

Shefchik: Seeking middle ground

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WLOL-FM, that's who.

WLOL's current playlist includes 41 records. Many of them, of course, mirror the playlist of the current FM giant, KS95, as well as WCCO-FM. And some of the records are favorites at rock stations KQRS and Stereo 101. But the WLOL playlist is the only one in town that includes both the Go-Gos and Eddie Rabbitt, the J. Geils Band and Ronnie Milsap, the Cars and Olivia Newton-John.

Admittedly, 1982 isn't as good a year for singles as 1965 was, and there's plenty of music on WLOL-FM that I wish nobody played. But a real Top 40 survey once again exists in the Twin Cities, and I think it's a step in the right direction.

And it's no accident, according to Bob Berglund, WLOL program director.

"We're trying to position ourselves between album rock and adult contemporary," Berglund said. "We're not as hard as the rock stations, and not as wimpy as the adult contemporary stations.

"I grew up with Top 40, and so did our general manager and most of our air personalities," Berglund said. "FM radio began as almost a different form of radio, but now FM penetration is so great everybody in the market is caught in the bind of doing the same thing.

"We noticed in larger, more progressive markets, that some stations were bringing back heavyweight personalities, fun, up-tempo Top 40 music, contests, jingles, and all those things that had passed to the side. Those stations were doing well, and after the last couple of ratings books we decided this market needs one of those stations."

For the past few years WLOL had been very close to KS95, WCCO-FM and KDWB-AM in format, but it wasn't going anywhere in the ratings. WLOL has ranked eighth in the market during the last two Arbitron ratings surveys. Last October-November, WLOL passed WAYL-FM, but in turn was passed by WCCO-FM.

Berglund said the adjustment to a Top 40 format was instituted about six months ago, and the station hasn't had a chance to test it over a full ratings period yet. But there is

reason for optimism, and not just because the station is trying something different.

"The Mediatrend survey shows us on an upward spiral for quite a few months," Berglund said, and added that the station's own in-house surveys showed it was gaining listeners in the desired 18- to 34-year-old demographic.

"The safe approach is to play the same proven records over and over," Berglund said. "But if you get enough stations in the same market doing that, you can burn out on the older records, too.

"We're trying to find the middle ground between people who listen to album stations and adult contemporary.

It is probably too much to hope that WLOL can become what WDGY or KDWB used to be — the most important stations in the market because they played the best new singles. I don't expect the next single by Elvis Costello or Bonnie Raitt or the Ramones to go to the top of the WLOL charts. But if "Our Lips Are Sealed" by the Go-Gos can do it, I guess anything is possible. □