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Appeal and Public Radio's Music

by David Giovannoni and George Bailey
(33 pages)

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Appeal and Public Radio's Music

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FOREWORD

“Public radio must reconsider its music programming if it is to significantly increase its audience.” That’s the thesis of this broad examination of appeal and public radio’s music. Topics range from the current appeal of classical music and its resulting underperformance, to different ways of thinking about — and fixing — music programming in general.

The problem is clear: public radio listeners prefer the music programming of commercial stations because the appeals of classical music and jazz, as currently programmed on most public stations, are incongruent with those of public radio’s core programming. And it is getting worse: the competition for listeners is becoming fiercer as commercial radio develops more highly-researched formats aimed directly at public radio’s target audience.

Public radio must squarely address this challenge if it is to maintain the listeners it now has, let alone increase audience. This means going beyond existing programming; it means becoming *different* — not simply becoming *better*. I am convinced the next music format will result from a new way of thinking about — and executing — music programming.

This compilation is adapted from articles originally published in *CURRENT*’s *Radio Intelligence* column, funded by CPB’s Office of Policy Development & Planning. In writing these columns my mandate was to look at existing research and come up with new knowledge — and strategies — which public broadcasters could immediately apply.

I have been fortunate to draw not only upon the innovative research conducted by CPB and NPR, but also upon my experiences with commercial clients who are working through many of these same problems. Dr. George Bailey and I are colleagues in these endeavors, and his expertise in music testing added greatly to the value — and applicability — of these columns. His work with commercial clients and his experience with managing a successful public radio station make him the best person to explain the basic concepts of music testing to public radio professionals. He wrote what have become Sections 5, 6, and 7, and his knowledge and insights permeate the entire compilation.

Thanks go to Ted Coltman and Ric Grefé at CPB’s Office of Policy Development & Planning, and to JJ Yore, Managing Editor of *CURRENT*, who skillfully edited our original drafts for the paper. The rewriting we did for this compilation has been without his guidance; we accept full responsibility for that.

David Giovannoni

Silver Spring MD
January 1988

1.

UNDER-PERFORMANCE TODAY

*If you're doing something the same way
you've been doing it for ten years,
the chances are you're doing it wrong.*
- Charles Kettering

Public radio must reconsider its music programming if it is to significantly increase its audience.

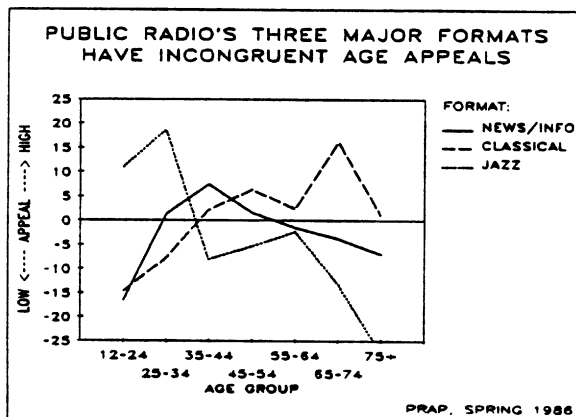
Public radio's two main music formats — classical and jazz — appeal to different types of listeners. Even worse, neither appeals to listeners of public radio's information programming — the backbone of most stations' schedules.

This isn't good news. The programming of formats with inconsistent appeals on the same station hurts all three components of average quarter-hour (AQH) audience: cume (the number of people tuning in), occasions (the number of times these people tune-in), and duration (the time people spend listening once they've tuned-in).

By airing formats that appeal to different listeners,

stations discourage any one group from listening most of the time. In this sense the station is "unreliable." The result is that fewer people use it each week. And since the station doesn't consistently air what these people want, those who *do* listen do so less often. Finally, because a station's appeal changes when it changes format, listeners often feel compelled to tune out — reducing the time they spend listening.

The repercussions continue. Because audience service (as measured by AQH) is less than it could be, listener support is not reaching full potential. Nor is listener satisfaction — another important measure of public service (and listener support). Do you really believe listeners are satisfied with public radio's service when they spend two to three hours tuned to commercial stations for every hour they spend listening to public stations?



These lines, which show the age appeal of each format, would be the same shape if the formats' appeals were congruent.

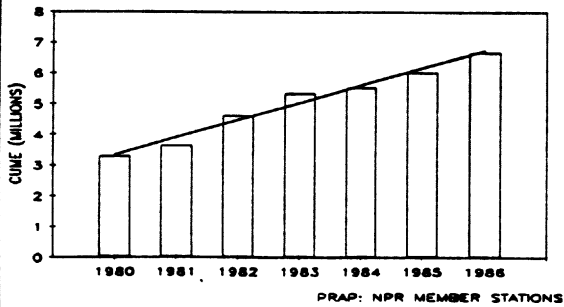
Audience size, satisfaction, and support will increase only after listeners find more to listen to on public radio stations. This will happen only by thoroughly rethinking and redesigning public radio's music programming.

This is a broad and powerful concept that will force public radio broadcasters to reconsider some basic programming assumptions.

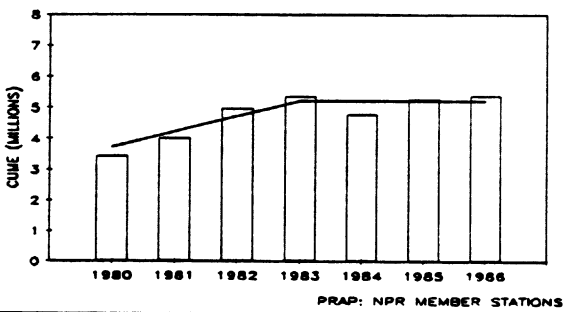
Audience Considerations

Don't get me wrong. There's nothing inherently *wrong* with classical music or jazz. Both have significant audiences on public radio, if you consider national cume ratings of 2.7 percent and 1.4 percent significant.

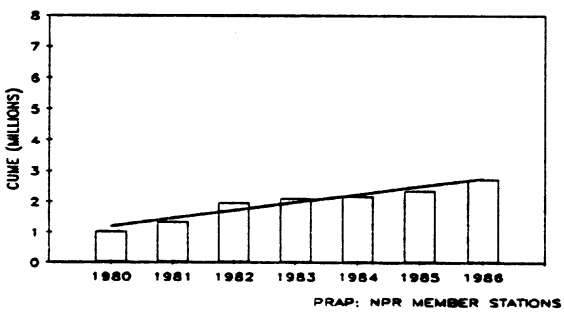
PUBLIC RADIO'S NEWS & INFO AUDIENCE HAS BEEN INCREASING BY 570,000 PERSONS PER YEAR SINCE 1980



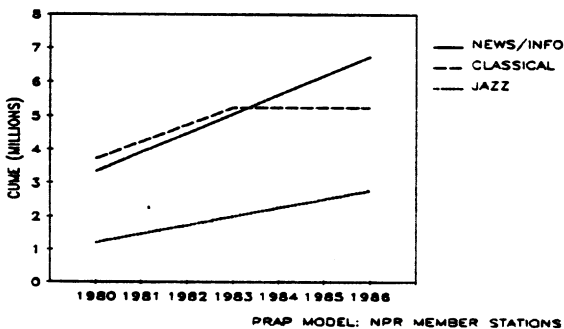
THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE LISTENING TO CLASSICAL MUSIC ON PUBLIC RADIO HAS NOT INCREASED SINCE 1983



PUBLIC RADIO'S JAZZ AUDIENCE HAS BEEN INCREASING BY 260,000 PERSONS PER YEAR SINCE 1980



NEWS & INFO IS INCREASINGLY PUBLIC RADIO'S MAJOR FORMAT



In fact, in focus group studies, listeners say they think public radio's music programming is okay; the problem is, they don't *rave* about it as they do public radio's news programming. The most positive thing they can say is that this music isn't available anywhere else — faint praise, considering they rarely mention that it is done well, or even that it particularly suits their musical tastes.

Nor is public radio's music programming helping audiences grow. In fact, its classical music has gained virtually no listeners at the national level since 1983. On the other hand, its audience for information programming has been increasing at a steady rate of more than a half-million listeners a year since 1980. It used to be that more people listened to classical music on public radio than to its news; as of 1986, there are five news listeners for every four classical listeners.

Anyone thinking that classical music has been the cause of this decade's audience growth would do well to reconsider.

It's important to remember that classical music still accounts for almost 40 percent of public radio's broadcast hours, while news and information accounts for only 22 percent. This means there is almost *twice* as much classical music on public radio as there is information programming.

Granted, public radio airs most of its new programming in weekday morning and afternoon "prime times." However, middays, where most stations are doing music, are just as "prime." It's in this sagging canvas between the news tent poles where public radio's musical under-performance really shows.

The bars in the top three graphs show the actual cume audiences for each format; the lines show audience growth models which have removed fluctuations from the actual data. This clarifies comparisons across formats, as is done in the bottom graph.

2. WHY PROGRAM CLASSICAL MUSIC OR JAZZ?

*Toto,
I don't think we're in Kansas anymore.*
- Dorothy

Is there any good reason why so many public radio stations devote so much of their air time to classical music and jazz? And if there have been compelling reasons to do so in the past, are they still valid?

Public radio's roots in educational institutions are surely a major reason why it plays the music it does. Classical, and later jazz, are the only two kinds of music which have made it academically. But it's 1987 and public radio is 20 years beyond its "educational" stage.

Perhaps public radio's self-definition as an "alternative" to commercial radio led it to program formats that are not commercially viable, such as classical music and jazz. This argument was valid in university towns and state capitals where public radio originated, because the range of commercial radio programming often was limited. But in major markets, where most public radio listeners are today, these formats *are* available on commercial radio stations. Besides, there are other kinds of music that commercial stations don't play.

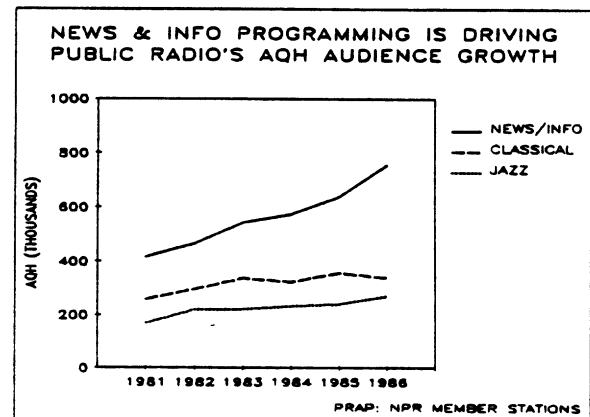
Some argue that jazz and classical music have stood the test of time, or that they are "quality" products. But in neither case does public radio have a corner on the market.

In short, I can think of no persuasive reason — and certainly no audience-based reason — why public radio is programming classical music and jazz. We seem to be doing it today because we were doing it yesterday.

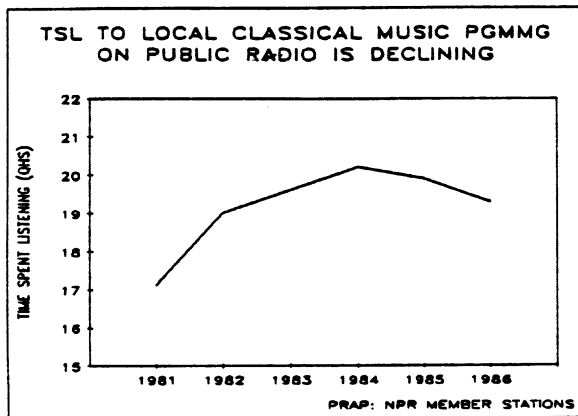
What kind of reason is that?

Under-Performance

As Section 1 demonstrated in cume terms, public radio's music programming is not performing at the level of its information programming. The graph below shows the same trend measured by national average-quarter-hour (AQH) figures. How is music programming doing at your station compared with your news and information programming?



Here's something else to ponder. Public radio's programming improvements have paid off during the last several years in increased time spent listening. But it looks as if the time listeners spent with locally-produced classical music on public radio is declining.



Some say it's not our fault — public radio listeners just don't listen to music on the radio. Yet study after study shows this to be false. The average listener spends two hours listening to commercial radio for every hour spent listening to public radio. And these listeners are tuning in mostly to commercial music: lite rock, classic rock, the beautiful formats, and yes, commercial classical. In fact, it's common to see more of public radio's audience listening to the commercial classical station in major dayparts than to the public station.

Form or Content?

Is this musical “under-performance” caused by the way public radio presents classical music, or is it because classical music simply has limited appeal?

This is a “form” versus “content” question. The major changes made by public radio in the late 70's and early 80's — when its classical music programming was still gaining audience — were *form* changes: cleaning up program schedules, taking the amateurs and syndicated matter off the air in prime times — that sort of thing. That's proof that the way music is presented has a significant effect on audience service.

But that doesn't mean *content* isn't important. Some stations have resorted to playing “popular” musical works — the “war horses.” While this generally increases audience size (because it cuts back on less accessible works), audience reaction is mixed. In focus groups listeners say they listen not because a work is *familiar* but because it is *listenable*, or because it fits their mood. There is a whole body of lesser known but eminently lis-

tenable music to be played; in fact, by reducing programming to overly simplified formulae, public radio may have “burned out” its hits while not developing its base of music.

And then there is the problem of appeal. Most programmers treat classical music as a genre, and pay little or no attention to the appeal of what they play. What I mean is, programmers usually assume that the appeal of a Bach fugue is the same as the appeal of a Shostakovich symphony, just because both works are studied in music appreciation classes, sold in classical music sections of record stores, issued by Deutsche Grammophon, and perhaps even recorded by the same orchestra.

But these are *intellectual* connections. Listen to your ears. These two works *sound* different. They are *not* the same; they share little appeal.

So while many public broadcasters have been paying attention to form and content of classical music (and jazz) over the last few years, these considerations are only part of the problem. *By far, public radio's biggest programming liability is its misunderstanding and disregard of musical appeal.*

Think About It

Consider the appeals of your station's programming, and the different types of persons attracted to your different formats. Do you really think that the same people listen to news, classical music, jazz, folk, and/or whatever else you do?

And if you believe that some listeners *do* cross over from one format to another (which some do), *why* are they doing so? What underlying *appeals* do these formats share which give them some sort of *affinity*? What do the different types of listeners to your various formats have *in common*?

Contemplate what changes you might make to your program schedule — particularly to your music — which will *unify* the appeal of your station. In other words, what changes would make the station listenable to a larger, more homogenous group of people? What type of music programming would encourage your news and information listeners to tune back to the station during the day, at night, on weekends?

3.

WHEN LESS IS MORE: NARROWING APPEAL TO BETTER SERVE LISTENERS

*Bait the hook well:
this fish will bite.*
- William Shakespeare

Unifying the appeal of your station's formats is essential to any significant future audience growth; it's the single strategy which will go the farthest in maximizing cume, occasions, duration, TSL, AQH, listener satisfaction, and listener support.

The simplest way to implement this unified appeal strategy is to adopt a single format. This is what most commercial broadcasters do. On the other hand, most public broadcasters strive for greater programmatic diversity — something more than “all news” or “all classical all of the time.”

By defining your appeal by the type of person served — not by the type of music or talk you program — you can unify the appeal of your existing formats. *Unifying the appeal of existing formats will significantly increase audience size, service, satisfaction, and support.*

Appeal and Audience Segmentation

The concept of *appeal* is inextricably linked with the practice of *audience segmentation*. Let's look at the basic tenets of each, and how they apply to radio programming.

1. Within any population, individuals share characteristics, or *attributes*, which define *segments* of the population.

Every person is an individual with a unique combination of attributes. But when you look at a whole bunch of people you begin to see similarities.

People share traits which can be used to classify them into groups, or *segments*. Men and women are two segments; age segments might include infants, children, teens, adults in various stages, and the elderly.

Notice that segments can be very broad or very narrow. Gender is a broad segment, while segments defined by several attributes (men between the ages of 18-24 who have not graduated high school and who own Harleys) can get quite small.

From everyday observation we know that different types of people behave differently from one another. For instance, 12-year-old girls and 25-year-old men and 90-year-old women think, do, and need quite different things. This is important to broadcasters, because

2. Different audience segments are attracted by different *appeals*.

What does “appeal” mean? Webster defines it as “the power of arousing a sympathetic response.” But in radio it means something more specific: as a verb, “to appeal” means to provide a service that attracts certain segments of listeners more than others; as a noun, “appeal” is the attribute (very often intangible) of the service which attracts these listeners.

It's like catching fish. From growing up next to the Sacramento river I know that you can catch catfish with worms, clams, or sardines. Sardines work on striped bass, too, but the biggest ones go

for live minnows. The *type* of fish you want to catch determines what type of bait to use.

The type of fish you want to catch also tells you where to throw your line. Catfish prefer muddy water; they stay close to the bottom and scavenge. Bass like clearer running water, where they can catch little fish and eat them.

You've heard it said "fish where the fish are" in reference to radio programming. This is just a way of saying to schedule your most attractive programming where it will do the most good — which is when people are most likely to hear it, which is when they are already listening to radio.

And just like fish bait, radio formats have certain appeals. Young people, particularly women, flock to CHR (contemporary hit radio); boys from 12 to 40 years old swim to the beat of AOR (adult/album oriented rock); most listeners to the "urban" formats are black; nostalgia formats (such as Music of Your Life) attract some of the oldest radio listeners.

Such relationships apply directly to public radio programming, because

3. In a mature competitive media environment, such as radio, success is based on appealing to certain segments, which is achieved through a unified format appeal.

Radio is the most *mature* electronic mass medium, and for this reason it is the most segmented. Thirty or more years ago a station could succeed by serving a wide variety of people — that is, by having a *broad appeal*. In fact, this is still true in media where there are not as many competitors; broadcast television is the most pervasive example.

But the game changes as a medium matures. As more and more services compete for a fixed amount of listener, viewer, or reader time, the share each one can expect gets proportionally smaller. In response, services become *narrower* by limiting their appeal to specific audience segments. For example, the array of choices made possible by cable is bringing with it single-format television. History is repeating itself, as this is what happened to radio in the 1950's when television and the proliferation of radio signals expanded people's electronic media choices.

The crowded radio dial drives the segmentation strategy, as it allows a diversity of stations to survive in a crowded and highly segmented marketplace. In your market, each of the 20-70 radio stations can't be all things to all listeners. Each must "differentiate" itself from the others — become, if you will, the food of choice for its particular type of fish.

One station can't be all things to all people. In a crowded radio market, a station which tries to serve everyone ends up serving no one. When a station's appeal is *too broad*, there are most likely other — more *appealing* — stations, to which people in the market prefer to listen. In this way

4. Segmentation *within* a radio station tends to *decrease* listener satisfaction.

Yet segmentation among a *number* of stations is a positive thing. In fact, *targeted appeal and audience segmentation greatly benefit the audience*.

5. Segmentation *across* stations tends to *increase* listener satisfaction.

By *targeting* programming to meet the lifestyles, values, entertainment and information needs of specific types of people, a radio station becomes more *appealing* and *satisfying*.

No doubt you subscribe to specialized magazines with narrow appeal — gourmet cooking, downhill skiing, travel, news analysis. The articles in these targeted magazines are *not* for everybody; yet they please you *because* of their strong, targeted, specialized appeal.

Would you be happy if Reader's Digest was the only magazine you could get? Does its broad appeal really talk to *you*? Does it meet *your* needs or address *your* lifestyle or share *your* values?

In addition to increasing listener satisfaction,

6. Audience segmentation encourages programming diversity.

Look at the incredible diversity in the magazine industry — an even more mature and segmented medium than radio, where publications must be highly targeted to survive. There are plenty of

radio examples, too. In your own market you probably have three or more “rock” stations; but upon closer examination, you’ll find that each is programming somewhat differently from the others in an effort to appeal to a significantly different audience segment. In fact,

7. A station’s appeal defines its audience segment, and its audience segment defines its appeal.

Appeal is so inextricably linked with audience segmentation that they virtually define each other. Not only is appeal what *attracts* listeners to a station, but *the attributes of the segment of listeners describe the appeal*.

Public radio’s audience is a prime example, with its high level of formal education distinguishing it from non-listeners. More by accident than by design, public radio has adopted an appeal defined by some sort of “intelligent, curious, quality-seeking, well-educated” attributes of the audience — intangible, perhaps, but unmistakably there.

By virtue of never defining its own *appeal*, public radio’s *audience* defines the appeal of the medium. But in today’s highly competitive radio environment, the strategy is to ask “what format will attract a particular type of listener?” and then put together the format’s program elements to accomplish this. Program elements include news and other information, music, entertainment, and communication with the listener based on a shared set of values and lifestyles.

The most successful radio stations know *exactly* what kind of listeners they want to serve. They

know how they live, what they eat, where they swim — and that helps stations make the right programming decisions. What are the *right* programming decisions? In mass media, they are the strategies which best satisfy and serve the greatest number of a particular kind of listener.

In sum, *segmenting the market based on appeal is a basic tenet of radio broadcasting — indeed, of all mature media. As long as public radio continues to ignore this fact, it will not provide the public service of which it is capable.*

Fish or Cut Bait

Wait a minute. Who says public radio is ignoring this fact? Didn’t it realize several years ago that it couldn’t be “all things to all people”? Didn’t it react to this new understanding by cleaning up its schedules — by “formatting” all similar types of programming into larger blocks of time?

Of course that’s true; increases in audience size and satisfaction verify that this was a major step in the right direction. But it takes more than one step. You see, we made a major assumption in the course of cleaning up our acts; we assumed that our formats were compatible.

They’re not.

The three formats to which public radio devotes most of its air time — news and information, classical music, and jazz — have three very different appeals. They are three different baits attracting three different audience segments. Each format is preferred by a different type of fish.

TIME SPENT LISTENING

The total time a person spends listening to public radio in a seven day period is called “time spent listening,” or TSL. It is the statistic which best indicates how well you are serving your audience.

The total time that person spends listening during a week is a function of the number of times they tune in *and* the amount of time they spend listening each time they do.

Researchers call tune-ins “occasions,” and the time spent listening per occasion is called “duration.” Mathematically,

$$\text{TSL} = \text{occasions} \times \text{duration.}$$

If, for example, somebody spends two hours listening to a station in a week, and tunes in on four different occasions, their average duration is thirty minutes per tune-in.

Public radio listeners average about five occasions per week for about ninety minutes’ duration apiece. The average TSL among public radio listeners is less than eight hours per week.

As the equation above shows, increasing either the number of times a person tunes in (occasions) or the average length of time spent listening per tune-in (duration) will increase total time spent listening.

This is important to keep in mind when considering the changes to make in your music programming.

Think it through. An occasion begins when a person turns on the radio, or when a person changes from one station to another. Research tells us that most tune-ins are from “off” — not from

another station. This means that *most occasions begin when the radio is turned on*. Therefore, if your station is broadcasting the same appeal as when a listener last turned it off, it will more likely be the station of choice for this occasion.

How long a person stays tuned is more often a function of life than of programming. People generally turn off their radios because they move on to other things; it’s hard to increase duration when a person turns off the radio, gets out of the car, and walks into an office building for a meeting.

Yet duration can be *prematurely shortened* by abrupt transitions, jarring public service announcements, stumbling announcers — these and many more problems dare listeners to tune to another station or to turn the radio off.

The most serious duration decrier is the change from one appeal to another. A person listening to information programming in English is suddenly hit with someone talking in some other language — tune out. A listener enthralled by Bach just a minute ago is assaulted by something atonal and non-melodic — life is too short to stay tuned for the composer’s name.

The goal of increasing audience can be attained through the strategy of giving listeners more of what they will listen to. Paying attention to appeal is not programming for the least common denominator — just the opposite, in fact, since it treats your listeners with respect and intelligence. By increasing the number of occasions to your station, and by decreasing the number of times you prematurely shorten listener duration, you become a better — more valued — service.

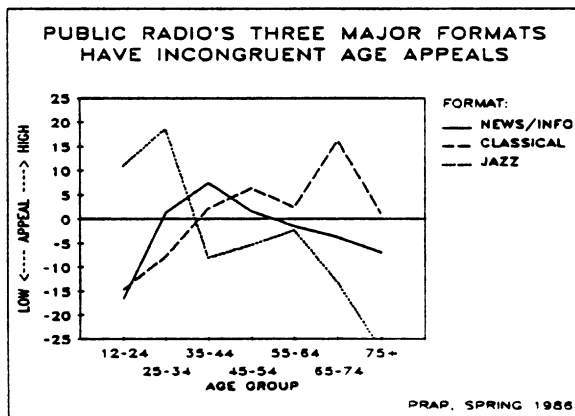
4. PUBLIC RADIO'S INCONGRUENT APPEALS

And now for something completely different.
- Monty Python

Public radio has a fundamental problem with its three major formats. Each of them — classical, jazz, and news — appeals to a distinct audience. This prevents public radio from maximizing its audience size, service, satisfaction, and support.

Listeners of all kinds describe public radio with words like *respect, professionalism, depth, intelligence, and integrity*. But even though they agree on these descriptions, closer examination of the research data shows that the classical, jazz and news formats each attract a different type of listener.

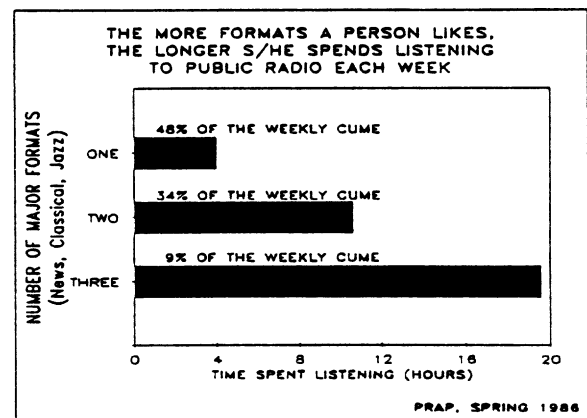
News and information programming tends to attract people between 25 and 54 years old. Jazz appeals primarily to people younger than 35, while most of classical music's listeners are over 35. While there is some overlap, the audiences are basically different; the formats — particularly jazz and classical — share little affinity; the appeals are fundamentally incongruent.



The Effects of Incongruent Appeal

Airing incongruent formats limits a station's audience to those who like news and information *and* classical music *and* jazz *and* whatever else the station plays. This strategy limits not only the *size* of the audience, but its *time spent listening* as well.

It's a basic fact: *The more programming a person likes on a radio station, the more they'll listen to it.* This concept is so simple it seems trite. The graph below demonstrates how listeners who like all three of public radio's major formats use it an average of almost 20 hours per week — five times longer than listeners who use just one of the three major formats.



But this is *not* evidence that the three major formats work together. In fact, they have such disparate appeal that only a small portion of the audience uses all of them. Look again at the graph. Only nine percent of public radio's weekly audience

APPEAL AND SEAMS

We've come to understand "seams" as changes in formats. We know that a shift in programming from one format to another creates a seam which encourages listeners to tune out. *But it's the change in appeal, not the change in format, which causes the tune-out.*

This means that you can shift from one format to another and retain your audience — as long as the two formats have congruent appeals.

News and information programming is the backbone of most public radio schedules; comprising about one in five on-air hours, it serves two-thirds of the national weekly cume. Devising music programming that appeals to this two-thirds would minimize seams between news and music *because, in terms of appeal, they would be the same format.* Think about it. The station beams a singular appeal; if broad enough and strong enough, the audience grows and is much happier with it.

use all three formats, while half listen to *only one* format. In sheer numbers, people who listen to one format outnumber those who listen to all three formats by a six-to-one margin.

The lesson is clear: *Most listeners don't listen much to public radio because they don't like most of what they hear.*

If public radio unified its programming appeals — that is, appealed to the same type of listener through all types of programming — more people would find public radio more listenable. Not only would more people listen — they would listen longer.

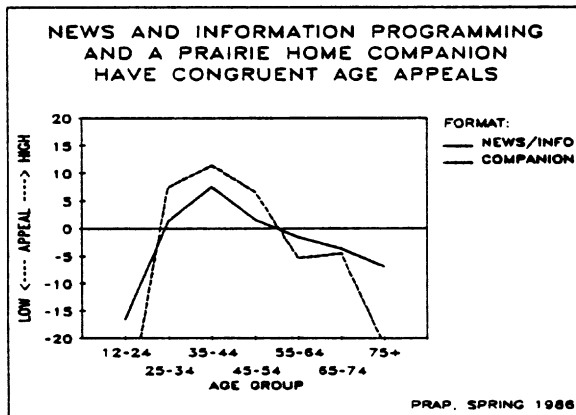
As I said, it's a simple concept.

Keillor Appeal

There is a fine — yet critical — point to this simple concept: *Apparently diverse formats can appeal to the same kind of listener.*

Read that last sentence again. Memorize it.

Apparently diverse formats are those which *seem* on the surface to be quite different. *A Prairie Home Companion* is a great example. Keillor's show *seems* to have very little in common with news and information; they are *apparently diverse* formats. Yet despite this appearance, they in fact share the same type of listener; their appeals are congruent.



Forget the marketing hype about the show bringing millions of new listeners to public radio; we've known for years that Keillor recycles *existing* listeners into the Saturday evening daypart. The reasons for this are clear: Keillor simply provides public radio's core audience with something else worth listening to.

One more valued occasion. As fundraising experience demonstrates, audiences appreciate this.

Music Appeal

Now consider what would happen if public radio's music programming had an appeal that meshed with its news and information programming as well as *A Prairie Home Companion's* does.

When all of a station's programming appeals to the same listeners, the station is accessible to its core audience *all of the time* — not just during specific dayparts. In this sense it is "reliable," and as a result more people listen to it each week; cume increases.

When the programming is always appealing, listeners tune-in more often; occasions increase. And because the station's appeal is consistent across formats, listeners no longer are compelled to tune out. Format seams exist *without appeal seams*; duration increases. (See box on page 10.)

Listeners will be more satisfied with public radio's service; they will spend a larger proportion of their radio time with public radio. You know the rest. Satisfied listeners who use lots of public radio are more likely to consider the medium important in their lives, and more likely to support it.

Audience size, satisfaction, and support will increase when listeners find more to listen to on their public radio stations. However, this will not happen until we rethink and redesign public radio's programming — particularly music programming — based on the tenets of consistent appeal.

CORE PROGRAMMING = CORE AUDIENCE

Throughout this compilation we refer to NPR's "core" information services — *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, and *Weekend Edition* — as "core programming." National data show core programming to be the backbone of public radio's audience service; it is the closest thing public radio has to public television's "core schedule."

A Prairie Home Companion figured into core pro-

gramming when it was live and fresh; to the extent that it continues adding one occasion to the core audience's listening, it may still.

People who use core programming comprise the "core audience." These people are primarily between the ages of 25 and 49 years old — older than jazz listeners and younger than classical listeners — although this is *not* part of the definition.

Editor's note. This definition of "core" audience is not consistent with the definition introduced later in 1988 by AUDIENCE 88. David Giovannoni 12/97

5.

THE NEXT FORMAT

We're on a mission from God.
- Joliet Jake Blues

Doubling public radio's audience requires a new way of thinking about how to program music — a mind-set different from that operating now in the music departments of most public stations.

Public radio's three formats — in-depth journalism, classical music and jazz — have limited affinity. (By affinity we mean congruent appeal, or programming that pleases the same kind of listeners.) This is a *big* problem, because the most feasible way to double audience is to get people to tune in more often (more tune-ins) and to get better loyalty from the kind of people who like *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*.

That does not necessarily mean more news programming. As we saw in Section 4, apparently diverse — superficially different — forms of programming can have great affinity.

The person who listens to *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* also liked Garrison Keillor. The intelligent, tasteful style of NPR news and the intelligent, tasteful style of Keillor's humor have highly congruent appeal.

Unfortunately, there's a limited affinity between these services and the music on public stations.

Public stations keep playing classical or jazz — nearly any recording that fits either category — just because years ago those were the two genres accepted by the academics who defined educational radio. That's programming based on tradition without regard to audience appeal.

And in this tradition, many program directors schedule that music as if on a mission from God. How many times have you heard classical mission-

aries speak of "the repertoire," by which they mean all catalogued works. There seems a holy obligation to program *the repertoire* on an annual cycle.

It is a way of thinking based on a statement of faith: "our mission is to play classical music." From station to station there may be minor variations — like more concerts or fewer operas, or the radical heresy that we really don't need Karl Haas — still the basic tenet is responsibility to a fixed catalogue of music. Jazz purists are no different.

Let me call that way of thinking the "category mind." As an illustration consider the music of George Winston and company. The category mind asks: Is that music classical? Is it jazz? Is it merely easy listening for yuppies? And on the basis of the answer, they decide whether or not to play it. Public radio program directors stuck with a category mind will not build audience because they're asking the *wrong questions*.

The new mind set, and the more appropriate way of thinking about music on public radio, is what I'll call the "audience mind." By that I mean an open mind, free of musicological categories, ready to accept all that can be known by intuition or research into how music appeals to audiences.

For most public stations concerned with doubling their audience, the truly *strategic* question is, "What music should we play between *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*?" "How can we keep those people listening middays?"

The answer might involve a "pure" classical music format, or only certain classical pieces, or perhaps no classical music at all. Here's how an audience-minded person might arrive at the answer.

1. Clear your head of categories like classical, jazz, rock, folk, country, soul, electric, acoustic, whatever. This state is what in Zen is called “beginner’s mind.”
2. Do market research which explains *why* your core audience likes *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. What are the appeals? What are the negatives in those programs? This is called perceptual or qualitative research, as opposed to audience ratings. A good method is the focus group.
3. Think about how the appeals of *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* could translate into music. Here’s where you need creativity and intuition. If one appeal is intelligence, can you pick music that has an intelligent component? If another appeal is newness — “On *All Things Considered* I hear things I didn’t know before” — can you work that appeal into your playlist?
4. Practice strict radio discipline. There’s only one program director at a station, and he or she is the one paid to be creative and intuitive. This is the product management aspect of the program director’s job. The DJ’s job is to execute — not design — the format.
5. Test. After your music format has been out there for a while, do music research. You’ll be testing your intuition against the reality of audience response. (Step four, discipline, was essential because you can not test an inconsistent product.)

There are several ways to test music. The next section describes a few of the most prevalent. Realize that commercial stations are testing music in your market all the time, which is why your *Morning Edition* listeners goes over to them for midday music.

6. Go back to step three. There’s a feedback loop in steps three-four-five that you’ve got to get operating: intuitive design, execution of product, testing, then more design, execution, and more testing.

Only after six or nine months of that loop do you check the Arbitron ratings. Remember, the goal is

to increase the number of times your *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* listeners tune-in to music dayparts. So calculate cume recycling from morning to midday. Compare the demographic composition of your audience from daypart to daypart. Measure how much the people who listen to your news also listen to commercial music stations. Find out where people listen, looking for tune-in middays at work.

A public station willing to take this path will require professional assistance. Your commercial counterparts hire companies to do their music testing, as well as other qualitative audience research. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting has funded studies which demonstrate that the same methods can work for public radio. (See Section 8.)

Now, if your way of thinking about music changed to an “audience mind,” what would the station sound like? What would be the end result of the six-step process?

Given that there’s *some* correlation between a preference for classical music and for in-depth journalism, there might be *some* classical recordings in your playlist. There would be other classical tracks that you would never play — period. Given what we know about the *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* audience — its age, its values, its interests — you might play cuts from Paul Simon’s CD, *Graceland*.

Let me emphasize that this is *not* advocating a return to free-form, stoned DJ, college-town radio. *Going this way without research — and without professional radio discipline — would be a disaster!*

Based on music appeal research and according to a strict plan of execution, you might end up segueing artists from superficially different categories, like from Bach to Joni Mitchell. The test would be whether your core audience spends more time with your music and less time with music on commercial stations. Remember — as the loyalty of your core audience goes up, so does pledging.

The “category mind” would ask what to call this kind of music programming on public radio. Naming it is the first step towards categorizing it.

I just call it “the next format.”

6. HOW TO RESEARCH AND FORMAT MUSIC

*We try not to play the same record
more than once per month.*
- Robert Goldfarb

Suppose you're willing to improve your music programming. I say willing because all the concepts and methods you need are readily available. Program directors at the leading stations in your market use no secret techniques; the only difference is in quality of execution.

At those stations there are two components to the program director's job. The first is *market research* — determining the station's position relative to the needs of the target audience; the second is *product management* — controlling the station's total sound to be sure it adheres to format.

Obviously the ideal program director is one who can handle both components of the job. However, many commercial stations are dividing the responsibility between an "outside" vice president for programming, who does the marketing, and an "inside" operations manager, who manages the product.

The public radio program director who doesn't have control over air staff — whether they be local stars, union, students, or "volunteers" — need not read further; this is a practical "how-to" article about researching and programming music for the *effective* public radio program director.

Auditorium Testing

These days nearly every major market program director does auditorium music testing. The need for auditorium testing has grown since radio's prime target has shifted from 12-24 year-old listeners to 25-49 year-olds, because older listeners buy fewer

records. It used to be that stations could track national charts and local record sales to find out what kids wanted to hear. CHR (contemporary hit radio — Top 40) stations can still do this, as their audience is young.

But stations which air adult formats need other information, especially if they are playing a lot of oldies records sold 10 to 30 years ago. Which albums from the 1960's should be played? Which tracks? Which oldies are best forgotten?

The research begins by *defining the audience a station wants to reach*. A public station might recruit educated 25-49 year-olds from certain zip codes who report listening to that station and at least one of its top three competitors.

Then the program director prepares a tape of hooks — representative passages from perhaps 100 recordings. About 150 individuals are paid to show up at an auditorium where the hooks will be played one by one. Each individual evaluates each track by checking off a form or pushing a button.

The company delivers a printout, usually with graphs, that ranks the group's response to the music. More sophisticated reports analyze which tunes have similar appeal. The results of this kind of test can help a program director choose music to add or delete from the station's playlist.

Listener Panels

Public radio program directors *think* that they hear from their listeners all the time; just play a record

not according to the program guide or one day skip Karl Haas. But those complainers — the bossy aficionados — are atypical of your audience. They don't even represent most of your contributors.

Commercial program directors use listener panels to obtain an *accurate* perception of their audience. They hire market researchers to *randomly* recruit listeners from their audience and invite about a dozen at a time to a comfortable place. The setting is much like a focus group, with a professional moderator who knows how to conduct interviews. Seated next to the moderator is the program director, who brings along edited air checks, flash cards of artists or even videos of TV ads for stations.

The objective of the session is to probe *how and why* listeners prefer certain music, as opposed to just finding out which tracks they like. For example a commercial station I work with learned that young mothers tune to music that their children also like, and they use upbeat dance music to help get through household chores.

How and why do public radio listeners use classical music?

Perceptual Surveys

Several research companies are known for perceptual or "hole-in-the-market" research. They find out how listeners or non-listeners perceive your station and the competition relative to their needs. The companies usually do a telephone survey, but they also sometimes use mail questionnaires and interviews at places like shopping malls. The survey size generally runs from 300 to 500 persons.

Perceptual surveys can find a "hole" in the market. An unmet need, or a weakness in a competitor's attempts to meet that need, constitutes such a hole. For example a winning album-oriented-rock (AOR) station may have a large audience among 12-34 year-old males and 18-24 year-old females. But research may show that its teen males want more heavy metal while its 25-34 year-old males want more classic rock and its 18-24 year-old females want more dance hits.

There are several ways for a public radio station to mess up perceptual research. One is to survey

contributors instead of the entire audience.

Another is to ask questions about your own station, without any questions about the competition.

Another is to use the "free" services of a professor on campus instead of hiring a professional vendor.

Especially in major markets, a good study would evaluate the relative appeals of music on the commercial classical station, the public station, and other competing formats.

Playlists and Rotation

Let's ignore other methods of music testing for now and talk about how a program director can take action based on research results — the product management component of the job.

According to legend, Todd Storz — the inventor of Top 40 radio — got the idea by sitting all day in a bar and writing down the songs played on the juke box. As customers came and went, a pattern appeared in how they played songs on the box. It wasn't random; one record, by definition the most popular, got played about once an hour. Others, usually of rising or declining popularity, got played less often. Accordingly, Storz instituted a playlist of records that would be played on his station. The playlist was rank ordered; the higher the ranking, the more often a song got played.

Now what does this have to do with public radio? *Rotation*, the recycling of content to match the natural recycling of audience, remains the basic principle of radio programming. That's one reason why *Morning Edition* is a success.

A public radio program director who tests music will have to install some kind of playlist rotation system to maintain control over the station's overall product. That doesn't mean a tight rotation like Pachelbel's Canon every 90 minutes. However, I doubt it means placing a new CD release of the Canon in no more than once-per-month rotation.

Please don't tell me that your listeners are loyal and would object. Look at your data. Public radio stations typically have a time-spent-listening (TSL) well below that of the competition. It's just a symptom of the problem that we're trying to fix.

7.

THEY EVEN TEST CALL LETTERS

*Walk into any Radio Shack and
tell them you want to buy a **public** radio.*
- Tom Church

I'm not ready to bet the farm that public radio can double its audience.

Doubling public radio's audience means taking listeners away from commercial radio. That in itself isn't the major obstacle: the real problem is that commercial radio is light years ahead of public radio in understanding appeal.

By "appeal" I don't mean what is called "least common denominator" programming. I mean appeal in terms of the audience segmentation concepts discussed in Section 3.

Appeal means programming intelligently to serve a specific audience segment as best you can.

One can argue that many public stations *are* programming more intelligently, if only by getting rid of some truly terrible stuff. Program directors have returned from programming seminars with new determination to take creative control of their air.

But public radio's national audience estimates from the last few years are distressing. The early 1980's saw double-digit audience growth rates; now we are lucky to see single-digit — positive — growth rates. What's wrong?

I think that just when public radio decided to get serious, commercial radio — for reasons of its own — started to get much better. By better I mean more competitive for the demographic group that contains public radio's core audience.

Commercial stations didn't do this because they were scared of public radio. Generally, they react to the advertising market and commercial competi-

tion. Nevertheless, coincidental innovations in commercial radio have limited the audience to be gained from public radio's improved programming. Some of these innovations include:

- *Format 41* You probably have a station in your market either taking Transtar's Format 41 off satellite or imitating it with local DJ's. This highly researched format is product-tested to aim precisely at persons aged 41, with a skew toward women. It's taken a lot of under-50 women away from beautiful music and some from classical music.
- *Lite Rock* You may have a competitor with call letters like LT-something or a slogan like W-Lite. David Giovannoni calls this format diet rock. It's aimed at a younger audience than Format 41, with a more hip style which includes some jazz. A Lite station would never play Barry Manilow or Barbra Streisand, but it would play lots of Chicago and David Sanborn. Promotion often includes after-work parties at some yuppie fern bar.
- *Classic Rock* This was the big radio story a couple years ago. Just by switching call letters to KL-something and playing every record off the AOR charts of 1965-75, a station could take a lot of 30-plus men away from the market's hard rocker. We're talking about revenue from the airlines, imported beer, and lawn tractors.
- *EOR (Eclectic Oriented Rock)* In Boston it's called Quality Rock. In Los Angeles it's Mellow Rock and The Wave. In Washington DC it's New Age. In the last year this format has been spreading around the country.

POSITIONING FOR YOUR LISTENERS

In spring 1987 a television ad for radio station WBMW appeared in the Washington D.C. market. Over a picture of clouds and the Washington Monument floating in blue sky and ethereal music, Watergate's G. Gordon Liddy announced "The conspiracy is over."

What conspiracy? The conspiracy to keep new and innovative music off the air, of course. The New Age format had arrived in the nation's capitol.

The call letters had been around for years but the program director was new to town. John Sebastian brought with him the experience of inventing EOR — a format based on eclectic, genre-crossing album cuts selected because of their proven appeal to a tightly defined target audience.

WBMW pulled upscale audiences from formats as

seemingly diverse as Adult Contemporary and Classical Music. More importantly, it joined the stations most likely to be used by public radio's listeners.

It is an excellent example of a commercial station targeting public radio's listeners. I doubt that WBMW's management saw a large public radio audience in Washington and said "Let's get it;" instead, they defined a target audience of "well-educated, affluent, professionals" and tested the music that would appeal to persons in this segment. Unfortunately for public radio, that just happens to be its core audience.

The station airs a number of positioning statements, a dozen of which are listed below in no particular order. Each phrase states clearly what the station is or how it can be used. Perhaps some of these ideas will prove useful to public radio broadcasters.

-
- Washington's Musical Oasis.
 - Your guide to new musical horizons.
 - The healthiest form of escapism.
 - Redefining radio for Washington.
 - The radio station of tomorrow. Today.
 - The dawning of a new age.
 - The most refreshing sound in Washington.
 - The button to press to reduce your stress.
 - The newest sound in radio.
 - Washington's most unique radio station.
 - The right kind of music for any kind of mood.
 - Quietly powerful.

On an EOR station you hear an eclectic mix of Joni Mitchell, Van Morrison, Steely Dan plus George Winston and his clones, and the Marin hot tub vibrations of space music. There's research which shows EOR taking audience from exactly the same zip codes where public radio listeners reside.

In the last few years the commercial industry has gone after 25-49 year-olds — your target group — in powerful and sophisticated ways. The music is tested. Newscasts and DJ's are tested. They even test call letters.

Using the concepts of audience segmentation and appeal, commercial radio defines a target audience, then designs its programming to meet that audience.

For example, the program director at Transtar did not decide to play a certain genre of music and then just wait to see who listens. The objective was to program music that appeals to 41-year-old women.

Public radio stations have had to compete with AM all-news and commercial classical formats, both of which skew toward an older audience. But now there are several new commercial formats which aim at younger listeners who make up the core public radio audience.

Although it's a national phenomenon, radio competition exists in individual markets. So check your own local numbers.

- Check table nine of your Programmer Package. Which stations share your audience now? How has that changed? Check the composition of your music dayparts by age. Are your midday and evening listeners getting older? That is, are your classical listeners older than your *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* audience?
- Check the cume and time-spent-listening of your classical audience. If time-spent-listening is rising, is that because cume is dropping? Are you left with only the classical hard core?

Note that the new commercial formats are using *music* programming to appeal to your listeners. *There is no indication that commercial radio will go after your core audience with in-depth journalism on FM.* It's too expensive, and public radio *is* doing an excellent job of it.

Anyway, your news ain't what's broke — your music is. The best commercial minds are working hard to give your core listeners music to listen to. It's not a conspiracy on their part — it's just that a well-educated, upscale, affluent audience is very appealing to commercial broadcasters right now. Nothing personal.

Nothing stays still in this business. Given this intense competition for a highly desirable target, I think public radio will have to get a lot better just to keep its present audience.

All radio stations have some reason for being: they are providers of a service. Most non-commercial radio stations define their service by a Mission Statement that generally opens up with words like, “We will endeavor to provide....” Often, explicitly missing from the statement of purpose is that which is implicit: “We will endeavor to provide *to people*....” There must always be recipients of the service — consumers, listeners — before the service has been fully provided.

Even a commercial station’s ability to attract revenue is dependent on how much service it provides; in other words, how many listeners, and which listeners. While non-commercial stations may define success in more esoteric terms than profit, the bottom line for all radio stations is that a mission — whether it is to make money or culturally attune, educate, or inform — cannot be achieved if there are no listeners.

Advocating the use of audience ratings to maximize “cume” and “time spent listening” is not the same as promoting programming to the “lowest common denominator.” Specifying in the mission statement the type of service a station will provide places inherent limits on the size of the audience that can be achieved. It identifies a *target audience* — that is, only a subset of the total radio audience. Judicious use of audience research can assist stations in reaching the maximum number of targeted listeners for sustained periods of time.

Use of audience ratings can help non-commercial stations achieve mission with an important side benefit for those that require financial support from their listeners.

From *Audience Ratings: A Primer for Non-Commercial Radio Stations*,
Radio Research Consortium, 1986.

8. NEW AGE AND YOUR JAZZ

*In art I pull no highbrow stuff.
I know what I like — and that's enough.*
- William W. Woolcott

Strong and consistent appeal is the key to improving your music programming. During the last few years you've cleaned up your patchwork schedule, resulting in whole dayparts full of music. But form alone is not enough; content with inconsistent appeal still runs rampant within your genre-defined formats. Just because the works of Palestrina and Prokofiev are "classics" doesn't mean they meet the needs of the classical music listener. The same holds true for the appeals of Coltrane and Cossu; their works sound quite different to listeners.

The next step towards better public radio service is to create a strong and consistent appeal *within* music dayparts. Remember: the goal is to serve listeners better by encouraging them to tune in more often, so the appeal of your music programming must have a strong affinity with the rest of your programming.

Jazz programmers may be the first in public radio to pick up the idea of consistent appeal within blocks. Jazz — a product of this century — continues to develop while the basic classical repertoire has ossified. This contemporary viability forces jazz programmers to question what new cuts to include and exclude from their playlists.

A big concern for many programmers is the new "acoustic" and "new age" music. What is its appeal? Is it compatible with public radio's current jazz formats? (Questions classical music programmers would do well to ask.) Last year, Jon Schwartz of KLCC, Martin Neeb of KPLU, and Carl Matthusen of KJZZ proposed research in this area. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting funded their proposal; a pilot study was done in the fall.

The Process

The study employed a form of "panel testing" which combined focus group techniques with auditorium testing's ability to play cuts of music.

An auditorium test uses a relatively large sample to find out whether listeners are familiar with and/or like a series of tracks; quantitative analysis yields groups of selections which have similar appeals. The CPB-funded panel method used much smaller samples and allowed listeners to explain in depth their attitudes and opinions towards the music. This was a good choice at this exploratory stage, as it allowed participants to say *why* they liked or disliked a cut.

A trained moderator from Mar%Stat Market Research & Analysis conducted two panels each in Eugene, Phoenix, and Seattle. The company recruited 84 persons between the ages of 25 and 49 who had at least some college and who were not professional musicians. Mar%Stat divided the panels equally between public radio listeners and non-listeners in an effort to test the differences between the two. To facilitate discussion, half of the groups were men-only and half were women-only. They conducted sessions in a secure section of town at a top quality hotel (a neutral, non-threatening location), served refreshments, and paid each participant a \$20 gratuity.

Station staff assembled short portions of 14 artists' works for testing. Selections were chosen as representative of a distinctive type of new age, contemporary, acoustic, or mainstream music. In broad terms each session was conducted as follows:

1. The moderator played a selection of music. Participants marked a scale measuring how much they *liked or disliked* the selection.
2. The moderator encouraged panelists to explain *why* they liked or disliked a selection.
3. Participants discussed the *moods and feelings* generated by the musical selection.
4. After playing several pieces, the moderator led participants through an evaluation of which selections they felt were compatible when played together and which were not.

Further information, contained in the study's executive overview, is available from CPB's publications office.

Results

Respondents in all three markets preferred contemporary and new age styles to traditional mainstream styles. Artists such as David Lanz, David Sanborn, John Klemmer, and Shadowfax were rated highly, while Art Blakey and Oscar Peterson received lower scores. There appeared to be no difference between public radio listeners and non-listeners.

Discussion concerning whether participants would tune in to or away from certain types of music support these ratings. Lanz, Sanborn, and Klemmer emerged as artists which would be sought out on radio; Blakey and Peterson emerged as strong tune-outs.

Mar%Stat's analysts summarized participants' likes and dislikes of the selections in these three points:

1. Participants reacted negatively to what they called "hard" or "aggressive" music and mentioned their "busy" and "stressful" natures.
2. Most panelists liked slower, more lyrical pieces, and several described their favorites as good "background" music. Listeners associated these slower pieces with "sitting in front of a fire," "relaxing," or "romantic situations."

Two meanings of "background" emerged from

the discussions: either the music evoked *strong associative qualities*, or it encouraged *contemplative relaxation*. Tracks receiving high ratings embodied at least one of these important factors. Slower pieces without strong associative qualities or not conducive to contemplative relaxation were pejoratively referred to as "Muzak" or "elevator music."

3. Panelists tended to give their highest ratings to selections with fewer instruments, such as David Lanz, Bill Evans, and John Klemmer.

Lessons

Despite its small scale, the study indicates the power of two very important concepts.

1. It verifies that *people like a musical selection because it is listenable, or because it fits their mood.*
2. It begins to ascertain *why* people like certain kinds of music — in other words, its *appeal*. Listeners used words describing *how the music affected them*; "relaxing," "distressful," "peaceful." These evocative descriptions from listeners stand in marked contrast to the categories (mainstream, fusion, acoustic, new age, etc.) used by critics, programmers, and other "experts."

The study clearly demonstrates that listeners know what they like and why; they know which music would fill their radio listening needs and which would not. The genre categorizations of experts add little intelligence to this.

Jazz experts would never put the names of John Klemmer and Bill Evans in the same sentence. But listeners don't perceive these men as artistic opposites — their music is listenable or it isn't; it meets a need or it doesn't.

Pure versus pop; mainstream versus new age — *labels* are not the reason people tune in. The *sound* — the *appeal* — is. The melodic, romantic piano trios of Bill Evans are probably quite compatible with the contemporary and more familiar solos of George Winston. But don't take my or anyone else's word for that. Test it.

How about *your* music programming? Is it serving the listener or the musicologist? Are you programming for the mind or for the ear? Are your themes driven by intellectual or visceral connections? Are your segues sensitive to musical texture? Do juxtaposed cuts match mood? Does the musical content acknowledge how people are listening?

Even the paternalistic programmer crusading to expose listeners to the repertoire can learn something from this study. *Use the ear of the listener — not the mind of the expert — as a programming guide.* Programming for the musical elite educates very few listeners. Accessible appeal-driven programming of high quality music can deepen the musical appreciation of the masses of well-educated people already listening to public radio.

Assessment

While the findings are intriguing, this small-scale study was primarily a test of the research method; it was more important to find out whether the method would work for public radio than it was to test a small number of album cuts.

The study demonstrates that music research is indeed a useful tool for public radio. This type of research yielded results for music unfamiliar to most people; it's not just limited to the hits.

Nor did the study confirm critics' assertions that it would favor music with "least common denominator" appeal. Its public radio listeners and intelligent non-listeners were able to discern — and did not appreciate — the sound of "elevator music." In

public radio, mindless programming of the blandest music can only come about through gross *misapplication* of music research — *not the research itself.*

The main research question asked whether new age and acoustic music is compatible with public radio's existing jazz formats. Clearly, within formats populated by Blakey and Peterson, the answer is "no."

This indicates one of two strategies: jazz programmers should either avoid this new music and keep on programming as they have been, or they should begin incorporating the new music into their playlists while concurrently culling tracks which do not have congruent appeals.

You're the programmers; it's your job to choose. But don't forget that mixing selections with inconsistent appeals within music blocks is a sure-fire way to serve the fewest listeners possible.

The study pointed the direction public radio might travel, but not the path. Subsequent research will need to test more works from a broader range of artists (it's difficult to imagine a "typical" cut from any performer). Indeed, it's the album track — not the artist — which should be tested.

But this was just a first step. As public radio programmers become more sophisticated in their professions, they'll require information on a whole library of cuts. Not limited to any one musical genre, this library will be unified by its appeal to public radio's information listener. It will constitute the musical content of public radio's next format.

We must be mindful of the way people use radio. We can't expect them to be attracted (to a format) which is the aural equivalent of the *Congressional Record*, or to require people read from right to left. However, we have gained our distinction by taking risks, by challenging the way things have always been done, by setting new standards which others try to emulate. To emphasize the safe, the same, only aspiring to minimize listeners tuning away, we underestimate our listeners and those other bright, curious people we are trying to attract to public radio. We must beware of any new orthodoxy which may limit the new and innovative.

Bill Siemering

Ten years ago if you were a program director, you thought of the radio station inside the walls. A lot of schedules at the time looked like quilts. I think we looked at the medium more like it was print. We've been very slow to look and listen to our stations just as the audience does.

Marcia Alvar

You have to be responsive to how people actually use the radio. You really need to be programming in terms of what's going to be useful for them.... We're talking about a communications vehicle, not a museum of radio art.

Joan Rubel

Some fear that blandness will spread like mold over public radio programming. Audience Building is not synonymous with blandness.

Bill Siemering

We do not see any conflict between the goal of audience growth and the mission of public broadcasting.

Don Mullally

9. THE BIGGEST PROGRAMMING DECISIONS YET

You've traded in your "category mind" for a new "audience mind." You understand the divergent appeals of public radio's major formats and agree that you must make fundamental changes in your music programming in order to significantly increase your station's audience service and audience support. But implementation won't be easy. The outlines on the following pages suggest just some of the most difficult decisions facing programmers — decisions which must be made *before* embarking on these fundamental changes.

THE FIRST BIG DECISION

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
- Robert Frost

When a station unifies the appeals of its formats, it maximizes its audience size, audience satisfaction, and audience support. When a station shifts appeals as often as it shifts formats (or even *within* formats, as often happens in classical music programming), it serves far fewer listeners far less often; the listeners it does serve are less satisfied, and audience support is less than it could be.

Should you unify the appeal of your station's formats, or should you maintain the potpourri of their appeal? It's a loaded question; don't answer until you've thought through what this decision means:

1. It means taking programming off the air which strays from your defined appeal.
2. It means replacing existing "genre-defined" programming with "appeal-driven" programming.
3. Since appeal-driven music programming currently doesn't exist on non-commercial radio, it means inventing a new music format, which may require replacing your entire record library.
4. It means re-exploring and re-evaluating the

concept of "service to minorities" — and adopting new strategies (probably multi-station/signal strategies) to achieve it.

5. In exactly the same way, the concept of "diversity" — and the strategies which achieve it — will need revisiting.
6. It means programming in a single language all of the time.
7. It means educating the institutions which support your station's operations.
8. It means being able and willing to ride out any temporary decline in audience caused by the loss of existing programming.
9. It means taking programming risks; managing experimentation and change.
10. It means paying more attention to your on-air product than ever before.

There are dozens more ramifications. Unifying appeal is a simple concept promising substantial rewards for your station and its audience; but implementation will be difficult and not without risks.

THE SECOND BIG DECISION

*My aim in life has always been to hold my own
with whatever's going. Not against: with.
Take what is given, and make it over your way.*

- Robert Frost

Deciding to unify your station's appeal is only the beginning. You also must decide what this appeal will be; i.e., the characteristics of the audience segment you wish to serve.

The most reliable research shows that NPR news programming serves more listeners than any other format. Focus group studies make it clear that public radio's news and information programming epitomizes the appeals of respect, professionalism, depth, intelligence, and integrity — all central to listeners' appreciation and support of the medium.

Should public radio build on and around its existing center of appeal, or should it discard this appeal in favor of another?

This too is a loaded question; but as Frost suggests, the answer is clear. Building on the existing appeal is taking what is given; the challenge comes in making it over your own way.

Even after fifty years of being “educational,” twenty years of being “public,” and nearly a decade of paying attention to the audience, public radio still serves only two percent of radio listeners at any

given time. Many would argue that public radio would be foolish to abdicate the strongest appeal most central to its audience service. Others might point out that it has done stupider things in the last seventy years.

So you'll probably decide to build on your station's existing news and information appeal. Music programming consumes the most air time (almost two-thirds of all broadcast hours system-wide), so it will be the first format you'll want to fix.

It is clear that any music format adopted by public radio should have the following characteristics:

1. A target audience and appeal congruent with those of existing news and information programming.
2. The attributes of “respect, professionalism, depth, intelligence, and integrity” — all identified by listeners as central to public radio's appeal.
3. A wide enough appeal and target audience to serve more, not fewer, listeners.