

WMAS drops disco for album rock format

By RUTH DANCKERT
Union Staff

WMAS-FM, a 1,000-watt Springfield radio station that has probably seen more format changes in the last 10 years than any other station in the market, has changed again, from all-disco to "light album rock."

The format is a mixture of '60s and '70s album music that could also be called "mellow rock." The changeover was made Jan. 1.

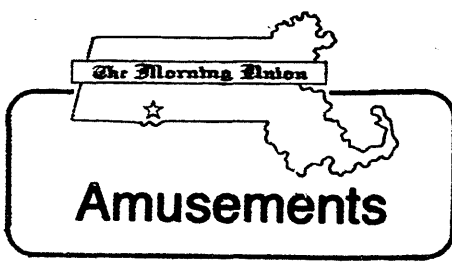
In the process of making staff changes, WMAS has raided WHYN radio of a number of employees, including, within the past week, three of the oldest radio names in the Springfield market — morning newsmen Ron Russell, morning FM announcer Frank Knight, and general manager Phil Drumbheller who will become general manager at WMAS. Drumbheller was known to radio listeners of the '60s as disc jockey Phil Dee.

Mike Adams, program director at WMAS, moved from WHYN — he was the afternoon AM announcer — six months ago and Michelle Benjamin moved from WHYN's news operation three weeks ago.

The station has also applied for an increase to 50,000 watts. If approved by the Federal Communications Commission, the increase would give WMAS-FM a signal equal to WHYN-FM, which emanates from the top of Mount Tom.

For nearly 20 years WHYN-AM and FM held the No. 1 and No. 2 spots in Springfield radio ratings. But two things have happened.

WAQY-FM has made a sizable dent in WHYN-AM's teen-age market, whether from its youth-oriented rock format, its personalities or from heavy and ongoing give-aways. In the spring 1979 ratings, the most recent, WAQY drew the highest number of teenage listeners.



In addition, WHYN Radio was sold last fall to Affiliated Broadcasting Inc. of Boston, a subsidiary of the Boston Globe. The sale requires FCC approval and in the interim the station is in a kind of limbo. The current management is restrained from making any changes and the new owners, obviously, cannot make changes until the sale is approved.

WMAS' change from disco (nickname: Disco 95) to light album rock (The New 95) is at least the station's seventh in the past 10 years. In the late '60s and early '70s, under the call letters WHVY, WMAS-FM was the first heavy progressive station in the area. It has travelled the musical spectrum, from progressive to middle-of-the-road to progressive to rock to mellow (soft rock) to all-disco in November 1978.

The all-disco format had worked wonders in other markets, especially for New York City's 20th ranked WKTU, which adopted an all-disco format in July 1978 and within six months had skyrocketed to become the city's No. 1 station.

But Springfield didn't take to all-disco. The disco format at WMAS "was an attempt to gain ratings," said Mike Adams, WMAS program director, "and what we found was that disco was either a hyped hoax or a passing fad. Disco is a nightlife artform. It's a lifestyle, but it doesn't work on radio. People just can't take 130 beats a minute, 24 hours a day."



Announcer Frank Knight, left, and newsman Ron Russell are the two most recent WHYN staffers hired by WMAS radio as part of a format change to light rock.

Adams describes the new format as "rock music without the bubblegum, without being yelled at or Gary Goodvoiced to death."

The new format is a mixture of successful album rock, music like soft Beatles, the Eagles, the Doobie Brothers — what Adams calls "reasonable programming."

"People don't want to hear Led Zeppelin at 7 in the morning, so we'll play soft Beatles in the morning and Led Zeppelin at night," Adams said.

"We're out to fill a big void in the Springfield FM radio market," Adams said. "At one end of the FM band you're put to sleep (WHYN-FM) and at the other end you are screamed at (WAQY-FM). We want to hit the middle."

Adams said that prime market for the new format is 25- to 34-year-olds, mature 18- to 24-year-olds and musically liberal people over 35.

Interestingly, all-disco wasn't all that successful in New York City either.

According to WKTU general manager David Rapaport the station "made some revisions" and adopted a "progressive urban contemporary" format. Even Rapaport doesn't know what "progressive urban contemporary" means except that his station plays "all kinds of music with a New York appeal."

"The typical disco dance beat is very fatiguing and we just copied what was going on in the discotheques where they slow the beat somewhat."

WKTU has dropped from the top-ranked spot to a No. 2, still a far cry from its No. 20 rank of two years ago.

WMAS' format is still in the rough stages and

could conceivably be changed under Drumbheller's management.

Frank Knight has been in Western Massachusetts since 1948 and has worked at WARE in Ware, WTXL (now WNUS) in West Springfield, WCCC in Hartford, and four years at Channel 22 where he did, among other things, an hour-long live polka show from the Cavalier Restaurant in Chicopee. He has been morning announcer at WHYN-FM for the past 13 years and hosted nearly 10 years of Channel 40's polka show.

Ron Russell, radio news director at WHYN, has been at WHYN for 13 years, coming to Springfield from Waterbury, Vt.

Phil Drumbheller began as a disc jockey in the mid '50s, while he was still in high school working at WEDK, the radio station at then Trade High School, and at WJKO in East Longmeadow, now WIXY. He moved to WPTR in Albany and put in a stint at WDEW (now WLDM) before moving to WHYN in the early '60s.

There has been little gossip in Springfield radio circles about what to expect when Affiliated Broadcasting takes over WHYN AM and FM except announced plans to move the radio operation from the Liberty Street studios, possibly to a downtown location.

Dance guild auditions

Auditions will be held Feb. 10 at 1:30 p.m. at the Dance Center in Springfield for a new company, the New England Dance Guild. Dancers aspiring to professional careers as performers, teachers or choreographers will research both classical and contemporary choreographers, according to artistic director Dolly Hicks.

Those wishing to audition should contact Miss Hicks before Feb. 10 by calling 734-3701 or 733-4524.

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JANE FONDA

THE ELECTRIC HORSEMAN

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1:30
7:30 - 9:40

Football helps CBS lead ratings

NEW YORK (AP) — A full two-thirds of the television audience Sunday evening watched Super Bowl XIV on CBS, and more than half stayed around for the post-game program and "60 Minutes," next in line, figures from the A.C. Nielsen Co. show.

The extraordinary, though hardly surprising, audience helped CBS to first place in the networks' prime-time ratings race for the fifth week in a row, and drew the challenger even with ABC in the ratings for the season so far.

The rating for the Super Bowl game — kickoff was an hour before the 7 p.m. EST start of prime-time — was 46.3. Nielsen says that means of all the country's TV-equipped homes, 46.3 percent were tuned in for at least part of the game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Los Angeles Rams.

Of sets in use during the game, 67 percent were tuned to CBS.

In addition to the three highest-rated programs in the week ending Jan. 20, CBS listed three others in the Top 10, and compiled a rating for the period of 22.5. ABC was second at 20.2, and NBC third at 16.2.

The networks say that means in an average prime-time minute during the week, 22.5 percent of the homes in the country with television were watching CBS.

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DUSTIN HOFFMAN
KRAMER VS. KRAMER
PG MERYL STREEP
7:40-9:40

ROBERT REDFORD
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ELECTRIC HORSEMAN
7:30-9:30

APOCALYPSE NOW (R)
7:30 & 10:00

Search of Historic Jesus
7:30-9:30

CINE ENFIELD
ENFIELD MALL
8:10-9:10

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JAN. 23 - JAN. 29
SWEETHEART
7:30
PRETTY PEACHES
9:00
MATINEES
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1:10
7:25
9:30
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1:20
7:00
9:00
THE DIVINE NYMPH

1:30
7:30
9:55
SCAVENGER HUNT

1:00
6:50
9:20
"A SMASH LIKE N-A-S-H" THE BOYS IN COMPANY C

1:20
7:10
9:45
THE ELECTRIC HORSEMAN

1:00
7:10
9:10
MEL BROOKS' BLAZING SADDLES
STARTS FRI. "GTAMA... CULT"

1:45
7:20
9:30
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1:00
8:00
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TODAY'S TIMES
2:00
7:30-9:30

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ART CARNEY
GEORGE BURNS

6 NOMINATED FOR GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS

Kramer vs. Kramer PG
TODAY'S TIMES
2:00
7:20-9:40

3 NOMINATED FOR GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS

BETTE MIDLER THE ROSE

TODAY'S TIMES
2:00
7:00-9:35

"10"
TODAY'S TIMES
2:00
7:10-9:40

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL R
TODAY'S TIMES
2:00
7:10-9:30

IT'S ANIMAL HOUSE GONE TO WAR
BILL COSFORD — MIAMI HERALD

HY PG
TODAY'S TIMES
2:00
7:15-9:40

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