

# RADIO RADIO



Elvis Costello & the Attractions

The science of radio programming is not within the ken of the masses, nor — it seems — is it meant to be. Complicated by extraordinary and intimidating jargon, it is a hefty tool crafted out of such awe-inspiring matter as the random listener survey and the attitudinal research results. Like all such methodology these deal a fair clout, and they've been bashed around in Auckland a lot in the last couple of weeks.

Of course, all radio stations employ some form of programming; it is what makes one station different from another in musical content, approach, advertising sponsorship, disc jockeys and so on. The formula which makes up the average radio hour, its variations and the actual playlist from which the DJs chose to play, are all decided upon by the station programmer.

There was really only one exception to this radio rule in Auckland and that was Barry Jenkin whose three-year contract had given him programming rights for his own 7-10pm slot on Radio Hauraki. For the past year or so Barry Jenkin has sunk his teeth deep into the current stock of new wave material, playing up a storm on the station's stereo. For his troubles he got the sack at the beginning of last month.

Dismissal did not come, says Barry Jenkin, like a bolt from the blue. Things had been changing at home base. It had been David Gapes who had hired Barry Jenkin to do a free format show; he was no longer with the station. Graham Parsonage was the programme director for most of Barry's employment at Hauraki.

"He seemed to have made the decision to leave me alone as far as my show's content went," says Barry. But he'd gone too.

It was with the hiring of Australian programmer Gary Roberts that penance began. A just-released survey from McNair put Barry six per cent lower than his previous rating. Additional research commissioned by Hauraki had up-turned comments that Barry Jenkin's show was "too heavy", "too way out" and "too specialised". Worst of all — for a radio station which as Gary Roberts says is here to make money — some listeners found Barry Jenkin a "specific turn-off factor".

Says Gary Roberts: "Something had to be done. People just aren't accepting wall-to-wall new wave. It's nice in fits and starts, but it's punishing listening to three solid hours of it."

Barry Jenkin was asked to "broaden" his appeal. Among the artists proposed by Gary Roberts were Bob Seger, Steely Dan, The Cars and Led Zeppelin. These, Roberts said would be complementary to Barry's usual content and make the show "accessible to the mainstream rock listener."

Finally Barry agreed to give it a whirl. He hadn't even left Caltex House after his first "broadened" show when he was assailed by a petrol-pumping fan who thought he'd lost his marbles. Compromises like that don't satisfy either party, decided Barry Jenkin.

Feeling that he owed his audience an explanation, he disclaimed his programme's content on air. Hauraki were aghast. The next day Barry Jenkin spoke to the press. Although he himself had replied to *The Star* before Barry

Jenkin had, Gary Roberts was incensed by this public airing. "It was the last straw, so I fired him", he said.

Had Hauraki forgotten that Barry Jenkin — through his spot on *Radio With Pictures* and because of his almost unique appreciation of new wave music — was probably the best-known disc jockey in the country? Regardless, publicity for the sacking must have exceeded management's wildest dreams. *The Auckland Star* printed updates on the saga every couple of days and even devoted half a page to letters berating the station for its actions. At the same time a group called "Save Auckland Radio" started up with a petition and a call to boycott Radio Hauraki.

The publicity everyone agrees will soon blow over. But the taste in the mouth will remain. Says Barry Jenkin: "People have seen this as another abrogation of their personal freedom." It is particularly ironic remembering Hauraki's humble beginnings in the mid sixties as an alternative to the schlock then available from the NZBC.

The winners of this round are undoubtedly 12M. They hired Barry Jenkin — with a completely free format show — within a week of his leaving Hauraki; then they also grabbed Fred Botica, for their breakfast show. Hauraki meanwhile had snatched up Alan Beagle. Bryan Staff was dismissed but was re-instated by 12M in the production side of things.

Meanwhile Hauraki are brave-facing the changes. The ratings game is what matters, says Gary Roberts. Barry Jenkin wasn't making the grade; he had to go. As for Fred Botica, he was never going to knock off Merv Smith on the 12B breakfast session, so he'd been shifted to 9-12am. He wasn't happy about that, says the programmer.

12M on the other hand are not out to catch Merv Smith's audience. The whole brouhaha timed itself to fit in with the visit of an American consultant who'd fired the station up for an onslaught on the radio audience. Whether by chance or design, it's a useful promotional device, further publicising "the switch". It could even be called coming in fighting.

Which is more than can be said for 1XI. Their consultant was from Australia, and he had plans too. He suggested 1XI go into "album orientated rock" with a "young adult" emphasis. Sniffing competition if 1XI veered away from its "beautiful music" content, Hauraki bought itself major shareholding status in the station, 1XI has now dumped its finer aspirations and turned even further to the "right" (radio jargon for mostly mainstream schmaltz).

All in all it's still a lively battle that's heating up on the dial. Both Gary Roberts and Graham Bolton are convinced that they'll be tops of the very next set of surveys. Hauraki looks all set to pull more money out of its coffers as audience enticement; 12M's carrot is offering listeners the chance to state their fancy. May the nobler sentiment win.

Louise Chunn

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WATCH FOR THESE TOP BANDS

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SHORT STORY  
CITIZEN BAND  
UPSERVICE  
EAST STREET  
ELECTRABEAT  
PICTURE THIS

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MAIN STREET

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PH 774422  
THURS-SAT

mmm... I think I can hear the sound of sunbathing in here

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