

Radio-TV Programming

New Country Format Aids Calif. KVRE

By PAUL GREIN

LOS ANGELES—A Northern California country station that modified its format last year to incorporate a progressive country sound reports a marked improvement in sales and listenership as a result.

Ed LaFrance, station manager and program director of KVRE in Santa Rosa, a community of nearly 70,000 located 55 miles north of San Francisco, points out that the current format is about 60% progressive and 40% standard country.

"We didn't clean out our library, throwing away the standard artists. We added the contemporary performers to our catalog. It is arrogant to feel that one can get into progressive country without programming the writers and performers who came before," LaFrance emphasizes that his audience, for the most part, enjoys both the traditional and progressive material he programs.

"Our listeners are as interested in western swing and honky tonk music as they are in the Flying Burritos. The same person who appreciates Pure Prairie League also appreciates the likes of George Jones, Dolly Parton and Hank Williams. This new type of listener demonstrates to us a strong historical awareness of country music's swing.

"This is evidenced in the music itself. Emmylou Harris sings Merle Haggard tunes and the New Riders have regarded Joe Maphis' 'Dim Lights, Thick Smoke.'"

Defining progressive country as a "synthesis of country, blues and rock," LaFrance puts in that category such artists as Mike Audridge, Asleep At The Wheel, The New Riders, Commander Cody, Linda Hargrove, Linda Ronstadt, Kris Kristofferson, Rita Coolidge, the Earl Scruggs Revue, Poco, Emmylou Harris, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Doc Watson, Vassar Clements, Old And In The Way, Doug Dillard, Ray Wiley Hubbard, Hank Williams Jr. and even some Grateful Dead.

Standard country artists by his definition include Lefty Frizzell, Merle Haggard, Hank Thompson, Billie Jo Spears, Hank Williams, Bob Wills, Hank Snow, the Everlys, Don Williams and George Jones.

While he plays both the outlaws and the Nashville stalwarts, LaFrance insists that he doesn't play any artist that isn't "pointedly country."

"We tend to shy away from the MOR country singer. KVRE is not a heavy metal boogie country station. And we are most definitely not a rock station playing a little country. We are foremost a country station. We've just pushed the boundaries back a little to broaden our appeal.

"Recently we presented a special titled 'Rock'N'Country: The Urban Sound' which dealt with the Los Angeles-based style of country. Another was 'Canadian Country' featuring Anne Murray, Gordon Lightfoot, Hank Snow, Ian & Sylvia, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young."



Billboard photos by KVRE
Personality Lineup: The on-the-air team at KVRE in Santa Rosa, Calif., is scoring with a progressive country format that still includes the old-line Nashville stalwarts. From left: Ed LaFrance, station manager and program director, Alan Carner, Shanna Santomieri and Brian Dahle.

KVRE-AM was established in 1962 under the ownership of Joe Nixon, Dick Scofield and Tom Brennan, all formerly of KFOX in Long Beach. For three years the station had an "old-line, folksy" country format.

In 1965, though, KVRE was sold to LaFrance and Bill Colclough, newcomers to country music, who gave it a Top 40 country format.

According to LaFrance, "this occurred hand-in-hand with the emergence of country music's Nashville sound, so KVRE's acceptance grew with the acceptance of Roger Miller, Eddy Arnold, Glen Campbell and the other more sophisticated, up-town country stylists.

"But then in about 1973-74, new influences started to chip away at the rather slick Nashville sound. From Macon and Muscle Shoals came the Allman Brothers, Marshall Tucker and Charlie Daniels; from L.A. came Gram Parsons, Linda Ronstadt and the Burritos; from Austin came Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Doug Sahm; and from the Bay Area came the Grateful Dead, the New Riders Of The Purple Haze and Asleep At The Wheel.

"So in late 1974 we established



New Kind Of Outlaws: "It is arrogant to feel that one can get into progressive country without programming what came before." From left: Ed LaFrance, program director of KVRE, watches afternoon personality Brian Dahle cue up a record.

KVRE-FM and 10 months later we modified our format."

LaFrance insists that the growth of progressive country isn't an aberration of the art form. As he puts it, "it is, to us, a natural evolutionary step dating from Vernon Dalhart and Jimmie Rodgers to the current day.

"I'm sure that at some point the Nashville sound was bemoaned by someone who claimed it was 'too modern' and 'not real country.' But the Nashville sound grew, was accepted, and maintained itself for years as the dominant sound in country music.

"But the Nashville sound will eventually move over and make room for the progressive sound. To us the progressive movement is not a fad, it's just another step. Over the horizon the progressive sound will probably yield to a different form later on."

According to LaFrance, part of the reason for the interest in progressive country in the North Bay area is that dropouts of the San Francisco music culture of the late 1960s have relocated there.

"Most of these musicians are relatively young, rooted in rock and working their way into rock-country, country blues, or, if you will, progressive country. Their influence on the music scene has meant an increasing awareness on our part to

the shifting tastes in country music and has resulted in the program changes."

Because the growth of the club scene in Sonoma County, which has a population of nearly 250,000, has been largely responsible for the progressive boom, KVRE has in the past year presented Jennings, Commander Cody, Asleep At The Wheel, Doc and Merle Watson and Tompall Glaser at the Inn of the Beginning Club in nearby Cotati. The station has even done live remote broadcasts on some of these shows.

LaFrance, who identifies his target audience as the 20-40 age bracket, notes "time sales are up more than 30% since we modified the format. And though we have lost some of our old-line listeners, the marked increase in positive reaction convinces us that the change was for the better."

A radio programmer for 18 years, LaFrance's experience was mainly in Top 40, MOR and jazz prior to coming to KVRE. He worked at WPEA, WTSN and WBBX in New Hampshire, WCTC in New Brunswick, N.J., and KRIZ and KXIV in Phoenix.

LaFrance handles the morning shift at the station, while the other air personalities include Alan Carner, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Brian Dahle, 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. and Shanna Santomieri, 7 p.m. to midnight.

Vox Jox

By CLAUDE HALL

Would someone say hello to Khan Hamond, who owns Audio America, San Antonio? ... Loring Fisher has been appointed executive vice president of Bonneville Broadcast Consultants, Tenafly, N.J. Frank Murphy has been promoted to director of creative services. ... John Shomby, program director, 98Q, Vidalia, Ga., writes: "Our staff is now complete. I'm on from 5:30 a.m. to 9 a.m., followed by Butch Jackson until 11 p.m. Our music director Scott Kerr is next until 6 p.m. Dave O'Brien goes until 10 p.m., followed by Martin Peterson until 2 a.m., and Craig Adams until 5:30 a.m. Working weekends for us are Chuck Creamer, William MacArthur, and Mike Todd. The station has just received its first plaque for breaking 'Shannon' by Henry Gross."

The lineup at KTGR in Columbia, Mo., now has program director John (Jerry Dee) Sutherland doing the 6-10 a.m. shift, operations director Jim Wight doing 10-noon, Russ Shellabarger noon-2 p.m., Jim Sullivan 2-6 p.m., Steve Twitchell 6-10 p.m., Kathy Bogler 10 p.m.-2 a.m., Chris Gilbert 2-6 a.m., and week-enders Vic (Vic Rollands) Eisenstein and Chris Velez. It's a Top 40 station. Sutherland recently replaced program director Mike Jordan and Jim Wight just came in from WJJD in Chicago. ... Greg Thomas, 512-442-7606, has finished studies at the Univ. of Texas and is looking for a job with an album rock station. He was music director of KLBJ, Austin.

Bill Douglas has been given music director duties at WPAR in Parkersburg, W.Va., as well as promotion duties. Rest of the staff there includes chief engineer Randy Kinsolving, Bob Jones, program director Randy Moellendick, and weekend persons Dave Michaels, Steve McCoy, and the syndicated Casey Kasem show. ... If anyone is in San Francisco or in driving distance of that town Sept. 19-21, I'll be in room 317 of the Hyatt Regency Embarcadero during the NRBA convention. On Sept. 22, I'm flying down to Nashville and will be hanging out with Mac Allen working as one of his many advisors on the annual Country Music Seminar. Probably be
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On The Air: Alan Carner, morning man at KVRE, gives Northern California listeners Emmylou Harris and Asleep At The Wheel along with western swing, honky tonk music and Merle Haggard drinking songs.

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