

Some would have it that radio is no longer a force to be reckoned with. The world has grown up. Our living rooms are not planned around where the sturdy radio console will go. We do not rest our chins in our hands by firesides and hang on FDR's every word. We would be merely amused now by Orson Welles and his Martian hordes. Radio, some would have it, is like romance: it was at home in a younger and less jaded age.

And it is true that the idea of

AM airwaves on the morning of September 21, 1947 and heralded the arrival of Santa Cruz' first local radio signal, Vernon Berlin was the proud, beaming station manager. Vernon Berlin is still the station manager at KSCO, and three-and-a-half decades at the helm have left him no less proud.

"Our goals have remained the same since Day One," he says. "We wanted to give Santa Cruz its own voice, to responsibly serve the changing needs of the Santa Cruz community and to provide assist-

as to be properly prepared for KSCO's inaugural signal.

Today, the broadcast transmitted from KSCO's perch at Corcoran's Lagoon is a hearty 10,000 watts. There is a thoroughly automated KSCO FM. There is a plaque on the wall commending the station for its coverage and assistance during the storm of '82. But the tall, curved windows, the insistent lime-green interiors and the Eisenhower-evoking floor console that pipes KSCO Beautiful Music into the waiting room are nothing if not

always been a cornerstone of the station's services. KSCO has its own charter in the National Emergency Broadcast System and is the common program source for Monterey Bay civil defense. As several prominent plaques on its green walls will not let you forget, the station has acquitted itself in fine fashion within the throes of floods, fires and earthquakes.

KSCO is also duly prepared for that certain unthinkable disaster. In 1955, Berlin recalls, an FCC official paid him an unscheduled visit with

business-oriented.

In attempting to reach the older sectors of its audience, KSCO can urge nostalgia to absurd lengths. Take, for instance, the regular Sunday slot given over to selections of Tennessee Ernie Ford's gospel hymns. Berlin calls them "ancient history," but when he tried to give Tennessee Ernie the boot a few years back, he received more irate mail than on any other single program deviation.

Not that KSCO has made no concessions to the times. The

# Radio Active

Dave Barber

radio will never again seem so bright and golden as it did, say, in the late 1880s when Heinrich Hertz rigged up his spark-gap to demonstrate that radio waves could indeed be tracked and moved, or in 1899 when Guglielmo Marconi's wireless "black box" compellingly proved its broadcasting mettle. There's nothing like first love. But reports of radio's demise into quaint inconsequentiality have been greatly and unjustly exaggerated. Radio still seduces. Radio will no sooner be obsolete than our desire to have and to hold.

Glance at a state map and the Monterey Bay begins to resemble a human ear. It figures. The indigenous resources of radio here are remarkably rich. While an evening stroll through just about any residential neighborhood can be so riddled with the blue light of television screens that radio might seem like a technological orphan, those of us who lend our ears to local airwaves hear a more favorable verdict being cast.

In the live interview room at the KSCO studios there sits a microphone of the sort that Harry Truman and Franklin Roosevelt used to lean over in press conferences. It is squared and heavy and could not be waved easily in front of a passing face. But it works fine and it can't help but capture an essential quality of KSCO radio. Time may not stand still at KSCO but let's just say it never really works up a sweat either.

When the strains of *The Star-Spangled Banner* cracked over the

ance in times of emergency. And we still do."

Berlin isn't just KSCO's station manager. He is one of the station's managing partners and the original inspiration behind this most venerable of Santa Cruz frequencies. He came early to radio, first as an amateur operator and later as a civilian broadcast technician during the war years. The idea of a distinctly local Santa Cruz station, in fact, occurred to Berlin in 1935, but the FCC's long freeze on new radio permits throughout World War II forestalled any such ambitions.

Berlin waited. And in 1946, he and Fred and Mahlon McPherson were granted official permission from the FCC to broadcast a 1000-watt signal at the 1080 AM frequency. Broadcast they did, over airwaves that in those days were something of a Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Only two other Monterey Bay stations existed at the time — Monterey's KDON and Watsonville's KHUB.

KSCO was launched when Walter Cronkite was still cutting his reportorial teeth and nobody loved Lucy yet and, yes, radio was very much a big deal. The September 19, 1947 edition of the McPherson-owned *Sentinel* ran 46 pages and 36 of them were devoted to the advent of KSCO. Right below the banner headline informing readers of a vicious New Orleans hurricane was a photograph of Deanie Covey, a comely Santa Cruz 17-year-old, who was shown fixing her radio dial to AM 1080 two whole days in advance so

testimony to an era when radio was the only broadcasting game in town.

At KSCO longevity and predictability are dance partners. Its history is clean of major policy revolutions or traumatic programming watersheds. "Since going 24-hour in 1949," confirms Berlin, "we've only had 2½ days of interrupted broadcasting and that was during our '55 fire. Our AM transmitter has 122,000 hours on it and our FM transmitter has 145,000. Keep the dust out of it and leave it alone and good equipment won't fail you."

After 35 years in the business, one can hardly blame Berlin for talking in terms of firsts and onlys. He likes to reveal that KSCO was the first West Coast station to feature an identifying call-letter jingle. He likes to point out that all local weather reports are gleaned from KSCO's barometers and thermometers and that the KSCO two-way remote news car is the only one of its kind in Santa Cruz County. He likes to affirm that no other station in the area has KSCO's stand-by power, which restores the station's signal a scant six seconds after PG & E lines go out.

KSCO is Berlin's baby and he is prone to fatherliness. But his point is well taken. Emergency and disaster communications have

## Vernon Berlin of KSCO

the message that KSCO would make his agency very happy if the station would furnish itself with a fully rigged atomic fallout shelter. The FCC man made it sound like a suggestion, but Berlin knew better. America was playing the Cold War Blues and the radio voices of America were expected to play along.

Set in thick concrete and lying about level with the bottom of Corcoran's Lagoon, the KSCO fallout shelter is a place only Joe McCarthy's ghost could love. But its long outmoded tube transmitters, says Berlin, are maintained and routinely inspected. And the truth of the matter, he will remind you, is that while a nuclear blast would utterly decimate solid state transmission, tubed broadcasting equipment would continue to produce a receivable signal.

Nevertheless, the winds of dramatic global change seldom sweep through the KSCO studios. The station has few designs beyond speaking to and for Santa Cruz. You used to be able to do that in the radio business — talk about audiences composed of entire communities, but with the drastic fragmentation of radio markets over the past 20 years, no one tries to pretend that can happen anymore. Berlin admits that the Santa Cruz KSCO speaks to tends to be over 25, settled, familial and

cushioned FM studio, once a bastion of live music broadcasts, is now a whirring mechanical cavern where neither mouths nor microphones need apply. The set-up is not uncommon and most contemporary: KSCO FM purchases its Beautiful Music tapes through a subscription service in Chicago called FM 100 and leaves the rest to the wonders of modern automation. The automated, formulaic approach, concedes Berlin, robs radio of its natural spontaneity, but it can't be beat economically. KSCO FM need only be staffed by one engineer at any one time.

The call letters are supposed to stand for "Santa Cruz' Own" and once upon a time they could have just as accurately described "Santa Cruz' Only." Still, KSCO is more than just a history lesson. Scorn if you will the eager, milkshake-wholesome announcers, the museum-piece of a microphone, the plastic plants in the waiting room and all that ill-advised green paint, but any station that has managed to deliver the same basic goods for over three decades through the tumult of the modern radio industry has got to be doing more than a few things right.

When the admirably prepared Miss Covey was setting her dial at KSCO's spanking-new frequency in 1947, radio was an entirely

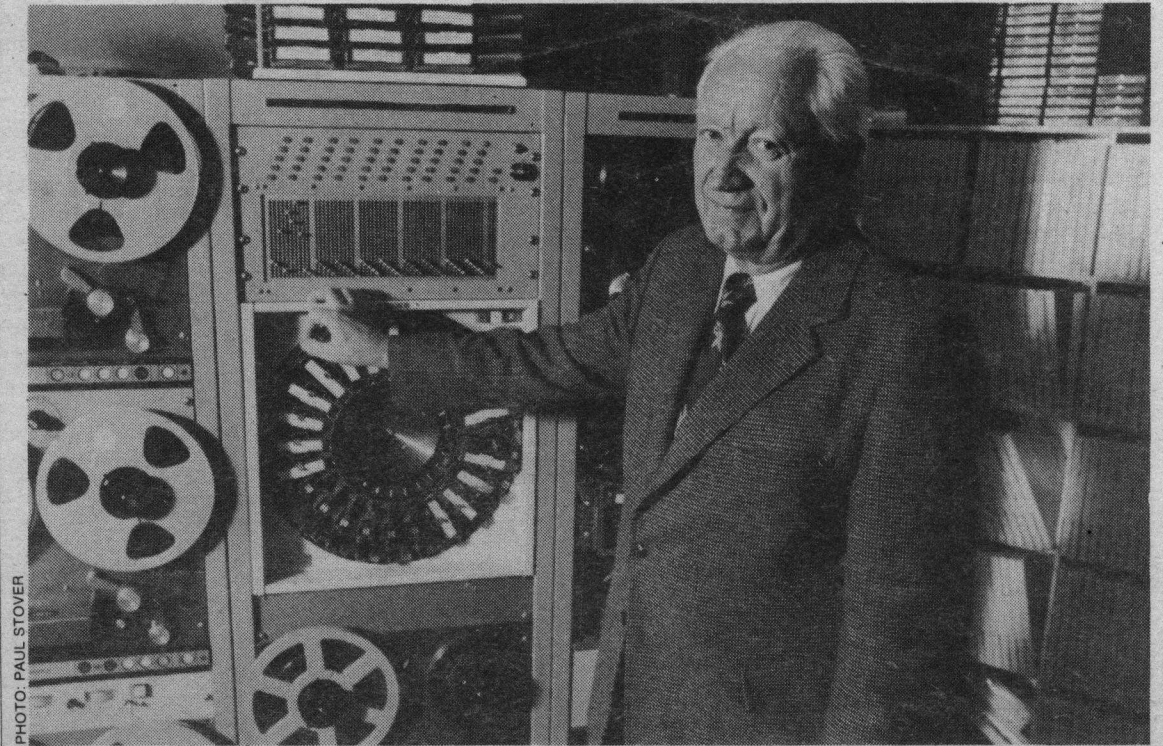


PHOTO: PAUL STOVER



different beast than the one we have come to know today. The industry was booming. American manufacturers churned out 20 million new radio sets that year alone, and a nationwide listeners' survey blessed the medium with an 82% approval rating. Clock and car radios were becoming all the rage and television was surely a passing fancy. Radio was where it was happening.

Mostly, however, it was happening on the AM band. Though FM had proven it could render a clearly superior sound, its prospects were crippled by the FCC's decision to shift the FM range of frequency and by the general unavailability of adequate FM receivers. In 1948 only three of the country's 114 FM-only stations showed a profit and over 100 applicants who had been granted FM operating permits returned them to the FCC. FM was quite the sickly child.

How FM got up off its back and won over our hearts and ears is a long and windy story. You could write a book about it and many have. But no such account would be complete without a generous nod towards two small events that went a long way: the FCC's reservation of the 88-92 MHz frequencies for non-commercial and educational stations; and its ruling, in 1948, that licenses could be obtained by 10-watt shoestring operators.

Back when the notion of commercial FM was an industry joke, it was the brave, small signals clustered at the far left-hand side of the FM dial that picked up where mainstream radio left off. They still do. And nowhere in the country is there a higher concentration of non-commercial stations than in the Monterey Bay region, which has everything to do with the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB) choosing Santa Cruz as the site of its annual conference this coming July.

KUSP station manager Lance Linares believes that the importance of non-commercial radio goes beyond its status as an alternative. Call it an oasis. "Contemporary commercial radio is twisted," he says. "It doesn't have a sense of place or self. All across the country, you hear the same 30 songs at any one time, the same kind of voice behind the mike."

KUSP, now in its eleventh year, is dedicated to the proposition that not everyone gets off listening to the Allman Brothers or Toto. The station's claim to singularity has always been the heart of its matter. When founder David Freeman was first spinning records from a backyard shed at a puny 10 watts, he dubbed his efforts "pataphysical radio," after French artist Alfred Jarry's philosophy of the exceptions to rules. KUSP no longer broadcasts from out of a backyard, but the spirit of Jarry is intact. The station is owned and operated by the Pataphysical Broadcasting Foundation Inc. and it has kept finding new rules to be an exception to.

If there is one bewildering element to KUSP programming, admits Linares, it is the station's unshakeable faithfulness to ethnic or "world" music. True, true: when it comes to trotting the globe, KUSP has few airwave peers. But while KUSP's penchant for ouds, gamelans and tribes of Senegalese drummers perhaps dismays as many listeners as it excites, Linares sees that very tension as central to non-commercial radio's role. "We are certainly concerned with the archival nature of what we are doing," he says, "and the degree to which we can expose and educate."

Such talk is not idle. A good case in point is Linares' own Friday night reggae show, which has reached semi-legendary proportions since its inception in 1974. That Santa Cruz now sees more top-flight reggae artists than any other town its size must be partially attributed to the influence of Linares' "all killer, no filler" broadcasts. Another example would be Susan Freeman's erudite forays into Irish and Celtic music. Few traditional acts from the British Isles pass up Santa Cruz on their West Coast tours anymore.

Does so-called "popular" music have a place at KUSP? Sure. But as program director Genial Johnny Simmons is quick to disclose, it is not the sort of white noise that most of us have been weaned on. "The pop we program is, by and large, Black pop. Soul. Rhythm and blues. We go back to the Black music that started it all."

KUSP is an impressively active station. Rather than hole up in its second-floor studios at the former Twin Lakes Baptist Church and be content with simple vinyl-mongering, it has ventured more and more into its surroundings. In addition to its live remote broadcasts from the Monterey Jazz Festival and Cabrillo Music Festival, KUSP has produced and sponsored more local concerts than you could shake a saxophone at. Perhaps the most startling of these was the 1982 presentation of the reggae group Black Uhuru from inside the walls of the Soledad Penitentiary, an event which affirmed that radio can forge contact with some places where other media can't.

And how much poorer would Santa Cruz be without such KUSP-inspired events such as the Festival of the Saws or the Tycho Brahe Festival of Food? Much.

KUSP's wing-and-prayer era is history. The station's growth and solidification, says Linares, has been staggering. It has expanded its community news program and is now sustained by some 140 volunteers. It is able to pay seven full-time staff members. But let's harbor no delusions: the great truth on the left-hand side of the dial is always the question of which brother or sister is going to spare the next dime.

KUSP's bi-annual subscription drives have reaped better harvests in recent years and Linares is cur-

rently authoring a grant that could earn the station a fresh supply of state of the art equipment, yet listener support does not segue easily into solvency. "We figure we get contributions from one out of every 10 regular listeners," says Simmons. "It's tough going, but it comes with the package."

Money and where it comes from is also a sore point up at KZSC. Because of its campus affiliation, many assume that the station is lodged warmly under the financial wing of Mama UC. Not so, says KZSCers in the know. The UCSC budget allocation for the station is small and getting smaller and the feeling is that the University administration wouldn't mind washing its hands of the operation entirely.

Because of the University's reluctant patronage, and because the station's programming is strictly student-conceived and student-designed, there are those who believe KZSC should not be pegged as a "college station" in the true sense of the word. They dislike the false implication of administrative stewardship. But KZSC is a college station, for reasons that have little to do with who owns the turf it broadcasts from. It has to do with youth and flux, the very essence of college life.



PHOTO: PAUL STOVER

## The Pataphysicians of KUSP

"What makes us fresh and vital can also make us inconsistent," says Noreen Nolan, KZSC's current orientation director. "We always have new blood up at the station, new ideas and new input. But we lose some presentational stability because of it."

Veterans can be hard to come by at KZSC, but Nolan is one of them. The orientation program she conducts each quarter is part of the reason KZSC can now lay claim to a certain degree of professionalism and integrity. No, it wasn't always that way. The first incarnation of KZSC radio was an AM transmitter sequestered in a garbage can atop the Kresge College dormitories. Bootleg Grateful Dead was the standard fare.

Roomier studios behind Merrill College have given KZSC a greater sense of place and the 1980 power boost to 1260 watts provided the station, with a distinct measure of

maturity. With a signal that can be picked up in Watsonville, Salinas and Carmel, there are a lot more ears and tastes and interests to consider. "Let's face it," says Nolan, "if we're going to be heard that far away, we need to be responsible for what we do."

Just what KZSC does isn't easily pinned down. Its programming is best described as a well-run gamut. A typical KZSC turntable might spin Beethoven sonatas, Welsh reels and Talking Heads within a handful of hours. The station broadcasts the sterling KPFA Evening News from Berkeley and follows it up five days a week with its own slice of staff-written community news. KZSC's arms are wide enough to embrace an original comedy program (*Rebels Without Applause*), a gay and lesbian collective show (*Closet-Free Radio*) and 60 weekly minutes for the young among us (*The Children's Hour*).

There is one sure sense in which college radio is a genuine saving grace: its receptivity to new, experimental and innovative music. Fifteen-odd years ago, it used to be that progressive FM stations prided themselves on their pursuit of avant garde or underappreciated pop sounds, but the arrival of album-oriented rock (AOR) programming and so-called Superstar

formats changed all that. Commercial FM emerged more streamlined, more financially secure and, Dylan forbid, more musically stagnant.

College radio, with nothing to lose, took up the slack. And it continues to. Months and months before kinky New Wavers Bow Wow Wow found happiness, rock press and wide airplay, university stations like KZSC were the only places you could hear them. The implications of this trailblazing activity has not been ignored. In its August 4, 1982 issue, *Variety* proclaimed "college rock recognized as sales tool" and quoted several major label representatives as saying that college radio was figuring more and more in their promotional plans.

Yes, the sailing is smoother at KZSC these days. But there is still plenty of undertow to contend with, not the least of which is the routine petulance of the station's

aged or second-hand broadcasting equipment. "Things break a lot around here," says three-year veteran Steve Gerow. "The equipment gets heavy use and some of it was semi-functional to begin with."

KZSC, staffed with volunteers from both town and gown contingents, considers itself to be "community" radio, and so it is. The subject is a tricky one. The late Marshall McLuhan, who did some thinking on these matters, once wrote that "the power of radio to re-tribalize mankind... has gone unnoticed," and, in the dizzying context of global villages, he's probably right. But on a smaller scale, radio seems to be increasingly at ease in its ability to forge and bind communities — particularly listener-supported radio which, after all, is a rather intimate and familial proposition to begin with.

This is most prominently the case with the remaining pair of Monterey Bay non-commercial stations: Salinas' KUBO and Pacific Grove's KAZU.

The birth of the bilingual KUBO in July, 1981 obviously had a whole lot to do with the significant Hispanic population within the Salinas and Pajaro valleys. But it also had to do with an Hispanic community's characteristic relationship with media. "Studies have shown again and again," says station manager Suzanne Manriquez, "that Spanish-speakers use radio more than any other medium."

Anywhere there are large numbers of Latino and Hispanics, Spanish-language radio usually flourishes. Bilingual programming, however, remains far more rare. There are only five such stations in the country at present and four of them are in California. KUBO's closest brethren station operates out of Fresno.

Bilingual, as Manriquez will emphasize, means bicultural as well. KUBO's Saturday mornings find *Early Morning Boogie* and *Cantares de mi Tierra* scheduled back-to-back. Yet as diverse as the station's musical programming is, Manriquez says that KUBO's strongest suit is its synthesis of news, public affairs and documentation pertinent to an ethnically heterogeneous audience. KUBO has also received kudos for its extensive broadcast training programs, which are more formal and comprehensive than is generally manageable for a non-commercial enterprise.

KUBO is on the cutting edge of bilingual radio's movement towards deeper legitimacy and influence. California has clearly been the medium's proving ground. Now the Western Community Bilingual Radio Network (WCBRN), to which KUBO belongs, is undertaking similar projects in Colorado, Texas and New Mexico. Five new stations, Manriquez reports, should be broadcasting within the next two years.

At Pacific Grove's KAZU,



Monterey Bay's broad cultural diversity becomes more striking with each successive listen. At least, that's the idea. "One of KAZU's main reasons for being alive," offers station manager Lorrie Benjamin, "is to provide air-time to as many disenfranchised sectors of the community as possible."

Benjamin doesn't know the percentage of Monterey County's large Portuguese population which tunes in Sunday mornings for KAZU's two hours of Portuguese programming, but she has reason to believe the numbers are enormous. KAZU has gained some inkling of what it means to that community by its annual sponsorship of a *chamarrita*, a buoyantly traditional Portuguese dance gathering.

Seaside and Marina also are home for a growing community of Asians and KAZU has responded by carving out schedule space for regular Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese programming. German and Brazilian language shows have been a KAZU feature for several of its five-plus years.

"We're very committed to our local emphasis," says Benjamin. "We'd rather strengthen our ties with our smaller, specialized audiences instead of trying to design a more generally accessible sound." Benjamin feels there is certainly a place for radio that you can leave on in the background, radio that doesn't stray from the beaten track of its consistent tone, but that place isn't where she wants KAZU camping out. "We're looking for people to turn on KAZU at specific times for specific reasons."

It takes a certain scrappy resourcefulness to keep a non-commercial station alive and kicking and KAZU has rolled with quite a few punches since 1977. The station's most recent travail occurred this December, when ferocious 90 MPH winds toppled its Hidden Hills transmitting tower. KAZU was off the air for a month and the entire earnings from its Christmas time subscription drive were drained by repair costs.

Then again, if it were too predictable, too safe, snug and absolute, it wouldn't be non-commercial radio. The small, vital congregation on the left end of Monterey Bay FM persuasively corroborates the words of Lorenzo Milam, patron saint to many an innovative broadcasting endeavor: "A radio station should be a live place for live people to talk their talk and walk their walk and know that they (and the rest of us) are not finally and irrevocably dead."

**F**M stands for "frequency modulation." The distance between the crests of FM radio waves is always changing, which means that the pitch of the transmitted signal is constantly fluctuating, which means that FM waves have more range and room to duplicate sound than AM waves, which means that the Tchaikovsky

Violin Concerto, not to mention Bruce Springsteen, come across clear and convincing on the FM band, a phenomenon which has done wonders for music and for radio and for all conceivable intercourse thereof.

Ever since May, 1962, when the FCC imposed a freeze on AM licensing in order to open up the

Markets are measured by raw numbers — New York, obviously, is the largest one of all. Monterey Bay? It's the 113th-ranked market in the nation, which makes the thriving KBOQ even more remarkable. You won't find another all-classical station until you get way up there to the 50th market.

**T**hen there are the not-so-happy endings, protests to no avail. We, in this part of the world, should know: there was no joy in Gilroy when mighty KFAT struck out.

A station called KFAT? Is that anything like a boy named Sue? You could say that. In the too-hip, blown-dry world of contemporary

lamenting the ghost of KFAT Past over a coffin brimming with carnations. The event was memorable but exaggerated. KFAT's edges were still rough, its tone more renegade than most and its musical recipe still happily indecipherable.

It was the second sale, just a few months ago, that brought the ax down. The station's owner had died of cancer and KFAT's ratings had slumped to half of what they had been in its glory days. The ranks of the KFAT faithful had dwindled. A radio chain, Western Cities Broadcasting, purchased the station and was granted permission by the FCC to change the notorious call letters to KWSS. The end, as they say, was nigh.

What Western Cities did next has become one of the most imperative practices in contemporary radio. They conducted a market survey. Such studies — and they don't come cheap — analyze a region's demographics, its median ages, ethnic compositions and wage scales, and emerge with a recommendation of what audience seems most ripe for the taking. A new station's format is usually shaped accordingly.

The president of Western Cities, to nobody's great surprise, said that the offerings on the newly christened KWSS would abide by the survey's findings. If grand opera was shown to be the most commercially promising format, KWSS would broadcast grand opera. If Merle Haggard or Oscar Peterson or Appalachian banjo quartets ... but you get the picture.

And what you get now, if you flip the dial to KWSS is Stratocaster riffs by the bushel, Foreigner and Journey and Styx and fast food ads. You could have called it. In the 20 years since the Beatles got us to believe that they wanted to hold our hands, the rewarding commercial returns of rock and roll radio have turned the airwaves into pop wars, and it seems like there's always another frequency only too eager to enter the fray.

Back when you could still see comb-tracks in Elvis' hair, there was only one rock and roll format: Top 40. Taking its cue from the wide popularity of jukeboxes and hit parades, Top 40 begat the concepts of playlisting, rotation and sophisticated charting that are now the flesh and blood of pop radio. But it didn't stop there. It is to the ensuing success of Top 40 radio that we owe the startling multiplicity of today's rock and roll formats: adult contemporary rock; easy listening rock; album oriented rock (AOR); middle of the road (MOR) rock; Black rock; soft rock; progressive rock. The rock of our age does indeed cleft for thee.

To the untutored ear, one Monterey Bay rock station must sound very much like the next. But they could never survive side by side on the same airwaves if they didn't occupy somewhat distinct niches. For this we have ourselves to thank — or blame. The audience for rock



PHOTO: JOE DANIELS

**The Whiz Kids of KZSC**

FM spectrum, the business of radio music has taken itself very seriously — as well it should. FM's superior fidelity and commercial possibilities have not only reflected the face of the music we listen to, they have changed it. Just how dramatically FM fortunes rise and fall these days has been demonstrated twice on Monterey Bay airwaves within the past year: the ascension of all-classical KBOQ and the demise of ponderously irreverent KFAT.

KBOQ director director Scott McClelland is gratified, but not overly startled, by the rapid success his station has enjoyed. "The demographics were in our favor," he says. "There was a market for an all-classical format that was going untapped."

McClelland can speak with some authority on the subject of classical programming: it's been his job for the last 20 years. Ten of those years were spent hosting and directing the evening Masters Concerts on Monterey's KWAV. But, at long last, the schizophrenic life of rock and rolling by day and fugueing by night got to be too much for KWAV brass and they cut McClelland loose in December '81. Soon afterwards, however, he was hired to design a classical format for the open 93 MHz frequency. By April '82 McClelland was cueing sonatas and quartets again from KBOQ's Marina studios.

There is no all-classical station in the entire country working out of a market as small as KBOQ's.

In the early days of radio, classical music was considered indispensable and a big to-do. The NBC network even recruited its very own symphony, led by the illustrious Arturo Toscanini. Now there are less than 20 commercial stations in the country devoted exclusively to classical music, many located in East Coast metropolises where tradition dies a little harder.

"Classical programming as a commercial format is a puzzle," says McClelland. "No question about it. So few of us are doing it, it's become a peculiar specialty. There's no kicking back in this business."

KWAV's old Masters' Concert retains its evening time-slot on KBOQ and still mingles symphonic warhorses with excursions into modern compositions. Mornings and afternoons are primarily given over to Baroque and chamber selections. "Not too much 'struggle' music during the day," says McClelland.

Demand may not be what it was, but it should not be forgotten that classical music *does* have its faithful and its fanatics. In 1975, when New York's all-classical WNCN decided to hop on the rock and roll bandwagon, over 100,000 disgruntled listeners petitioned the FCC in protest. But the FCC turned a deaf ear on the complaints. Who knows what kind of crisis was averted when the GAF Corporation bought WNCN and restored the sound of Mozart, Schubert and their ilk.

FM, KFAT's raucous, unlikely blend of country-western, rockabilly, folk and blues, and its uncanny talent at treating its listeners' ears no kinder than swinging saloon doors, broke all the rules — it was loved because of it. Garlic, once the town of Gilroy's sole claim to fame, had to share top billing shortly after the station set up shop in 1975.

KFAT was a risk. Founders Lorenzo Milam and Jeremy Lansman were shrewd if eccentric radio veterans who liked nothing more than thumbing their noses at the abiding conventions, norms and trends of broadcasting. And did they ever. KFAT DJ's, graced with such sobriquets as Amy Airheart and Uncle Sherman, were long on gall and chutzpah. KFAT turntables could be counted on for cuts of the raunchy and ribald. KFAT programming did not kowtow to industry standards: Bessie Smith might fold into Willie Nelson or Johnny Paycheck. KFAT, against all odds, worked — for a while.

Twice in its seven-year history, the station's ownership changed hands. The first sale in 1979 prompted two distraught DJ's to heist 1800 records from KFAT's eclectic collection for fear the LPs would be junked in the wake of a format change.

The records were returned and, sure enough, KFAT cleaned up its act a bit. Some long-time KFAT fans and several former DJ's held a wake at Santa Cruz' Catalyst,

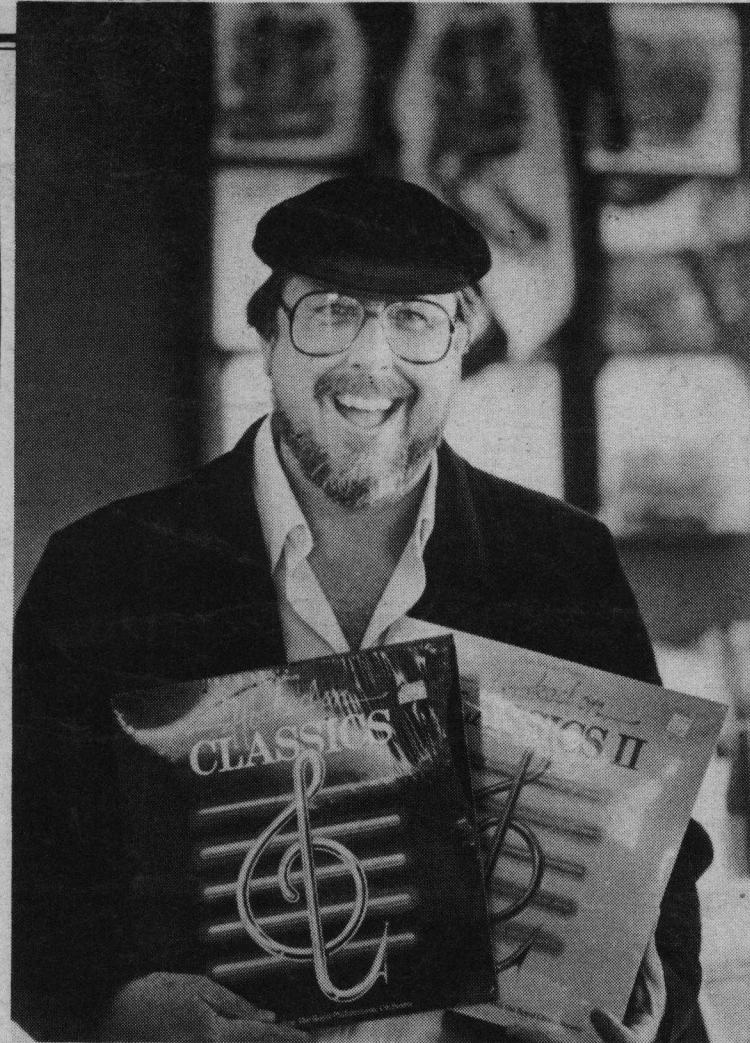


and roll has deepened and broadened so incorrigibly that the segmentation of markets has been a most natural and necessary recourse.

So we hear. Hear Monterey's KIDD, which has a lock on that county's 12 to 18-year-old audience, with its ever-upbeat DJ's and its insistent reference to Monterey as the "Magic City." Hear KWAV, the self-proclaimed "music wave," serving up a low surf of soft rock balladry. Hear the chain-owned KWSS, abrasion-rock at its best. Hear Salinas' KDON, it of the sterile, all-automated format and enviously high ratings.

What we hear from Carmel's KLRB, the local alumnus of the breath-on-the-microphone school of rock broadcasting, is not the same as we once heard. This, too, comes with the package. KLRB is still the most adventurous and spirited rock and roll station around all right, but spirit and adventure mean different things in the industry than they did in days past. Audiences, by most accounts, are more easily alienated than they ever were, and a station that does not compromise some of its boldness for consistency in tone risks probable extinction.

"Familiarity doesn't breed contempt in this business," says KLRB music director Rosalie Smith. "Your listeners have to feel at ease with what you're doing. From our perspective, familiarity breeds



## Scott McClelland of KBOQ

tolerance and trust."

Do the handful of Monterey Bay rock stations collectively sound so very different from those in

Cleveland or Baltimore or Phoenix? Well, no. But any disdain for this scarcity of individuality should be tempered with the realization

that the birth of rock and roll 30-some years ago provided radio with a transfusion of energy and possibility instrumental to the medium's survival in the age of television. Radio will always owe rock a favor or two.

So whither AM? Things have never quite been the same on the older spectrum since the pre-eminence of FM musical programming stole something of its thunder. But rather than roll over and play dead, AM programmers have adapted and adjusted and come out ahead for their troubles. Capitola's KMFO is a perfect example.

"The station went through several automated music formats since '77," says new manager Sean Conrad. "But it wasn't until we went all-news last July that we caught fire."

National news on KMFO is furnished by Ted Turner's innovative CNN network via satellite. Local Monterey Bay coverage pops up anywhere from five to eight times an hour. As of this April, KMFO will carry ABC's syndicated talk radio show, designed on similar lines to San Francisco's phenomenally successful KGO.

Conrad is delighted with KMFO's recent ratings surge, but he laments that the AM band can be a lonely place these days. "Few people seem to know who we are," he says. "They don't even know we exist."

Conrad, however, has plans to

change all that. The station will launch an ambitious promotion campaign this spring which will alert the public of KMFO's presence with a proliferation of balloons, sandwich boards and banners streaming from low-flying biplanes.

**R**adio waves, unlike rock stars or marriages, never die. They knock around the universe forever. That is why it's not just clever or metaphorical to say that radio is always restless, always trying to find itself. Today, radio finds its national revenues skyrocketing. It finds National Public Radio becoming more respected, improved satellite transmission technology, and relaxed FCC restrictions on what must or must not be broadcast. And radio finds, in a small region like the Monterey Bay, a healthiness, diversity and engagement that can only bode well for the state of its art and affairs.

Still, radio is taken for granted more than any other communications medium. It's no contest. You don't have to stand still for it, keep your eyes open for it or dig a quarter out of your pocket for it. It lets you slide. In this age of blue screens, radio seldom sweeps us off our feet with the immediacy it once did. It has to grow on us, slowly, like the boy down the block or the girl next door. □