

RADIO PROGRAMING: Miller Attacks

At Storz Stations' Pop Music Disk Jockey Convention in Kansas City recently, Columbia Records' Mitch Miller said that d.j.'s appeal to musical tastes of 8-14-year age group

Gathered under this roof are a great many men of fantastic skill, taste, and imagination. You caused radio to jump out of bed and click its heels a few years back, while the public was dressing for the funeral. You made radio once again a vital force on the American scene, a source of first-rate entertainment, and—best of all—you made it pay.

But what's been happening in the last year or two? To say that many of you have grossly mishandled this great, fat money-maker—radio—would be understating the case.

You carefully built yourselves into the monarchs of radio and then you went and *abdicated*—abdicated your programing to the corner record shop; to the eight to 14-year-olds; to the pre-shave crowd that makes up 12% of the country's population and 0% of its buying power, once you eliminate pony-tail ribbons, popsicles, and peanut brittle.

I know that most of you agree with me that much of the juvenile stuff pumped over the air waves these days hardly qualifies as music. But your standard answer is—"We're not here to educate. We're here to give them what they want."

What *who* wants?

Certainly not the 75% of the nation over 14 years old! If they did, they wouldn't be buying hi-fi record players in unprecedented numbers, setting them up in the living room, shutting off the radio—and creating their own home-made programing departments!

Certainly not those who want variety, musicianship, a little bit of literacy, and a bit more sophistication in their music. And, gentlemen, that's the majority . . .

"Well," you reply, "that may be, but we radio stations are doing O.K. in the rating departments." Yes, but we

both know that ratings are comparative. Each of you is fighting for your share of the milk—after the cream's been skimmed off. The current phenomenal grosses of the recording companies show that the country is hungry for music. Television has failed over and over again to satisfy that hunger. It lies in your power to bring the grown-ups back to radio music.

O.K., so who's the "they" in radio's standard defense—"We're here to give them what *they* want." It is usually the mythical "they" who make up the Top 40 song lists. At its best, the Top 40 presents only a philosophical problem on a par with "Which came first, the chicken or the egg." Does the demand for a record come because you play it first, or do the kids demand it because they find it in the Top 40?

If you media buyers think none of this applies to you, you're very much mistaken. It all translates quickly and painfully into advertising dollars and cents. Most of you buy radio listeners for your clients at so much per pound, like meat.

I can see you station owners objecting, "Why should we change our programing at a time when business is going great?" But just because you're making a profit and this is a seller's market, it doesn't follow that you're making the profit you should. And, if the economy slumps further, which stations will best weather the storms ahead? I believe it will be the ones with distinct personalities, the ones that jump out at you as you're twirling the dial because they're not programing with the herd. A policy of music and news is great. But it can only work in the long run if it doesn't rest on fresh news and stale music.

You stations aren't thinking clearly into the future when you gear yourself to the eight to 14-year-old men-



tality. Every year, a large chunk of the audience, at the top end of your age span, gets over its musical growing pains and gives up the game of rebelling against parents, teachers, and the world at large. That means that every five years the stations that program for sub-teens turn over almost their entire audience. The smart station is the one that recognizes that you're a grown-up a lot longer than you're a sub-teen, and works to build a permanent audience.

One other word to station owners. You pay for the best equipment, you seek golden-voiced announcers, your engineers work to get the best signal possible, and then what—you play records so badly produced the listener thinks he can't tune you in properly.

I'm not asking you to snuff out the musical life of these kids or their followers. But I am asking you to put new life in radio; I'm asking you to take radio away from the lists and give it back to all the people; I'm asking you to give up lazy programing—to play music for every age group and every taste. The by-product of such a move will be aesthetic, and you can take pride in the public service. But principally you'll be doing it for your pocketbook by insuring a broader, healthier audience, and guaranteeing advertisers who are seeking that audience a fair shake for their money. ▀