

WHERE'D THAT FORMAT GO?

By MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY
Correspondent

Two weeks ago we told you about a missing DJ, now it's a station's whole format. One of our fans wrote to say WJZZ Smooth Jazz had been "abruptly yanked off a local station. The new format is the same music that can be found all around the dial. Do you know if Smooth Jazz will reappear any time soon for listeners in my area, which is Manchester Township?"

It almost seems that jazz and blues fans are meant to be mistreated, to evoke the same unrequited passions and angst so present in the music itself. Don't they say, "You have to suffer if you want to sing the blues?" But why must fans suffer? Is it some anomaly in our U.S. culture? After all these years, are jazz and blues still part of the counterculture, where fans are forced out into the night to quench their thirsts in the smoky night spots of run-

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down neighborhoods? What is this about?

Alas, the answers we're getting point to nothing more profound than ratings and the blindfolded (or should we say ear-plugged), bloated corporate honchos who live by them. Ratings. Imagine that our access to the ephemeral gifts of life, the stuff that lifts our wretched souls to float somewhere up above \$700 billion bailout packages of Wall Street to where sweet horns cry and saxes rule, imagine that resting in the hands of, well, bean counters.

The facts can't be denied. On Monday, Sept. 5, 2008, Greater Media (didn't I hear that name not long ago?), owner of Philly's WJZZ-FM, "launched a younger-leaning adult contemporary format featuring a variety of artists from Madonna, Rob

Thomas and Kelly Clarkson to Rod Stewart, Elton John and Phil Collins," according to Mediaweek Reports, which added that the station had been "struggling with lackluster ratings..."

John Fullum, vice president and market manager for Greater Media, in Philadelphia, told Mediaweek Reports, "We saw a great opportunity for a station that takes a new, younger approach to today's soft rock in the Philadelphia market."

Young people and Phil Collins? Soft rock? Hmmm. Not the 18-34 young people we know. Major markets in New York, Houston, Denver, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore are said to be following suit.

However, there remains the only stalwart of classic jazz still reigning 24-7 throughout the New York metropolitan area, WBGO, 88.3 FM. And, I would advise my jazz fan to check out WBGO on the Internet at www.WBGO.org, if he can't pull it in from Newark with his crystal set.

Having just completed its fall fund-raising season last Tuesday, the station reports contributions have been flat over the past three years. Given that listeners do relocate and some die,

the constant number implies that new listeners are being added all the time, says Bowles.

While classic jazz features the likes of Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, the loss of smooth jazz stations, particularly Emmis Communications CD101.9 FM, which became 101.9 RX, a rock station, in February, prompted WBGO to add a Smooth Jazz program in April. "We lament the loss of Smooth Jazz WQCD, in April," says Bowles. So WBGO added The Sunday Night Music Mix. From 7 to 11 p.m. on Sundays, a live DJ, Eulis Cathey, who will scratch for you that smooth jazz itch.

And, Bowles reminds us, there is another public radio station, WRTI, the Temple University station, which offers jazz overnight, from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m.

In our research, we also found CBSRadio offering jazz online at AOL, from V98.7 HD1, in Detroit, and WSJT 94.1, in Tampa, Fla.

"When times are tough and

we can't stand listening to news one more minute," says Bowles, "It's nice to have relaxing, intellectual, stimulating programming. It's not about shareholder value or anticipated returns. We just seek to balance our budget with a modicum of dignity. Our mission is to give people choice." And some great choices they are!

WBGO accepts donations year round. Checks can be sent to 54 Park Place, Newark, NJ 07102, or contribute online at www.wbgo.org. The stations annual reports are short, easy to read and posted on its site.

Asbury Park Press radio correspondent Maureen Nevin Duffy created and hosted "Asbury Radio — The Radio Voice of Asbury Park," a weekly public-affairs talk show at the City's WYGG, 88.1FM station, for more than six years. Please send your comments and suggestions regarding Radio Somewhere to AsburyRadio@aol.com or 3 Deal Lake Court, Asbury Park, NJ 07712.

Another non-mainstream
playlist bites the dust