

Local 99

American Federation of Musicians • AFL - CIO / CLC

artistry
advocacy
unity



November 9, 2007

Chairman, Commissioners, citizens,

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For us, this is about radio and the simple question is,

Is radio programming more accessible, more diverse and of higher quality now than before the last round of consolidation? The obvious answer, unless you don't own a radio, is a resounding NO! Why would it be any different this time? Even a cursory look at the incredibly negative consequences of the vertical integration and control companies like Clear Channel have gained, at the expense of quality, local programming, speaks volumes.

In Portland, we decided to take a closer look at radio. We got volunteers to listen to and document a broad mix of local commercial stations. We visited them, went through the public files, talked to programmers and managers, and came back with pretty clear evidence of problems with the state of Portland radio. What was absent was a connection to the community and its local musicians. Out of all the commercial stations in Portland, only two were giving any airplay to local artists, and it was minimal at best. This, in a region with one of the most vibrant music scenes in the US. Home to a plethora of emerging artists and indie bands, our citizens – *your* citizens – have been deprived of the pleasure of hearing their home-grown artists on radio in their own town.

We filed an informal objection for FCC license renewal against three of our local stations. None of them were playing local music. Two had no dj's, no news, weather, traffic, nothing tying them to the local community. With consolidated ownership already at detrimental levels, radio execs in distant cities are thumbing their noses at the concept of serving the public interest, convenience and necessity. I forgot, they did have public affairs programming that aired on Sunday morning at 6 am and in those instances, the same programming aired on the five other stations owned by each of the conglomerates. Obviously a cost benefit to them, but a symbolic slap in the face to fulfilling their public interest obligations. While there were numerous other "violations", in our opinion, one of the letters in particular jumped out at me. Virtually every complaint letter in the public file had been answered, except the letter from a local band asking what the procedure was for garnering airplay? No response, and when I talked to the band later, they confirmed that their request was ignored. No consideration. This is not an isolated incident. I hear it over and over from musicians with high quality recordings, bands that are touring and performing locally, nationally and internationally.

Let's talk about Payola. It's illegal, it's wrong and it's enabled by consolidation. Recall, it was the large conglomerates that were recently busted. And even though they agreed, as part of the settlement, to provide airtime for independent artists, they seem to have backed out of that agreement. Even worse, look at the attempt by Clear Channel to strip these artists of their royalties in exchange for this airplay - airplay that they agreed to provide. There was a time when

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local stations rallied behind local artists and celebrated when their participation and support moved these musicians to the next level of success. No more. There is a pattern here, and it's a direct result of an arrogant and disengaged media power structure cultured in the Petri dish of consolidation.

What is additionally disheartening, though, are conversations with people inside the stations. DJ's with no input on programming. Newscasters questioning their future employment because their departments are being gutted. Programming directors (PD) making their music choices based strictly on so-called "research". I had to ask one PD whether he actually listened to anything before making his programming choices –he evaded the question. And station managers that believe they are providing localism when 1 of the 6 stations they own has any local content. One out of six. Frankly, consolidation will kill radio. It's the lack of quality programming that has been the outgrowth of consolidation that is driving people away from terrestrial radio and to their ipods, webcasting and satellite radio. One of my challenges when we were researching the stations was just getting people to listen. I can't tell you how many times I heard something like, "I'd love to help, but I never listen to radio anymore because it sucks".

Of course, much of the debate here is about economics. There is only one winner under consolidation, and it's not the workers. Don't forget that every band out there is a small independent business, and they are all, always, fighting for survival. Radio, for now, is still the best outlet for a band to break out, so if they are to grow *their* businesses, they must have access.

Finally, let me come full circle here. The National Association of Broadcasters claims that there are twice as many radio stations now as compared to 30 years ago. That should mean there would be *more* access and *better* programming, but the opposite is true. Why? While there may be more stations, they are controlled by fewer owners. When 3 companies in Portland own 17 of the radio stations, over 50% of the market, and certainly a combined listenership greater than that, and popularly driven quality programming disappears, it should be clear to everyone that we are not moving in the right direction. Time and again, the people have told you that they don't believe they are being well served by this government's communications policies. It's time for you to listen to the millions of voices, the people you are supposed to serve, and not the broadcast lobbyists walking the halls of the FCC. They may have your ear, but they're our airwaves, the public airwaves, and we want them back.

Thank you much

Bruce Fife
President, AFM, Local 99