

IS ANYTHING BETTER THAN LIVE MUSIC RADIO?

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“Fighting to stay free”

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And now, ladies and gentlemen...

...I'm trying to remember when people stopped placing value on live entertainment.

Growing up, most of us took it for granted. We figured it would never go away. You could turn on a radio at any time and have someone there.

The problems began when that someone said less and less. And when he/she was clearly reading a script and not letting his/her own voice be heard.

There was research and ratings and all sorts of proof that less talk and more music meant more listeners and longer listening. Many of the best music radio entertainers moved to mornings where music wasn't as important, or they became talk hosts.

Then local hosts began to be replaced by voice tracking and national syndication. The idea of having a friend on the radio in your hometown became antiquated.

Then one day the word “personality” disappeared from radio. And then, the live host started to disappear, too.

Then along came the Internet and the smartphone, which allowed the user to program music without interruption. No commercials or people. By that time, a generation had grown up without “personality,” so they never knew what they were missing.

And now, here we are, witnessing the dismantling of live music radio as we knew it. And just when you thought it couldn't get worse, it has: the idea of non-personality music radio has infiltrated our generation. We said we'd never drink the Kool-Aid, but we have. Most of us have sought out shows online to find music first. The hosts no longer matter; talent is but a memory.

The astounding part of all this is, from the live angle, the personality angle, the entertainment angle – all of which have been unceremoniously junked over the decades – nowhere is there better radio than live radio.

At least we have the air checks to prove this, even though future generations will find it hard to understand why a human being ever needed to talk over the beginning or end (and in some cases the middle – talking to you, Dick Biondi) of a song. The idea of entertainment as a companion to music will be lost.

But before they close the door on live personalities playing music on the radio, there is something we can do to keep the memories alive and remind everyone just how great it was: perform it live.

That's right. Pack up your music, jingles, commercials and everything else and hit the stage. Let's prove to the world that even without a radio, this is superior entertainment. That's what the very first generation of radio talent did when television and music put them out of business, so why can't we?

I know. It sounds strange. Who would pay to see a disc jockey? I think that with the right marketing, everyone would.

If they can make Broadway musicals from pop songs, there can be a live review of radio personalities. After all, so many of the best and brightest are still with us and remain great at what they do.

So who's first? Let's prove to the world that nothing's better than live music radio by making it as live as it can be.



MORE KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCKIN' ON ROCK 'N ROLL HEAVEN'S DOOR?

2012 has not been a good year for legends of contemporary music. We're not even five months in and already we've lost Whitney Houston, Donna Summer, The Bee Gees' Robin Gibb, The Monkees' Davy Jones and The Beastie Boys' Adam "MCA" Yauch.

Rock 'n roll heaven is, to quote an old Betty Everett song, getting mighty crowded.

When you consider that most of popular music's best and brightest, from what was arguably its most fruitful period - the 1960s and 1970s - are now in *their* 60s and 70s, it makes you wonder if we should expect more tearful exits on a more regular basis from here forward.

During those two decades, there were more hit recordings by more artists than ever before or ever since. That's because the music and radio worlds were less controlled: there were more labels and more station owners, and therefore, a better shot at getting your song played on the radio. There were also more listeners for longer periods to a hit music stations, so much so that the average shelf life of a hit song was 7-9 weeks.

That means there were also more top-flight artists who came out of that period - artists who are now, alas, a lot older. While the focus has always been on acts who left us too young, the fact is most of pop's biggest stars are still with us. Even if you go back further - to the 1950s and rock 'n roll's early days - it's worth noting that Elvis and Buddy Holly aside, all of rock's pioneers - Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis - are still here. So is another pop giant of that era - Tony Bennett - although I'm starting to sense that he's going to outlive all of us.

Don't get me wrong - it's never good to lose any of our icons. In fact, I wish the attention currently paid to Donna Summer or Robin Gibb would have happened before they left us, so they would have been here to enjoy the accolades and big increases in sales of their music.

It's wonderful to pay tribute - something I sense we'll be doing more this year and for years to come - but we should also enjoy our pop heroes of the past right now, while they're still with us.

More music...

If you're a collector of radio station music surveys, you understand how important a part of music history these lists are. After all, this is what helped create the weekly national chart: each piece therefore gives us more information about what was popular than what it fed into.

There are two reasons for this. When radio stations still published surveys, many were not run by large groups, which allowed for greater musical freedom by way of 1) songs by artists from inside the station coverage area and 2) songs promoted by smaller labels, or by majors as a means to influence the PDs of larger stations in larger markets.

There are already websites where station surveys are either displayed as they originally appeared (for most major market top 40 stations) or where the lists have been re-typed (<http://www.las-solanas.com/arsa/>) as well as shown as they were. To me, this is the true history of top 40. Especially since every time you look at local surveys, you learn something new.

And, to quote Forrest Gump, "That's all I've got to say about that."

And the hits...

OINK-ERIFIC! In 1987 and '88, during what I'll call "The Time Machine Era," I stayed up late to

hear "Big Jay" Sorensen bring back the glory era of top 40 on WN – make that NNNNNNNNNN – BC in New York. Calling in requests and getting on the air with Jay ("you say it...we play it") was fun, but nothing beat oinking like the Record Pig I was (and still am) if I could stump Big Jay with a music trivia question.

Both Jay and pig-mania live on. You can catch the Big One weekends, even occasional weeknights, on the mighty CBS-FM, and best of all, you can still win an official Record Pig t-shirt by correctly answering Big Jay's weekly trivia every Wednesday right here (http://www.ocpostsentinel.com/JaySorensen/?page_id=2). Knock out everything after Jay's name and you can check out his weekly column and "Pop Music History."

BIGGEST COUNTDOWN EVER? Quite possibly. Wednesdays 9pm to midnight ET on WTBQ, Rob McLean reviews more of the "The RMc 10,010." That's right, the key songs from the history of recorded music, from #10,010 to #1 (<http://www.wtbq.com/personalities/wednesday-programming/>). And no, I've never heard him play a "hit #9,472! 9,472! 9,472!" jingle.

I GOT PLUGS And here they are.

* "The CHRONICLER," in Thursday's *Billboard Top 40 Update* (subscribe free at <http://www.billboard.biz/newsletters>)

* "The Rest Of The Week With Rich Appel," Saturdays 6am-1pm ET, Sundays 10am-3pm ET (listen at <http://wrnradio.com/streaming/>, sample at <http://wrnradio.com/2012/03/watch-rich-appels-video-aircheck-video/>)

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