

Akron Beacon Journal

## Morning drive-time: Dueling on the dials

### Disc jockeys are verbal vanguard in daily dawn wars on the radio

By Bob Dyer  
Beacon Journal staff writer

**YOU ARE TRAVELING** through another dimension. Next stop, the Sunshine Zone. It's a world where... In some places, the egos grow just as wide. It's a world populated by creatures who are simultaneously wired and tired, creatures who wear perpetual circles under their eyes from getting up at 4 a.m., yet manage to sound bubbly and glib because their professional lives depend on it.

But it's also a world of ripped-off gimmicks, nasty tricks and — most of all — double-barrel competition, all fought out in dawn's early light. To those who live here, this eerie world is known as the Land of Morning Drive-Time.

It is radio's equivalent of primetime, these hours between 6 and 10 a.m. Many more people are tuned in, if not necessarily turned on, than at any other time of day. And it's largely a captive audience.

Although decades have passed since radio was the sexiest medium around, it remains the perfect medium for the automobile. What else can you do in a moving car?

Sponsors naturally want to reach as many of the heading-to-work drivers as possible, so they head for the radio stations that deliver the most listeners, as judged by the folks who publish the Arbitron ratings books.

Rarely is the ratings war a one-on-one, *High Noon* showdown. It's more like professional wrestling's group gropes — nearly 30 different stations show up in the local book.

The Beacon Journal ventured into six musical combat areas on a series of recent mornings. The locations were selected because of consistently high ratings or unique disc jockeys or both. In this corner, we have:

- **Jeff and Flash**, the Dr. J of morning drive. Mr. Kinzbach, 32, and Mr. Ferenc, 32, cornerstones of WMMS's live members "Morning Zoo" team, are smooth, experienced, usually classy and sometimes spectacular. Lots of people try to imitate them.
- **John Lannigan**, 41, a Junior Bob Hope on Bendzire. Loud and fast. Buys jokes, recycles jokes, makes a ton of money at Cleveland's WMJL. Has a legion of loyal followers.
- **Adam and Bob**, Akron's blue-collar jocks. Despite working on the city's top-rated show, Mr. Jones, 48, and Mr. Allen, 46, go about their jobs without much glory, maybe because they're so hard to find among WAKR's extensive news schedule and its awesome volume of commercials.

- **Mac Patrick**, 27, the Jim McMahon of Akron's morning jocks. The young, brash quarterback of WKDD's "Waking Crew" consistently tests the established limits and occasionally steps over the line.

- **Paul Taple**, 30, a Rich Little in a foreign land. Master of 150 voices, WGAR's impressionist seems trapped in a musical format (country) that's not particularly suited for him. Probably the most underrated of the morning personalities.
- **Jaybird Drexler**, 37, the Big Boss of Akron radio. Runs a homey, no-nonsense country show. Downright comfortable at WSLR, where he's been spinning tunes for 20 years.

Your favorites may not be here, or you may not agree with these thumbnail sketches of them. That's OK. Radio is like religion: You know what you believe, even if you can't explain exactly why. And you probably won't change, no matter what anybody says. But, lordy, do they try to convert you.

Area stations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars advertising on television and in newspapers, on buses and on billboards. Many stations even use contracts that tie the size of a jock's paycheck to the number of public appearances he makes, the



theory being that familiarity does not breed contempt. (See accompanying story.) Formats used by the stations vary dramatically, but every station is trying to do basically the same thing: Be so witty and informative and friendly and funny and generally irresistible that you'll never touch that dial for the rest of your life. There's another thing Northeast Ohio's morning people seem to have in common: WMMS is on their minds. Jocks from three of the other five stations mentioned WMMS (100.7-FM) before a reporter did. And most of them sounded a little defensive. It's no wonder. The FM rock station recently dominated morning drive-time like the Bears dominated the Super Bowl. According to the last Arbitron book, 82,600

Northeast Ohio adults listen to WMMS during an average quarter-hour between 6-10 a.m. And nearly 350,000 adults in a 16-county area set their dials to the "Home of the Buzzard" at least one morning a week. These days, the Buzzards get about as much sympathy from other stations as the Bears get from the rest of the NFL. "WMMS is trying to appeal to everybody from diapers up to about 40," snipes Lannigan, who returned to Cleveland last fall after working for two years in Florida. "Their music is much broader-appeal than ours. They've changed their format, if anybody knows it or not. WMMS is not the hip, cool AOR (album-oriented rock) station it was. It's completely sold itself to a different format. It's a

CHR (current-hit radio), top-40 station. So I don't know if you'll ever beat that." Although a man whose station plays everything from John Cougar Mellencamp to Barry Manilow has no business teasing others about aiming for a mass audience, Lannigan is right about WMMS' musical switch. The change was so gradual that many listeners didn't notice. Playing only current singles is the latest cycle for an industry that has shown a slavish devotion to rapid cycles. But other local stations have jumped on that musical bandwagon without tremendous success. What sets WMMS apart is its personalities and its tradition. A jock's personality is more important in the morning slot than during other parts of the day. See DJs, page E4

## Cleveland Orchestra wined, dined in Brussels

By Donald Rosenberg  
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BRUSSELS, Belgium — The Cleveland Orchestra and music director Christoph von Dohnanyi, continuing their first joint European tour, are settling in the Belgian capital until Tuesday to give concerts under the sponsorship of the National Opera of Belgium.

The Belgian opera will be collaborating with Dohnanyi and the orchestra on a production of Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* at Frazz Lebar's Center in August.

The orchestra performed a rousing concert Friday in Antwerp and a different program Saturday here. With the Cleveland Orchestra chorus, which gave concerts in Oxford Thursday and Friday, Dohnanyi will perform Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* Monday night here.

Today is a free day for the orchestra, which will be the guest of the Belgian Opera at a dinner party tonight at the nearby Chateau La Hulpe.

Before playing the Antwerp concert, the orchestra had a chance to peruse several reviews of its first tour concert Wednesday at London's Royal Festival Hall.

Five of the seven reviews that have appeared praised the orchestra, but four of the critics didn't think much of Dohnanyi's interpretation of the Beethoven *Ninth*. Only Hilary Finch, in the *Times* of London, felt that Dohnanyi had brought a fresh approach to the work.

The orchestra had moved across the Thames River Thursday night for

its first concert ever at the Barbican Centre.

This arts complex includes a concert hall, two theaters for plays, a movie theater, areas for art and trade exhibits and several restaurants. First proposed to the government in 1957, the center didn't open until March 1982.

The center's pristine modernity is in stark contrast to the older architectural styles that dominate in this neighborhood, which is known as The City, and it has come in for its share of criticism from the public. Because the Barbican Centre is built on a series of terraces, it's quite simple to get lost in the maze.

There's certainly no shortage of artistic activity at the Barbican. The Cleveland Orchestra's concert Thurs-

day at the Barbican Hall occurred at the same time as performances of *Othello* (with Ben Kingsley, who played the title role in Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi*) at the Barbican Theatre and Christopher Hampton's adaptation of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* at The Pit, a theater-in-the-round. Business seemed to be booming in all the theaters.

While large audiences attend arts events in London, very few performances sell out. So much is happening in this city on a daily basis that it's easy to pick up a ticket for even the most popular activities.

For instance, outside the Palace Theatre, where the Royal Shakespeare Company's acclaimed musical version of Hugo's *Les Miserables* is playing, one can buy a ticket for any perform-

ance from a scalper (or tout, in the British vernacular) — for four times the original price.

Even a musician as beloved as conductor Sir Georg Solti, whom London press representative Mary DeCamp Carlson said is considered a "god" here, doesn't draw capacity audiences. Solti had attended the Clevelanders' concert at Festival Hall on Wednesday night, when a bit more than 80 percent of the house was full.

In general, orchestra members preferred the Barbican's acoustics to those at Royal Festival Hall. Although the open spaces of Festival Hall had provided the musicians with far too

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