

NEW MUSIC



WDET's Dave Dixon hosts a new TV show Thursday nights on WADL, Channel 38.

Radio plays it safe for ratings

By John Corlitz
Special writer



Fred Jacobs, the brains behind classic rock whose company consults about 20 stations across the continent, including WCSX.

Late last year, Boston's WFXX-FM asked its listeners to rank the top 101 songs of the '80s. "How Soon Is Now?" by the Smiths topped the list, with other top spots filled by such artists as U2, New Order, the Cure, R.E.M. and the Clash.

San Diego's XTRA-FM, where Detroit new wave expatriate Mike Halloran currently resides, took the same poll and saw similar results, including the same top tune.

Such a vote by Detroit radio audiences would have markedly different results. A regular listener to Detroit rock radio must think that Husker Du is a memory game and the Smiths are brothers who make enough drops.

The truth is that they are two fine rock bands whose time has come and gone, without so much as whisper over the commercial airwaves of Detroit, "the home of rock'n'roll."

As it stands now, progressive music fans can only be satiated in compact two-hour chunks on Sunday nights, or at hours when most people are either sleeping or watching David Letterman.

And put the shades away, because the future's not so bright. The odds of regularly hearing new music (music by bands who don't have hairdressers, leather stockings or "gun" in their name) on a strong-signal FM station any time soon are slightly less than the odds of Little Richard joining football's L.A. Raiders.

THE SITUATION, according to the experts, is explained by a simple equation: Financial survival equals high advertising revenue, which equals good ratings, which equals tried and true formats — the same classic and not-so-classic rock the AOR stations churn out hour after hour, day after day.

A radio station buying and selling frenzy within the last five years has incurred tremendous debts. Management has to protect its huge investments by going after the top advertising dollar, according to Fred Jacobs, the brains behind classic rock, whose company does consulting work for about 20 stations across the continent, including WCSX.

"Radio is not dictating the situation — ad-

vertising is," Jacobs said. "The reason a lot of stations in the Detroit market have a lot of the same characteristics is that they're all going after the same people."

Those "people" the advertisers want are not Lloyd Cole fans, they're Billy Joel fans who drive nice cars with lots of extra cash to spend. They're Led Zeppelin fans who drive crummy cars with no extra cash to spend, but spend it anyway.

The only way for advertisers to know if their jaunty jingles are perpetually stuck in the minds of their target audience is the all-powerful rating.

"If you're going to succeed in this business you must have good ratings in a desirable demographic," said Jacobs. "The problem is that the ratings are frequently questioned, and even if they are accurate, all they tell you is that you went up or down. You never know why."

COUNT WDET's Dave Dixon among those who questions the ratings system. "Ratings are legalized extortion," declared

Dixon, who hosts a new TV show Thursday nights on WADL, Channel 38. "It's a system that radio doesn't have the guts to wean itself off. Stations who spend more money with the ratings people have a better chance to get higher ratings."

Dixon likened the ratings system to payola scandals involving stations taking cash to play certain records, and predicted that, as with payola, the system will be exposed.

"Someone in the ratings business will write a tell-all story," he prophesied, "and the next day radio will be as radically changed as Russia."

Will it take something as momentous as the fall of the Berlin Wall to get a station that plays more Stone Roses than Rolling Stones?

"I think a station like this can be successful in Detroit," Jacobs said, referring to a new music format called the Edge that he has developed and copyrighted. "How successful is harder to say. It's to make money, but given this debt situation, that's usually not enough anymore."

"Detroit is a real cool city — it could support a new music station no problem," said Halloran via telephone from San Diego, where the station he programs makes \$12 million a year and regularly rates in the market's top five. "We've proven that you can do it and survive. It's a matter of someone in Detroit realizing that AOR is essentially a dead format and giving this a real shot."

HALLORAN BLAMED the demise of his former station WLBS (now WKSG) on lack of direction and commitment from management, and said that a station needs both to instill a new music format, something stations are wary to do.

"Fear motivates a lot of decisions that are made," said Jacobs. "But I can understand why someone who owns a \$15 million radio station may not want to roll the dice."

White radio is playing crap, it must actively pursue the listening desires of its audience — and the listeners must make their opinions known. Otherwise they can only mutter to themselves in vain when they hear "Rocket Man" on three stations at once.

"It's not always easy to find out what people want," observed Jacobs. "No radio station wants to do things that people hate."

IN CONCERT

● **Sense of Smell**
Sense of Smell will perform on Monday, March 19, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 596-2747.

● **Captain Dave**
Captain Dave and the Psychedelic Lounge Cats will perform on Tuesday, March 20, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **Beer on the Penguin**
Beer on the Penguin will perform on Tuesday, March 20, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 596-2747.

● **Imitation of Life**
Imitation of Life will perform for the "Post Modern View" on Tuesday, March 20, at the Lameligh Cafe, 24300 Hoover, Warren. For information, call 756-6140.

● **Helios Creed**
Helios Creed will perform with guests, Wig, on Tuesday, March 20, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● **The Look**
The Look will perform Wednesday, March 21, and Friday and Saturday, March 23-24, at Juggers, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford. For information, call 661-1700.

● **Iodine Raincoats/Iodine Raincoats**
Iodine Raincoats will perform on Wednesday, March 21, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **The Huntones**
The Huntones will perform on Wednesday, March 21, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 596-2747.

● **Missionary Stew**
Missionary Stew will perform with guests, Walk the Dogma, on Thursday, March 22, at Club 3-D, 1815 N. Main, near 12 Mile, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

● **Juice**
Juice will perform on Thursday, March 22, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 365-9760.

● **M-16**
M-16 will perform on Thursday, March 22, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **Soul Review**
Southwest Soul Review, featuring Nap-

py Brown, Mighty Sam McLean, Wayne Bennett and Johnny Adams, will perform Thursday, March 22, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.

● **Lonnie Mack**
Blues guitarist Lonnie Mack will perform on Friday, March 23, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 596-2747.

● **Flash Back**
Flash Back will perform a reunion bash on Friday, March 23, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **Anson Funderburgh**
Anson Funderburgh and the Rockets with Sam Meyers will perform on Friday, March 23, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.

● **Frank Allison**
Frank Allison and the Odd Sox will perform on Friday, March 23, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● **Straight Ahead**
Straight Ahead will perform on Friday and Saturday, March 23-24, at the Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. For information, call 662-8310.

● **Speakers Corner**
Speakers Corner will perform on Saturday, March 24, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2015 Condit, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-9760.

● **Trash Bratz**
Trash Bratz will perform with guests, Broken Toys and Ick, on Saturday, March 24, at Blondies, 21139 W. Seven Mile, Detroit. For information, call 525-8168.

● **Pro-choice benefit**
Frank Allison and the Odd Sox and the Urbanians will perform in the Ann Arbor Committee to Defend Pro-Choice at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 24, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **See Dick Run**
See Dick Run will perform with guests, Civilians, on Saturday, March 24, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● **Steve Nardella**
Steve Nardella will perform on Saturday, March 24, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.



Anson Funderburgh and the Rockets will perform Friday, March 23, at Sully's in Dearborn.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs on WOUX-FM 90.1, campus station of Oakland University in Rochester.

1. "Blue Savannah," Erasure.
2. "Favorite Pack of Lies," Steve Kilbey.
3. "Faith Collapsing," Ministry.
4. "Enterlike Me," Psychedelic Furs.
5. "Lucky Ball and Chain," They Might Be Giants.
6. "I Won't Write You a Letter," Doughboys.
7. "Beautiful Red Dress," Laurie Anderson.
8. "Venus Sands," Preachers.
9. "Never Be Mine," Kate Bush.
10. "I Couldn't Smile," Jank Monkeys.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs (no particular order) heard on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDET-FM 90.7.

1. "Funky Cowboy," Goobar & Peas.
2. "My Turn to Cry," The Gear.
3. "It's My Turn," Ickabod Stowe.
4. "Again," Cuppa Joe.
5. "Tap Dance," The Process.
6. "Here's Looking at You," Michael Sklad.
7. "Nightmares," Joey Harlow Project.
8. "Walking With an Angel," Nolan Vold.
9. "The Fighter," Soul Station.
10. "Modification," Standing Pavement.

REVIEWS

WAKING ON EACH OTHER
— The Elementals

"Waking on Each Other" is the latest effort by Robert Thibodeau's band, The Elementals. Thibodeau, owner of Berkley's Mayflower Bookshop, is somewhat of a local celebrity in Detroit: metaphysical circles. He describes his role on "Waking on Each Other" as "songwriter, romantic-futurist, celestial navigator, mystic voyager, metaphysical and meratheric musician."

"Waking on Each Other" is the type of album that grows on you. Fans familiar with the Elementals' earlier, more rock'n'roll oriented efforts will initially be surprised, and possibly disappointed, by the new softer sound of the group. But this new sound starts sounding better and better with repeated listenings.

Thibodeau calls the album "easy listening folk-rock romance." In the old days, it would have been called "make-out music."

Thibodeau sings in a breathy fairy tale voice full of child-like wonder. This takes a little getting used to. Rarely are males singers so plainly honest, emotional or God forbid, as openly joyful as Thibodeau is on "Waking on Each Other."

Other highlights include "Soul Doctor," a song that has drawn comparisons to John Lennon's later efforts and "Whistling Chopticks," a song about the importance of re-



moaning silly.

Chris McCall of Jugglers and Thieves instantly lops her work with that band with her back-up vocals on this album. In Jugglers and Thieves, her voice is sometimes drowned out by guitar pyrotechnics, but her voice rings clear and true. She reaches breath-taking loveliness on "Woman (womb-in)," a hopeful duet along the lines of Peter Gabriel's "Don't Give Up."

Another local luminary on the album is Darryl Dykba, the co-producer and keyboard player. Dykba's credits include work with Frank Zappa, Earl Klugh and Chet Atkins. Romantic types will find love songs a plenty on "Waking on Each Other." Nine out of the 11 songs, including "Bless Your Heart," "I'm in Love" and "Is My Love Good Enough?" deal with the ever-popular subject of love.

As Thibodeau puts it, "The Elementals just kissed you on the lips."

— Jill Hamilton

OUR FLAWS
MAKE US
PERFECT

— Sensitive
Big Guys

Sensitive Big Guys is a nutshell: Loud guitars, lyrics humorous, vocals likewise and a peculiar affinity for dairy products.

From there, it's anybody's guess. Can a band be taken seriously with such neo-cosmopolitan and vexing political titles as "Cheap Beer" and "Lazy People" along with "Sour Cream" and "Yogurt" (obviously earning the Big Guys a seal of approval from the American Dairy Council)?

Let's hope not.

"Our Flaws Make Us Perfect" is an example of a group that is quite content with being a guitar guttural basement band. Maybe that's not so bad. At least the Sensitive Big Guys are not guilty of pretension.

Partners in guitar, Rob Varney and Brian Russel, provide a hornet's nest of string activity from the opening number "Sour Cream" that doesn't relent. As a vocalist, Varney won't have Boon quaking in his boots. Judging by the cement mixer



Our flaws make us perfect.

sound, Brian Eno (curator of music for dentist chairs) wasn't called in for production work.

There is no attempt to offset any of the eight punk guitar driven numbers with anything resembling a melody. Lyrically, the Big Guys have some bite. That is if you can hear it through the guitar mumble.

Provided in "When I Met You," a love song that microwaves the heart: "When I met you birds fell from the trees/Then the state of Texas was conquered by killer bees/Then part of California fell into the sea/Then all Kansas was conquered by leprosy." Geez, kind of makes you regret letting Hallmark do the job on Valentine's Day.

If one thing makes the Sensitive Big Guys an endearing bunch, it's their humor. You'll laugh until you're ears hurt. Or your ears will hurt until you laugh.

— Larry O'Connor

THE SWEET
KEEPER

— Tanita Tikaram

"The Sweet Keeper" by Tanita Tikaram is an album for the VH-1 generation. VH-1, for the benefit of those who aren't blessed or cursed, as the case may be, with cable television, is an adult (read: mellow) version of the MTV video station.

But, Tikaram is a crossover artist in the sense that both aging baby boomers and their kids will like her music.

In the past, the generation gap between the over 30s and under 30s was especially apparent in musical tastes. The oldesters jammed to the likes of Perry Como and Bing Crosby, while their children listened to groups with weird names like the Who and the Doors. Not exactly a generation gap . . . more like a chasm.

Now, these aging thirtysomethings want to remain cool in their musical tastes, but their fast-track-added brains don't take so kindly to fast and loud music anymore. So, artists like Suzanne Vega, Steve Winwood and the Cowboy Junkies become popular. The music is hip, but easy on the ears.

"The Sweet Keeper" is the follow-up to Tikaram's 1988 effort, "An-



Sweet Keeper" probably will, too, since it is pretty much the same reason.

Tikaram is somewhat of a rarity in the music business in that she wrote the all words and music on the album, and played many of the guitar parts herself.

The petite Tikaram also has an amazingly deep voice.

This is interesting at first because her voice is so unusual and distinctive. But, with repeated listenings, it soon turns annoying as it quickly becomes apparent that Tikaram has an incredibly small vocal range.

She lolls/sings through the 10 songs on "The Sweet Keeper" in the same monotonous tone of voice.

In other words, if you like one song off of "The Sweet Keeper," you will surely like all of them because the album sounds more like one big song with minor variations than a collection of different songs.

— Jill Hamilton