams' Record Industry Impact Has Been Great

(Continued from page 12)

directors at the Abrams stations and stated, "The program directors are the key, and Lee Abrams lets each guy operate on his own; the format is the basis, but the program directors pretty much guide themselves."

Key Roles

Discussing the impact Burkhart and Abrams have had on radio, promotion spokesmen concurred that AOR was quickly becoming the competitive format, and that since Burkhart and Abrams were the leading consultants of AOR, the two men played key roles in today's radio programming. Sotet commented that Burkhart and Abrams have stimulated the growth of AOR considerably: "Burkhart and Abrams have had a positive effect upon formatted radio in that they have forced AOR to adjust their programs to the audience. Anytime someone

comes into the marketplace and causes you to improve your air-sound because the stations you're competing against have improved their air-sound, you're improving the business. And when you have someone like Abrams who has added things to the FM band, like feature lps and the concert series, you're improving the FM band and that's positive." Tusken pointed out that product was improving due to AOR predominance: "Everybody is concentrating on promoting acts that are geared to lp-oriented radio—you just can't come out with weak product with all this competition." Swig mentioned the credibility that Burkhart and Abrams have brought to AOR and said, "Credibility has brought AOR from the underground up to the society it was originally revolting against. AOR has become big

AOR has become big business . . .

“Gone are the days when AOR had to rely on local accounts and head shops.”

business, and this is evident by the national advertisers it now attracts. Gone are the days when AOR had to rely on local accounts and head shops."

Radio of the Future

When asked about the future of music radio, promotion people stated that AOR had become the dominant format and could very well become the radio of the future. Projecting into the future, Tusken said, "The essence is still on the FM band, and there are a great many formats there. However, AOR has had a head start and because of its sophistication, I see it as the radio of the future, as well as the predominant format today. Counter-culture music has become mainstream, and I think top 40 radio has recognized that as well. The Abrams stations have become the competitive rock radio that other stations have to look at."

Don McGregor

Also commenting on the status of the radio of the future were Don McGregor, national promotion director for Warner Brothers, Davis and Beer. According to McGregor, "there's a place for all formats, although I believe that we will continue to see more

specialization in terms of the audience. There will always be a place for a teen or upper demographic station; furthermore, there are too many good people out there programming too many good stations. I think radio will fragment, and we'll see a lot of radio stations with basically the same numbers." Beer added, "I think the near future of FM radio is tighter formats, but I think the trend could reverse itself; tighter formats could very well be a phenomenon of the present."

More LP Cuts

Davis commented on the future of radio in regard to the market, as opposed to a specific radio format, and said, "I see in the future almost the elimination of the top 40 station waiting for the single; I see them listening to albums more, and playing more lp cuts. A lot of top 40 stations are as hip as AOR, and it's just that their presentation is different. Radio is more than ever trying to program its music to the audience. We've got to get the 18-34 buyer, the hip 34-40 buyer and the hip 14-18 buyer. With these buyers, radio will be successful, and a record company's first product is radio."

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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



PDs on Superstars

(Continued from page 14)

At this stage it has become part of what WQDR's Miller describes as "the looseknit federation."

Held together by Abrams' constant traveling and a nationwide flow of ideas, communications within the "federation" lends itself to a lot of cross-pollination. Promotional concepts are easily transferred and the network's "chief ambassador's" research can quickly be assessed for other markets. Bullet says, "The strength of the chain is there's a lot of back-up research to determine which are popular artists and which are cult ones." WWW's Johnson adds that "stations rely on Lee's research to determine the viability of new product."

Educational Course

The learning process for the Superstar program directors is a plentiful and continuous source as was evidenced recently in Dallas where the Superstar seminars were most productive. "Lee is one of the few people who's an educator," says WDVE's McGhan. "Being a part of the network is like being enrolled in a true educational course in radio. Lee really knows and keeps up with what's going on. He knows the terms, meanings and technicalities. And with everything constantly in a state of flux, we can keep on top of it."

Currently at 43 stations, the Superstar stations are rapidly increasing in number because of the prestige and bottom line advantages of being a part. KPRI (San Diego) reports doubling its billing after one year, while Tom Daniels, program director of Milwaukee's WLPX which joined the network but four months ago, claims to be "three or four months ahead in revenue goals and two or three ahead on ratings. The Superstars is very well known now so on regional and national levels it's been very profitable and on the local level it sounds so good and flows well enough to pull in ads."

Prestige associated with the Abrams consultancy can make a big difference to a station like WRCN on the extreme eastern end of Long Island. PD Don Brinks, after evaluating a variety of new formats, hired Abrams because he "offered us instant recognition in the industry and gave

us an immediate in with groups and labels. We saw changes within six weeks." For a relatively small outlet like WRCN, Brinks added, "It allows us to do things that only a major market station could afford."

As the Superstar network grows it is also diversifying, marked by the recent addition of Sonny Fox as program director of New York's WKTU. Fox, who also programs WYSP (Philadelphia) and established Abrams-Fox consultants a few years ago, is currently programming an "expansion of the Superstar format," he says.

Lee Michaels

(Continued from page 35)

evolving?

Michaels: Yes. It is evolving in some markets faster than in others, but the overall format is evolving as well. Partly because there are more stations now. When I came down in June, I believe we had 26 or 28 stations. Now I believe it's 40 or 41. All those stations are not only stations we give information to, but they are also facilities we get input from because all of the markets are doing their own research and giving us feedback. Because of the increased amount of information being shared, and because of the increased number of facilities, a lot of things that we used to pick up as vague hints of things going on, we now pick up in four or five places and we realize that something is happening and it is not just a regional fluke. We are then able to institute research projects and find out if it is universal. Just the way listeners have started perceiving radio stations has changed in just the last six months it seems. Possibly because with every month that goes by there is more activity on the FM dial. Top 40 stations spring up on FM. It has made the dial more active, fractionalized the audience a little bit more, and it makes you have to be a little bit more refined in everything that you do to hit that target. Now you can't just plug into a market because the competition isn't that far out on the left as it used to be and so it becomes even more important how far to the left or right in relation to the top 40 or AOR you get to know if you win it all or lose it all. You can wash out your own identity by not knowing where you stand. It has become more of a challenge and it makes us get even more into a research situation. One situation that I'm always concerned with is that the markets don't let themselves get where they wait for us to tell them everything that's happening in their city.

RW: Are you getting that research consistently from all your stations?

Michaels: Yes, but the smaller markets are having a harder time because it comes down to manpower. It just gets chaotic when they have to set aside 20 hours a week to do research. We give them national information and they can counter with the validity or lack of it for whatever concept we may have come up with. The bottom line in radio to me is, wouldn't it be nice to make whatever decision you want in radio and never have to rescind that decision? That goes from adding the right records to doing the right promotion. Another positive thing about having all of these stations together is that there are certain promotions we do that are indigenous to Superstars and each time we've done it in a different market we always learn a little more. Something we've started doing three years ago is drastically improved by now. Little detail things that make something come off sparkling as opposed to just sounding all right and that is something we learn from experience. All of the "Superstars" elements did not come from Lee Abrams or me but from individual programmers who understood what we were trying to do.

"We remove the harder artists and launch a more revolutionary approach which will be capturing a bigger and larger audience. This is appealing to an older, more passive listener developed in the past three years." As one of the more innovative program directors working with Abrams, Fox has initiated a unique "combination of a musical production sound with electronic IDs" and feels "extremely proud and honored" to be contributing to these properties. They're the first people to know what they're doing."

Program Directors

(Continued from page 32)

Paso). "They help us give people what we feel is the right mix, and it's paying off. It's been a plus for us: there's no question about it. I'm just glad that my boss saw fit to spend a few extra bucks to make sure we were right. It's given us more confidence." Tom Phiefer, of KRMD (Shreveport, La.) which is owned by KHEY, agreed with Russell. "At one time we had good ratings, but were losing an audience we needed to get to, and he advised us how to get back into that audience. His advice is just invaluable because he'll spot things immediately that we don't hear. You just couldn't even put a price on how much he could save us in the end."

Dan Wilson of KPUR (Amarillo) says his station follows "about 99 per cent of their suggestions and recommendations. We're running what I believe is a very efficient major market format."

Dick Kent, program director for WLAC in Nashville, which has used the services of Kent Burkhardt for three and a half years views the bottom line. "All you can do is just look at the total picture and see how you came out, and over the past three and a half years WLAC has gotten higher ratings than any radio station in Nashville has gotten in the last five years. So it's performance. They're super people and they've proven it."

WLRS

(Continued from page 14)

term success to its practical local research and participation in local events which make it seem "more sensitive and giving the listener credit for being intelligent." The station avoids quizzes and gimmicks opting for direct giveaways.

Essentially WLRS is the fully developed AOR station reaching "the facet of the Abrams format which is self-promotion. A built-in factor which forces a station to promote and market itself." But this extensive marketing might not work for a middle-rated station; WLRS and Lee Abrams have devised it for the dominant AOR. Henson explains, "We would burn out if we used the same technique while we were growing. It would turn into hard sell. Marketing helps create a station's image and the image is the most tangible factor in maintenance."

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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Lee Abrams On Research, Radio and The Future of 'Superstars'

(Continued from page 36)

ideal Superstars station is really the cultural radio station, one that people can really relate to as a close friend. I think a black Superstars has a great deal of potential. We have talked about it a lot but what we have to do is collaborate with sharp black programmers because we can supply the research, the mechanical and promotional ways to pull it off, but as far as the actual feel of the stations it's going to take someone who is involved in the black community.

RW: You mentioned that you're doing market research for groups or record companies.

Abrams: Actually what we have there is a company called MARS (Marketing, Advertising, Research Services, Inc.) which is run by a guy named Dennis Nicholas out in Los Angeles. This isn't to be confused with Todd Wallace's company, this is a different one and we supply that company with some research data and they work with the groups.

RW: What groups have you worked with?

Abrams: Well, we did out of a desire to do it—in other words, no financial compensation—a thing with Yes, and then we did a very intensive one for Foghat.

RW: What did that involve?

Abrams: Well, it involved studying pretty much every aspect of the group, from the effect the cover of the record album has on the record purchase to what key they should play in for best effect to specific reactions to their concerts and how the concert can be more positive and maybe what songs the group should do in concert, ideally what material they should do, what style. Really comprehensive, every aspect of the group that you can think of. Of course the problem in dealing with these groups is that artists are not merchandisers. A lot of the information is not taken to heart. Nonetheless, I think there is a tremendous potential for this, not necessarily with the artistic aspect of the group but with improving the marketing of their records.

RW: Where did you go to find this information?

Abrams: For example, with the Yes thing, we had people outside of all their concerts afterwards interviewing two or three thousand people coming out of the concerts, plus we called thousands of people who bought Yes records. We've done different kinds of panel testing where we get people who have never bought a Yes record and find out why they like it and why they don't. We have even re-engineered some of their music to find out just certain elements of their music that are irritating such as certain frequency ranges, production, etc.

RW: Would you like to get more into that kind of work?

Abrams: Definitely—it's sort of in my personal long-range goals. For the next 10, 12 years it's going to be a major priority.

RW: I presume that there are a lot of things coming up in your research that you didn't look for. Are you just asking your researchers to write down anything that happens repetitively?

Abrams: Well, usually we just ask a series of questions and then we find out weird things in the translation process. Let me think of an example. There was one style of music we were studying and we were trying to find reasons why this kind of music was popular and right in the middle of all this we found out that it was a certain key that made the songs appealing, the key of E major, so that was a real surprise. From there we did our own little project on not key words but musical key signature research—anyway, we could program by key. We're right in the middle of it now but it's showing some pretty interesting—frightening—results.

RW: How do you as a research professional see the various ratings services?

Abrams: I think the biggest pitfall of all the rating companies is the way they break things out. In other words, I think we're going to have to see more psychographic breakouts. For example, in the 25-34 you've got very straight middle American suburban housewives, you've got people who are just getting out of college and you've got



"My priorities are going to change, and as we grow just the whole nature of the company and the duties of everyone will change."

just blue collar urban laborers, you've got so many different types of people all falling into one category 25-34 and I think really we're going to have to see more specific breakouts. Another thing is I don't know how valid 18-24 is, or 12-17, because in the teens there's a vast difference between a 12 and a 13-year old and a 16 to 17-year old. We tend to think as soon as somebody turns 18, all of a sudden they are into FM, head phones and a hip lifestyle when actually that process starts at 16. The same thing at the other end. When somebody turns 25, they are not all of a sudden into Montovani. So I think the Arbitron is just a little idealistic but the problem with all rating services is the breakout being too wide.

RW: You touched briefly on your goals for the next however many years—what might you want to get into that you're not into now?

Abrams: Several things. I do have about a 15-year master plan, it includes, of course, the immediate future and for quite a while continually involved with the radio thing that's really very exciting right now. In the long run you see tremendous potential studying pretty deeply cable television which we'll see as the next major medium. We believe, based on some preliminary research, that cable TV is being marketed so poorly relative to the potential strength of the medium. I also have personal musical aspirations, I'm a musician myself so I plan on ending up as an artist.

RW: What do you play?

Abrams: Normally guitar and also I'm involved in organ. I'm getting a mellotron.

RW: Who are your musical influences?

Abrams: There are three influences. I would say music along the lines of Yes, Alan Parsons because of the classical influence, also some of the jazz guitarists like Al DiMeola, Pat Martino; and some of the more accessible classical such as "The Planets."

RW: How are you spending your time now? Are you still traveling as much as you were?

Abrams: It's usually four or five days on the road and then two days in the office on the weekends.

RW: Do you anticipate that changing?

Abrams: It's going to change as we get more people. My priorities are going to change, and as we grow just the whole nature of the company and the duties of everyone will change. I can't see getting off the road completely, but I can see in the next few years a change. The road is very important because it gives you face-to-face contact with the people you work with. That's one of the problems of some of the larger syndicators, a lack of frequent face-to-face contact. ☺

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THE BURKHART/ABRAMS STORY



Mike Scott: Getting a Radio Overview

(Continued from page 12)

hour nighttime airshift in 1960. Thus the odyssey began: from Santa Barbara it was on to Monterey, Sacramento, Fresno and other California markets, in 1967 Cincinnati and WUBE, a Bill Drake station, beckoned. Other stops remained: Buffalo, Milwaukee and finally, Atlanta, where he was named in 1973 as program director for General Cinema's four stations, including the celebrated Z93.

But change was in the air. General Cinema considered selling its stations and getting out of radio altogether. Enter Kent Burkhart.

"I had known Kent since the early '60s," Scott explained, "from my time at WOKY in Milwaukee. He had been talking to me at that time and had also been a big admirer of Z93. We just seemed to hit it off. I had a tremendous amount of admira-

tion for him and he liked what I was doing and decided then that I should join the organization. It's worked out fine."

Scott's expertise in combating FM competition on the top 40 level, plus his solid background in country music, render him invaluable to Burkhart-Abrams. Of his approach to programming Scott says there is no simple answer, no formula for bolstering a floundering station or for strengthening an already highly-rated one. "Radio's so totally complex today," he says with a trace of exasperation in his voice. "Now it's a matter of taking all the information you have and trying to pick out just exactly what you should be doing at a given time; and staying with the tried and true as far as contests are concerned, as far as music is concerned—staying with what you know is going to happen."

Scott unflinchingly hammers home the last point: conservatism is the cornerstone of his philosophy "Of course there are areas you have to get into now that you didn't years ago, such as identifying with an AOR factor; you do have to play some music that isn't absolute hit material. But it should still come off hit albums.

"We don't really take any chances with totally unknown, unfamiliar artists unless we see something developing in the secondary."

As committed as Scott is to the AM band, he feels FM represents the future of music radio. AM, he predicts, will eventually turn to news and information formats exclusively, with country music perhaps remaining as its only musical ally.

"But there's plenty of time," he advises. "FM's coming gradually. Stations that are really getting

shot down on the AM side are ones that just aren't getting prepared for it. 70 percent of the major markets in this country are dominated by AM, not FM. And there's so many ways for FM to go wrong. It hasn't got the mass audience that's available to AM; and it suffers in mobility. KKKX in Denver came on with big numbers and just faded away. That's a perfect example of just not being able to hold with programming. These are areas where we capitalize with our AM facilities and get the audience that is available."

High ratings and industry plaudits are the more tangible results of Scott's work. But he insists that the greatest reward comes with knowing that the Burkhart-Abrams stations are committed to community service. "I feel we are. We're constantly looking for new things that work."

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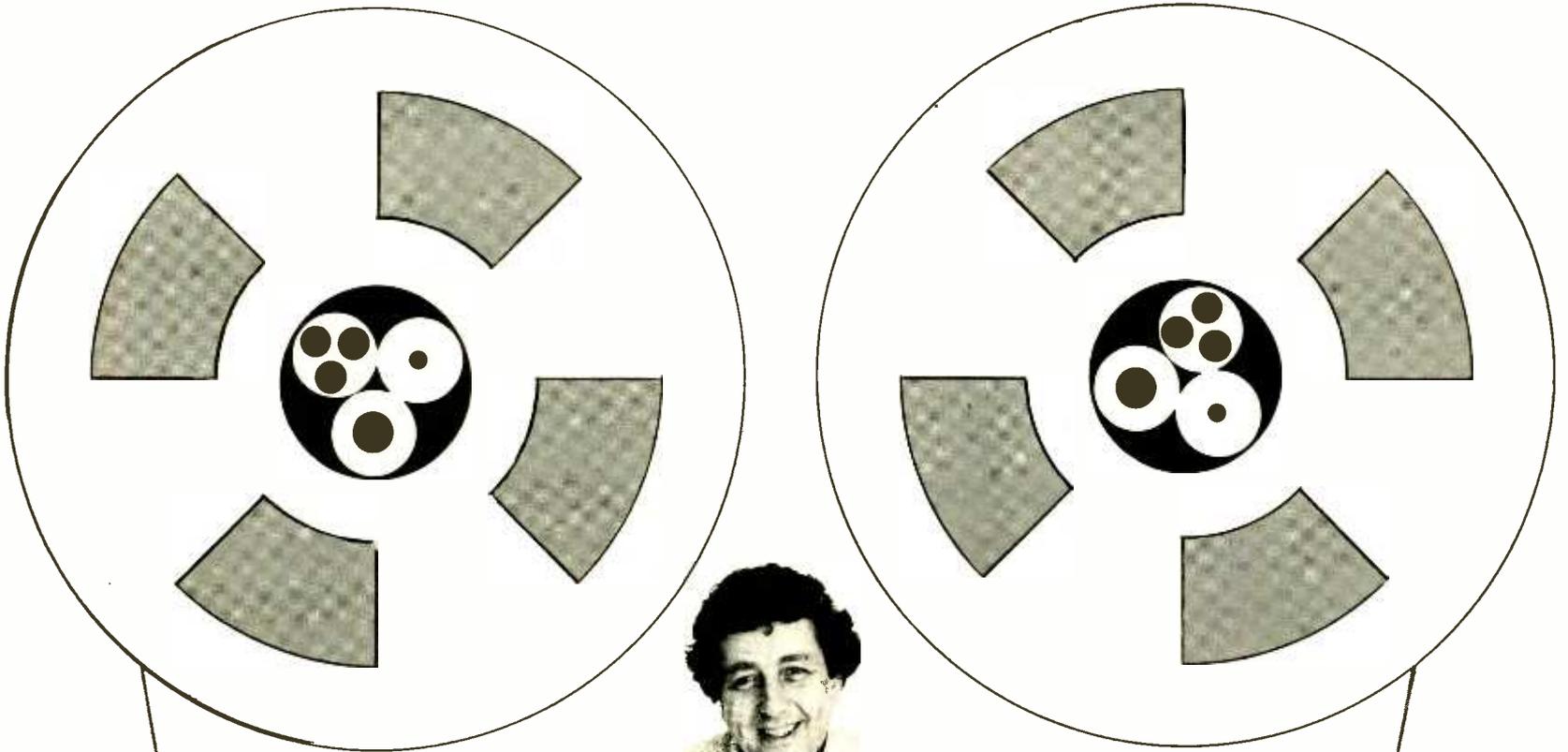
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Commentary: Burkhart/Abrams Helps Radio Gain Respect



By NEIL MCINTYRE

■ Doing consultant work is like having a wife and a girlfriend, and that's if you only have two radio stations; when you have 70 of them, it makes it difficult to spread your love around. Burkhart/Abrams have managed to keep the customer satisfied by being successful.

As program directors read this, imagine the problems that occur at your station on a daily basis, then put yourself in the position of the consultant and multiply that times 70 stations across the country.

Burkhart/Abrams' ability to direct their time and energy throughout the country and maintain and create new successes is a credit to good planning and stability in format. Besides the obvious recognition from the music industry, the radio stations in the country have responded, not just by hiring their service but in changing their formats to the AOR style of programming. Many top 40 operations have made a transition to rock album music and have used some of the guidelines set down by Abrams to formulate their music and audience research. The same stations have put emphasis on image artists or superstar types as part of their programming clock. When listening to stations that are considered AOR you'll hear a number of program elements that were originated in the superstar format. This makes Burkhart/Abrams' job more difficult as the stations change in markets that they consult, putting them in a position at times of competing against their own ideas.

Some may say that Burkhart/Abrams have deleted some of the poetry at rock album programmed stations, but no one can deny that at the same time they have helped FM radio gain respect and success.

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