

Around Country, FM Turns to Rock

By JACK GOULD

The most rapidly expanding development in broadcasting is "underground radio," which transmits a broad diversity of rock music for FM listeners from their late teens to their middle 30's.

A random survey of such stations in many parts of the country suggests the audience for underground radio covers the spectrum of those who like the music for itself, those who use it as background music for social marijuana smoking and in some instances "to get stoned by," those who respond to pleas for active social protest within the law and those who openly want to radicalize the country.

The emergence of what many broadcasters believe is a fundamental medium of communication among an unmeasurable number of the nation's younger people is taking place on frequency-modulation stations that have found classical music unprofitable and have switched to rock.

Dissatisfaction a Theme

The lyrics echo the beliefs of many listeners: dissatisfaction with society, alienation from older people with "closed minds," loneliness, general love of humanity, and disgust with political leaders who "don't know what time it is" and are purportedly preparing "greater oppression to stifle dissent."

Virtually without exception rock FM station owners and students said television's influence had almost completely waned save for sports, news and an occasional movie. Most TV commercials insulted the intelligence of those either in college or recently graduated, they said.

A total of 350 to 400 FM stations, according to estimates by several station owners who recently met in convention in Chicago, have adopted the rock format with varying degrees of vigor. The most conservative outlets carry pretaped syndicated "love rock" or "chicken rock" — synonyms for blandness—and the more outspoken acid rock or jazz rock.

Linkletter Is Critical

In broadcasting, the most articulate foe of underground radio and rock subculture is Art Linkletter, TV entertainer and wealthy businessman, whose 20-year-old daughter, Diane, died last October after jumping out of a sixth-floor window under the influence of LSD. He has been touring the country since the family's tragedy, asserting that the ultimate effect of much of "underground radio" is to encourage experimentation with drugs.

The phrase "underground radio," which many avant-gardists of FM rock already regard as passé, is not used in the general political sense. Rather it represents the technique of picking "cuts" or



Joyce Dopkeen for The New York Times

Charles Laquidara dispenses rock music from WBCN-FM to Boston listeners. Switching from all-classics to a blend of classics and rock has enriched station by \$41,000 a month.

segments from long-playing rock albums, which often do not make the list of the top 40 rock tunes offered on single 45-r.p.m. disks.

The top 40 are still widely used by powerful AM stations to attract less sophisticated youths and are frequently accompanied by disk jockies speaking at a machine-gun rate of speech and sounding hysterical. But such records also may censor out lines from the original version.

Obscure Lyrics Used

The lyrics of harder rock virtually constitute an arcane language, difficult to comprehend because of the blurred diction of so many rock artists.

In the judgment of some professional observers of the rock scene, reports of codes, innuendo and double meanings can be a "put on" by youngsters, who believe it adds more to the privacy of their own society.

Stereophonic FM, which surrounds the listener with sound, is purposely raised in volume by the young so that they can physically sense the vibrations of the audio waves and emphasize what one college graduate characterized as the social schism between generations.

George Duncan, president of WNEW-FM, which has had a spectacular rise in popularity in New York, says that the intensified interest in rock apparently extends to what youth believes can be a more relevant broadcasting environment.

Unlike the rapid-fire delivery of earlier rock disk

jockies, their new FM counterparts talk in low and seductive voices. They don't speak louder in delivering commercials and are especially interested in products and events common to youth in society—boutiques, jazz concerts, underground newspapers.

A characteristic of FM rock is heavy emphasis on bass, including drums and cellos and random periods of silence.

The Boston station WBCN-FM simply read a news report of proposed legislation in the Massachusetts Legislature that challenged the legality of the United States' involvement in the Vietnamese war on the ground that Congress had not formally declared war, and then urged its listeners to telegraph their opinions. In a community surrounded by colleges, the resultant deluge of messages was believed to be partly responsible for Gov. Francis W. Sargent's decision to sign the bill.

In San Francisco, Robert Preston, program director of KMPX-FM, said that his outlet was urging neighbors to form car pools to drive out to the country and buy fresh vegetables to avoid paying inflationary supermarket prices. Listeners were also informed of legal agencies prepared to take action against landlords who either were seeking rental increases or not maintaining their buildings in good condition.

Several other broadcasters, requesting anonymity, said that the advantage of FM "underground radio" was

that it could survive economically by pinpointing its efforts rather than catering to the mass following that television and large AM stations must woo.

Mrs. Sarah Newsam, business manager of WBCN-FM, said the Boston station once received heated protests from college girls for running standard cosmetic advertisements. The girls, she said, maintained they were old enough to know their preferences. The advertisements of local retail stores, such as those carrying innovations in sandals or dress attire, proved more interesting, she said.

Mrs. Newsam added that the income of the station had jumped from \$11,000 to \$52,000 a month net when it switched from classics to rock, even though classics continued to comprise a part of its schedule.

Many FM broadcasters believe that although users of marijuana do not constitute the majority of their audiences, social pot smokers who work regular hours and hold regular jobs are far more extensive throughout the country than either Federal, state or local authorities admit.

LSD Fad Waning

Subtle references to "grass" or "flying high" and "looking down on the world" proved commonplace in two weeks of monitoring some New York FM stations in the early morning hours and in reports from out of town. A cross-section of FM broadcasters said that LSD had dropped out as a fad on the college level some time ago and that it and heroin were now practically never mentioned.

A Chicago AM station, WCFL, which combines both the top 40 and some underground radio, last fall demonstrated the audience appeal of the rock format. As an impulsive stunt a disk jockey declared "A Braless Friday" and invited girl listeners to deposit a brassiere in a barrel; there was no stripping in public. A crowd of 5,000 girl watchers jammed Marina City and the State Street Bridge to witness the enthusiastic response.

However, WCFL also has organized many campaigns to enlist children to pick up litter and to contribute to civic causes.