

FM'S REBIRTH IN THE 1960s/ITS WHAT'S HAPPENING, BABY!:

As seen by the re-birth of the stations in Muskegon and Owosso, life began to return to the FM band in the early 1960s. This was due in large measure to the approval in April 1961, of FM Stereo (Multiplex) broadcasting. The FCC chose a system jointly developed by Zenith and GE and the first stations to broadcast Stereo were theirs, WEFM Chicago and WGFM Schenectady (For more on Stereo Broadcasting see the Web Site <http://members.tripod.com/~transmitters/stereo.htm>). Prior to 1961, some stations used Binaural simulcasting to achieve a crude stereo, which was "AM-Left, FM-Right". See web site http://hhscott.com/what's_simulcasting.htm for more information and to see tuners designed for this system. An additional web site discussing binaural broadcasts at New York's WQXR is at <http://www.angelfire.com/nj2/piratejim/nycamhistory6.html>. At least one Michigan combo, WSAM AM-FM, in Saginaw, is believed to have used the process in the early 1960s. Binaural Stereocasting had major flaws and limitations too obvious to even mention.

The *Detroit News* reported on May 31, 1962 that exactly one year after the FCC gave the green light to Multiplex Stereo broadcasting 89 stations were broadcasting in Stereo nationally including four in Detroit, WDTM (106.7), WLDM (95.5), WGPR (107.5), and WOMC (104.3). In Grand Rapids, as of April 1962, WJEF-FM (93.7) and WOOD-FM (105.7) were in Stereo. Of course, some stations at the time that did transmit in Stereo only did so for limited day parts. For example, Gerity's WNEM-FM (102.5) in Bay City continued mono operations in 1964 except for a program called "Candlelight and Wine" from 6:00-8:00 PM followed by a program of show tunes in Stereo (note: WNEM-FM was picked up by a head end in Grayling owned by Soo Microwave Corporation and sent to cable TV companies in Petoskey, Sault Ste Marie, and other cities. They installed a tuner on their equipment rack and tapped its detector, a process that preserved the Stereo subcarriers and the 19 KHz pilot). Stereo caused a new awareness of FM. On March 17, 1962, Hudson's hosted and promoted in newspaper ads a "Stereo Night" event on the 13th floor where the featured speaker was Jack Alan of Detroit's WLDM. Stereo was certainly catching on and FM was catching on with it.

Beginning in the 1960s, FM programming also started to improve and expand. Detroit's WABX, WQRS, WLDM, and WDTM carried drama produced by the BBC and a tremendous amount of classical and show music. However, some stations also started to experiment and to stretch their formats. In fact, some of these stations helped to define what would become the free-form formats through specialty shows carried mainly overnight or on Sunday evenings at least three years before stations in San Francisco and elsewhere introduced them on a full time basis. In his book *Rockin' Down the Dial*, David Carson cites an article in *Life* magazine which discussed the birth of free-form radio in San Francisco. Quoting Carson (p. 222): "This account, as given in a 1968 issue of *Life* Magazine, was nearly accurate except for its failure to mention that a guy named Larry Miller was already on the air with a free-form show from midnight to 6 A.M., at the same San Francisco station.... According to Detroit broadcaster {WABX Air Ace} Dave Dixon, Miller should get more credit.... Dixon recalls that Miller had done an eclectic program on one of Detroit's seldom listened to FM stations, most likely WDTM or WQRS, in about 1966." In fact the program Dixon referred to was "Promenade" and the station was WDTM. The source for my additional information on Larry Miller and his role in Detroit at WDTM comes from a web site:

www.borderlinebooks.com/us6070s/fuzz.html?http://www.borderlinebooks.com/us6070s/s9z.html . Here is what that site contains about Larry Miller:

“It's worth noting that Larry Miller, who was an early member of **Southbound Freeway** {a progressive rock band} was primarily a DJ in Detroit, with WDTM, a Fine Arts/Classical station. His "Promenade" show based on thematic programming of folk, cabaret, spoken word and miscellaneous stuff, is regarded as a precursor of sixties FM format. Miller later created the all night show on KMPX in San Francisco in Feb of 67 as an electrified extension of Promenade.”

Additionally, the David Carson book provides a superb look at Detroit FM rock radio in the late 1960s and early 1970s in his chapter titled “Over Under Sideways Down”). WDTM also produced a still famous interview with folk singer Bob Dylan while he was performing in Detroit in 1965. But that kind of programming was mainly limited to independent FM stations without AM companions until the FCC mandated unique programming on stations in major cities in the mid-1960s (as opposed to simulcasting the AM side). In anticipation of the requirement to generate separate program content on FM, some AM-FM combo stations used AM DJs in a different role on FM as part of the increasing experimentation that was occurring. Perhaps the most successful of these arraignments anywhere was at WABC-FM in New York, where their programmer, Rick Sklar, used the legendary Dan Ingram as the host of a jazz and blues program he called “The Other Dan Ingram Show” (a scoped air check from 1967 is available at <http://www.musicradio77.com/evolution.html>).

As the late Rick Sklar noted in his 1984 book, *Rocking America* (page 143), “The FCC had decreed that FM stations had to program separately from their AM counterparts at least half the time in major cities where the same company owned both stations.” Beginning in 1966, Sklar was asked to help program WABC-FM. He described the format he developed like this: “Playing more progressive rock, a mixture of music including Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Joan Baez, and Janis Joplin, it was in sharp contrast to the bubble gum sounds prevalent on WABC that year” (1966). This experimentation by ABC was significant in Michigan because it led to the ethereal “Love” format featuring “Brother John” on the ABC Owned and Operated FM stations including Detroit’s WXYZ-FM (101.1MHz) which, while it failed (see the interview with Dick Kernan in the Art Vuolo Radio History produced for WDRQ in 1971, Chapter 12) eventually morphed to the progressive format still on at WXYZ-FM’s successor, WRIF (there were rumors at the time that the WRIF call was actually meant for Chicago and that the Detroit station was to have been WDAI but that ABC transposed their applications as they changed the calls at all of their O&O FM stations *en masse*). WJR-FM, Detroit, became “California Radio” with an automated Bill Drake format in Stereo (another Bill Drake format called “Hit Parade '69” debuted at about the same time on WSBM, a Stereo station in Saginaw).

WKNR-FM (100.3MHz) briefly programmed progressive rock before developing and adopting the MOR “Stereo Island” format (loosely modeled after the “Quiet Island” format developed by programmer Jack Schulke—see the book *Elevator Music* by Joseph Lanza, 1994, especially Chapter 11, “The Rise of Easy-Listening FM”—note however that this book, while very detailed, does not deal with any Michigan stations). CKLW-FM (93.9MHz) continued to simulcast “the Big 8” during the day but introduced a program of beautiful music (in mono) at night in 1963 that expanded in 1967 (see http://www.rcc.ryerson.ca/ccf/CCF_Listings_and_Histories/Radio/On/SW_Ontario/CIDR-FM_Windsor_History.htm). They used an oldies segue called “a Decade of Big 8 Hits” presented sans announcers on FM only which then shifted to beautiful music. Some Michigan NBC affiliates that normally simulcasted their AM stations took advantage of the news-talk-heavy weekend “NBC Monitor” series to separately program music on the

FM side. This happened in Traverse City and Petoskey where WTCM-FM (103.5) and WMBN-FM (then at 96.7 with 1kw) linked as the "Paul Bunyan FM Network" to carry programming called "The Wonderful World of Stereo" on weekends beginning in Traverse City in 1966 and expanding to Petoskey in 1967.

While Rhythm and Blues was still the purview of AM radio, that format started making inroads on FM as well with stations like WWWS (107.1 with 2kw), Saginaw (using the "W-3-Soul" positioner) and WGPR (107.5) in Detroit ("Soul in Stereo, Finger Poppin' Good"). In fact, during an interview for the 1971 Detroit Radio History produced by Art Vuolo; Norm Miller, General Manager of Booth Broadcasting's urban WJLB (AM) in Detroit was absolutely prophetic. Citing the success of Booth's urban FM station in Toledo, he predicted that FM would overtake AM radio. Of course, in 1980, WJLB moved its urban programming to FM, restoring the WJLB call sign to a station that began as W49D. This excerpt from the National Association of FM Broadcasters meeting in 1967 sums up the state of FM by the latter half of the 1960s (note the section on Grand Rapids' WJFM, formerly WJEF-FM):

"At the National Association of FM Broadcasters luncheon, FCC's Robert Cahill predicted that earth-circling satellites will speed the growth of FM stereo Radio. FM is no longer "a free bonus with no commercials. This is a noble (sic) position FM can no longer take as it becomes an entity of its own." He said the growth of FM was slow after WWII. "In 1948 we had 1020 FM outlets but only 58 were actually on the air." By 1956, there were still only 546 stations. But today, "in the vernacular of the modern DJ, we can say FM is what's happening, baby." He went on to say that the FCC's forced divorce of FM and AM stations brought horrified groans at first, but that there are now 512 FM outlets programming in stereo and 389 have gone to circular polarization antennas which brings FM into the automobile. Then Bruce Glycadgis of WJFM, Grand Rapids, related the evolution of his FM outlet into a "regular radio station." He said the station went on the air in 1951 with 100,000 watts, jacked up to 500,000 in 1960. "At that point we faced the problem of programming, for we separated from AM. Against my better judgment, we went the way of all FM--to classical music." After five years of moderate success, WJFM switched to middle of the road music-news-sports programming and has evolved during the past year to what Glycadgis calls "The Modern Sound." His taped illustration included some Si Zentner and the Seekers with "Georgy Girl." DJ chatter was brief and cueing was quick-- strictly AM style." (From web site <http://www.broadcast.net/pipermail/broadcast-airchex/1996-November/004216.html>).

WJFM also exported this "modern sound" to John Fetzer's Cadillac operation, WWTV-FM (92.9 with 100kw). The WWTV-FM antenna was mounted on the WWTV tower which at the time it was built it was the second largest in the world at 1,282 feet—standing directly at the base of that tower as a child and looking up was unforgettable—a fact to which I can personally attest. With the current trend toward football and other sports moving to the FM dial, it is interesting to note that Mr. Fetzer broadcast the Detroit Tigers on WWTV-FM for many years in the 1960s. However, while stations today tout their Stereo sound, these games were in "lo-fi" mono, i.e. off the same landlines that carried that the games to AM outlets. During the mid-late 1960s, Northern Michigan was also one of the few locales left anywhere that still offered live FM Stereo broadcasts (which lacking tape hiss and surface noise provided simply stunning sound). On Sunday's, WIAA (then at 88.3) at the Interlochen Arts Academy carried live concerts from an auditorium on the campus.

There were some innovations in the 1960s and early 1970s that did not prove as successful. One was four-channel Quadraphonic Sound. There was some interest in perfecting a means to broadcast discrete four-channel sound on FM. However, Quadraphonic sound proved to be a decisive commercial flop before the FCC ever approved a system. However, those who recall the announcements on some Michigan stations like WGRD-FM in Grand Rapids in the early 1970s "...in Stereo and four-channel Quadraphonic Sound..." or who attended "Quadraphonic Night" in Grand Rapids at Roger's Plaza in 1972 know that Quadraphonic Sound was in fact broadcast on FM. This was matrix four-channel sound. Stations that played records or carried programs encoded with the Columbia "SQ" matrix information or the competing Sansui "QS" encoding in theory broadcast in quadraphonic sound because the encoding simply came along for the ride. Some syndicated programs carried by a variety of Michigan FM stations were four-channel encoded including the "King Biscuit Flower Hour".

Another failed innovation was Dolby FM, which required difficult calibration by way of a reference tone that sounded somewhat like today's Emergency Alert System, in order to listen to or record using Dolby pre-emphasis. WJZZ (105.9 MHz Detroit) listeners from 1975 will remember that calibration tone since they were one of about 100 stations nationally that used the Dolby system in their sound processor.

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, FM slowly gained the acceptance that its supporters always knew it would. Sadly, many of these supporters were no longer around to see it, as these visionary broadcasters were part of a trail of failed FM stations like WJJW Wyandotte, WMLN, Mt. Clemens, and others.