

Fans hope KTWN's new owners won't drop jazz

One of the most agonizing sights in the wacky world of broadcasting occurs when listeners loyal to a particular radio station fight to convince new owners to retain the format they enjoy.

That's the scenario being played out now by listeners of KTWN-FM (108), an Anoka station that is the only one in the Twin Cities specializing in modern jazz.

KTWN is being sold by North Suburban Radio for \$3.8 million to Sunbelt Communications, Ltd., of Colorado Springs, Colo. Sunbelt filed an application with the Federal Communications Commission July 5 seeking permission to buy KTWN, and FCC approval is expected sometime in the next 60 days.

The pending sale has caused consternation among KTWN listeners who are having trouble imagining life in

un-mellow Minnesota without jazz, and a group of them is planning a meeting Sunday to map a strategy to persuade the new owners to retain the jazz format.

While the prospective new owners say it's possible that the format will remain the same, they admit that they are conducting research to decide what format would prove most profitable here.

"We haven't really decided what we're going to do, format-wise," said Sunbelt President Terry Robinson. "We're starting just now to focus on the market and we've got a research company (The Research Group, of Seattle, which is owned by Sunbelt) to research the market. It's too early to tell exactly what we'll end up doing, but we're business people — no doubt about that — and we'll do what makes the most

sense for us."

Whatever the decision, it seems likely that the new owners will want to improve the return on their investment by doing something to boost the station's ratings. The KTWN audience, while loyal, is small: It has averaged only 1.6 percent of the listening audience for the past year.

In certain time periods and among certain age groups, however, the station does much better. On Saturday nights, for example, KTWN wins 21.4 percent of the male listening audience between ages 18 and 49.

KTWN listeners are convinced that the station can profit by continuing to broadcast jazz, and they're setting out to try to convert the new owners to their way of thinking.

Three Honeywell employees who call themselves "Friends of KTWN" are calling a meeting of KTWN listeners at 2 p.m. Sunday at Gateway Center park, across Hennepin Av. from Hansford Pontiac in downtown Minneapolis. One of them, Patsy Randell, said she's been so upset by the news of KTWN's sale that "I've been banging my head on the wall the last couple of days."

"It's important to impress on the new owners that there's an important jazz market here," Randell said. "We need something more on the radio here than country-western, beautiful music and rock. We want to encourage KTWN supporters to contact the station's advertisers and sign petitions urging them to keep jazz. We're friends of KTWN and lovers of jazz and we think there's a lot of us out here."

Robinson, though noncommittal, said

Minneapolis Star and Tribune

Thursday
July 21/1983

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it's possible that the listeners will have an impact.

"Listeners have a very large influence on what you decide to do, and I'd certainly be interested in what they have to say," Robinson said. "Jazz is certainly a format that we'd consider. But we really try not to go into markets with a predisposition about what we're going to do. The most important thing is we're going to do our homework and determine what's best, and we haven't closed our mind to any alternative at this point."

Sunbelt owns five other radio stations in Fresno, Calif., Albuquerque, N.M., and Colorado

Springs. It's also paying \$4 million to buy another FM station in Seattle. None of Sunbelt's other stations play jazz, but several of them specialize in "adult contemporary" music. That has led to speculation here that Sunbelt will move KTWN to a contemporary adult format to compete with KSTP-FM and WCCO-FM.

Robinson said a decision on format will be made before Sunbelt takes over operation of the station. He said Sunbelt hopes to retain the station's present staff.

One hopes the new owners will see fit to retain jazz. KTWN plays an important role in contributing to the night life of the Twin Cities, building an audience for musicians who

New KTWN owners drop jazz format

Star Tribune - September 1983

By Nick Coleman
Staff Writer

New owners took control of KTWN-FM (107.9) Saturday and promptly dropped the station's progressive jazz format, switching to adult contemporary music.

The move angered KTWN listeners who had been trying since July to persuade a Colorado company that bought the Anoka station to retain the jazz format.

But officials representing the new owner, Sunbelt Communications of Colorado Springs, said audience research persuaded them to drop jazz. Sunbelt paid \$3.8 million to buy the station from North Suburban Radio.

Final approval of the takeover came last Friday from the Federal Communications Commission and the station went off the air from midnight Friday until 11 p.m. Saturday while technical adjustments were made to improve the quality of the station's 100,000-watt signal.

The takeover meant the departure of station President Jack Moore, a major figure in local radio circles. He was replaced by Doug Brown, who will be vice president and general manager. Brown was station manager at KEEY-FM for five years before leaving last fall. Also departing was popular radio personality Carl Bernards.

Most of KTWN's 24-hour day will be filled by use of a satellite radio service from Colorado Springs called Transtar. The adult contemporary

service, featuring pop hits from the past 20 years, is owned by Sunbelt. The only local programming will consist of a morning-drive show between 5 and 9 a.m., an oldies show from noon to 1 p.m. and jazz in the evening, from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.

The jazz show will be hosted by Rob Moore — Jack Moore's son — who used to be host of KTWN's "Mellow to Midnight" from 7 p.m. to midnight.

One group of KTWN listeners wasn't happy with the change. Patsy Randall and Carolyn Williams, spokespersons for a group called Friends of KTWN, said yesterday they were disappointed that efforts to preserve the jazz format had failed. The group estimates it gathered 2,000 signatures on petitions. It also organized a letter-writing campaign to the FCC.

Sunbelt officials say the listeners' efforts persuaded them to retain the evening jazz show on a trial basis. But they said business concerns dictated a change in format.

"With the amount of money we paid for the station we had to go with a format that had a better chance for mass appeal," Brown said. "Jack Moore did a real fine job in jazz programming and we'd be kidding ourselves to think we could come in here and wave a magic wand and triple our audience. And that's what we'd have to do to make it financially feasible. Changing the format was a business decision."

KTWN averaged just 1.6 percent of the listening audience last spring.

Brown said the station hopes to gain 3 percent of the audience during the 12-week fall ratings period that began last Thursday.

Friends of KTWN, in a prepared release, said it will "continue its efforts to influence the adoption of a full-time progressive jazz format at another station."

At least one other station intends to increase its jazz programming in the wake of KTWN's change. J.D. Ball, music director at KBEM-FM (88.5), said the noncommercial station, operated by the Minneapolis school system, will add several hours of jazz.

Effective next Monday, Ball said, the station will broadcast contemporary jazz each weekday afternoon from 1:30 p.m. to 6:20 and each evening from 7 p.m. to 9:30. On Saturdays, the station broadcasts jazz from 7 to 10 p.m., following that with National Public Radio's "Jazz Alive" program until midnight.

The station also offers six different jazz programs on Sundays from 10 a.m. Those shows include programs featuring old-time jazz, big bands and Mendota's own Hall Brothers Jazz Band. In addition, the station airs a jazz request program called "Listener's Choice" during the early morning hours Sunday through Friday.

Brown said KTWN received about 100 phone calls yesterday from "ex-KTWN listeners who obviously weren't happy with the format change." But he said the station re-

ceived a like number of calls from listeners who like the new format.

The station is now calling itself "B108." Brown said the station will soon file an application to change its call letters to some combination including a "B."

The letter has no significance, he said. But research showed that the station could promote itself more successfully by using a single letter and its number on the FM dial. He said the decision to drop the KTWN call letters was reached "because people have thought of it basically as a jazz station and we thought it was better to give it a new image."

Television commercials promoting the "New B108" started airing Sunday night during the broadcast of the Emmy Awards on Channel 11. Brown said the station is planning a major ad campaign.

"The niche we're looking at in the marketplace is young-to-middle-aged adults, the 22-to-40-year-olds," Brown said. He said the station's main competitors will be KS95 and WLOL. Those stations, Brown said, emphasize strong on-air personalities rather than their music.

"They have a lot of talk and a lot of contests," he said. "We're going to have enough personality that people will enjoy it but still the music will be our main thing. The image we're gonna try to convey is that we have the music that people will want to hear."

KTWN's jazz falls prey to profits

By Theodore L. Glasser

Twin Cities jazz fans are beginning to appreciate the folly of deregulating commercial radio.

Where there was once KTWN-FM, the area's only radio station devoted to modern jazz, there is today B108, one of several local stations playing "adult contemporary" music.

Where there was once a public-interest standard for broadcasters, a federal mandate to secure what the supreme court once described as the "maximum benefits of radio to all the people," there is today the "invisible hand" of the marketplace.

KTWN's new owner, Sunbelt Communications of Colorado Springs, Colo., didn't merely switch formats; it knowingly abandoned what the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) calls a "unique" format — a programming mix for which there is no reasonable substitute among competing stations.

Why did Sunbelt abandon the Twin Cities' only modern jazz format? It wasn't because the new owner thought adult contemporary music would better serve the needs of the listening public. And it wasn't because Sunbelt is committed to enhancing the diversity of Twin Cities radio. According to Doug Brown, the station's new general manager, jazz gave way to adult contemporary only because the latter is expected to boost ratings and increase profits.

From a business point of view, I suppose, that makes sense. But what doesn't make sense is that the "business point of view" is no longer subject to public scrutiny. Radio has become so deregulated that the business of broadcasting is none of our business.

It hasn't always been that way. During the early and mid-1970s the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, where FCC decisions can be appealed, made every effort to combat what it saw as the commis-



sion's "mechanistic deference" to free enterprise.

In what had become known as the "format doctrine," the court established the need for the FCC to hold public hearings if notice of a format change brought about "significant public grumbling;" if the grumbling public was large enough to be accommodated by available frequencies; if the proposed format change would leave the service area without a unique format, and if the format being abandoned was economically feasible.

Simply put, the appeals court wanted the FCC to consider formally and publicly whether the "disappearance of a distinctive format may deprive a significant segment of the public of benefits of radio."

The commission wasn't interested. It viewed any involvement in format selection as an "unnecessary and menacing entanglement" in matters best left to a broadcaster's discretion. So, rather than abide by the appeals court's rulings, the commission took the issue to the supreme court.

In 1981, in a decision distinguished by its impoverished logic, the high court evaded the broader issue of program diversity and instead is-

sued a narrow ruling on the FCC's authority to make policy.

The FCC is now free to authorize broadcasters to use success in the marketplace as the only public-interest standard they must apply to entertainment programming. Broadcasters can discard an unpopular (albeit profitable) format as easily as a grocery-store manager can discard an unpopular brand of toothpaste.

What success in the marketplace means, of course, is format duplication — not format diversity. For without a policy in support of diverse programming, what governs broadcasters' selection of formats is the principle of profit maximization: Formats will be duplicated if doing so will yield higher profits than those generated by the entire audience for a unique format. The Twin Cities could end up with 10 adult contemporary stations before the marketplace accommodates a single jazz station.

Still, the commission is politically comfortable with its laissez-faire approach to format allocation because its marketplace model is portrayed as an impartial and value-free resolution of the diversity issue.

In fact, that the FCC's conception of diversity is wedded to competition in the marketplace is striking evidence of the commission's bias, not its impartiality.

It is a bias in favor of free enterprise, not consumer welfare; a bias in favor of competition, not diversity, and a bias in favor of the broadcaster, not the listener.

Twin Cities jazz fans are beginning to realize that an unregulated radio industry would contribute as much to cultural diversity as an unregulated automobile industry would contribute to driver safety.

Theodore L. Glasser is on the faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota.

KTWN-FM
 Anoka (Minneapolis), Minnesota
 has been sold by
 North Suburban Radio


 to

KTWN-FM, Inc.

 for

\$3,800,000

 (subject to FCC approval)
 Associates Ray Stanfield and Peter Stromquist
 represented the Seller and assisted in the
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Former KTWN 'market shares' are airing their disappointment



Will Jones
after last night

When the new owners of the radio station that had been KTWN pulled the plug on those call letters and the radio programming they represented, I felt like a character in a movie in which the musical sound track has gone dead.

I don't really mean to claim that I lived my entire life with K-Twin providing the background music. But there were times when it seemed that way. So many of my family and friends were addicted to KTWN that I could set out on a round of weekend visits and errands, for example, with KTWN playing on my car radio, and then make two or three stops and

encounter a radio at each place tuned to the same station. The sounds gave such a day a certain heightened continuity.

Since the former KTWN spot on the dial has been given over to Nebbish Rock or Me-Too Rock or whatever they call that same-old-stuff now being played on most Twin Cities FM stations, some of the friends who were addicted to the quasi-jazz of KTWN have been urging me to direct some strong remarks at the new owners of the station about what a terrible mistake they have made.

One complainer, I think, was on the right track when he called the station directly on behalf of his household and said, "We are in our thirties and upwardly mobile and live in Edina, and I just got a big raise, and what more do you want from a listener?"

The profit-minded new owners no doubt will be hearing more about the demographics of the group they have dumped into the cold without a favorite radio station to cling to.

KTWN fan Rick Ofstel has ordered up a set of bumper stickers that announce, "I WAS A KTWN MARKET SHARE."

He is pressing them onto his friends who were KTWN listeners, and plans to run some ads offering them to the public at \$1 a copy.

"It's an attempt to get some attention from the researchers who ruin radio stations," Ofstel said. "Market shares! That's the only kind of language the researchers can understand."

The new owners certainly are entitled to hear such messages, but I don't think they will do much good. And until this week, the best I could hope to do for complaining friends and offspring was commiserate with them.

Now, however, there may be a new message of hope for all the listeners who think they lost much more than a friend when they lost KTWN. And it won't be coming from the station's new owners. It will come from one of the station's former owners, Jack Moore, who was the inventor of the KTWN sound, just as he was the inventor of WAYL back around the beginning of the '60s. Moore doesn't have anything to announce yet, but Nick Coleman is tracking those developments; there will be a full report on them in an upcoming Coleman column.

Minneapolis Star and Tribune

Thursday
October 6/1983

1C.

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Tues., Oct. 11, 1983

Minneapolis Star and Tribune

CLIP AND ACT TODAY

If you're one of us...
put this sticker on
your bumper!

I WAS A KTWN MARKET SHARE

What
is a "MARKET SHARE?"

A "market share" is a STATISTIC...in this case, a listener of KTWN's former music format, that researchers tell us is "down the drain". Because we liked the jazz music on old KTWN, are we, too, down the drain. Do you want to do something to help me show market research something about common sense? Put one of my stickers on your bumper and show everyone who we are! I'm only a private citizen trying to make a point...not a profit. They're only a buck & you'll be doing something that should have been done long ago! This is a low \$\$ operation and this ad will only run once! Clip it and send for your sticker as fast as possible. Send a stamped, self-addressed larger envelope and \$1.00 (tax incl.) to:

RICK OFSTEL, Box 24525, Mpls., MN 55424