

Artists Find Radio Promos A Palatable Part Of The Job

■ BY PHYLLIS STARK

NEW YORK—They dislike track dates. They dislike being stuck in the middle of station rivalries. But artists, particularly breaking artists, consider visits to radio stations, radio promotions, station-sponsored concerts, PD dinners, and the like as part of their job. As a result, most say they have a good attitude about doing radio promotions.

"I like the intimacy of radio much more than television," says Enigma's David Cassidy. Doing radio promotions, he says, is "exhausting. I was in three cities yesterday. [But] I'm willing to go out and do what it takes because I want people to have an opportunity to hear what I'm doing today."

"You've got to do what [stations] ask you to do," says Charlie "Steele" Pennachio of Atlantic act Linear. "Just button up and do it. Stations that have really supported us, we'll do anything for."

By and large, artists say, their experiences with stations have

been positive. But there are still radio promotion horror stories. Pennachio tells of a day when Linear played three shows, in New York, New Jersey, and Cheyenne, Wyo. Island recording artist Dino tells of signing autographs for fans in the rain at a station-sponsored amusement park visit. He notes that with few breaks and little time to oneself on the radio promotional circuit, "it's harder than being on tour."

Carnie Wilson of SBK Records act Wilson Phillips tells of an on-air interview in Australia during which a jock asked her if she used to play in the sandbox with her father, former Beach Boy Brian Wilson—a reference to his much-publicized emotional problems of the mid-'70s.

"People warned me that this guy was nasty and was going to say something rude so don't be afraid to fire back at him," Wilson says. "They also told me that he had this thing about Phyllis Diller. So when

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he asked me that, I asked him how his last bath with Phyllis Diller was and he completely shut up and played a song because he didn't know what to say."

Wilson also remembers the group's first live radio interview last winter at WGY-FM Albany, N.Y. (then top 40, now oldies). "We were shaking," she says. "It was like why are we going all the way to this iceberg place for nothing? But when we got on there it was amazing. They told us we could sell 300,000 records from doing this station alone."

After 20 years in the business, Cassidy—while positive about radio promotions overall—has had to set some limits. "I try not to get attached to these gimmicks and gags," he says. "It sort of compromises your credibility. I'm happy to send myself up and be irreverent, but some people take it too far. [They] want to put you on the corner in a monkey suit with the station call letters on it. I make it clear that I'm not coming to sing 'I Think I Love You' at 7 in the morning."

RADIO WARS

Artists on the radio promotion circuit are keenly aware of the way rival stations use record rep relationships and the acts themselves as weapons against each other, and they resent being caught in the middle. "Sometimes they get acts tied into it," says Pennachio. "Then the other station won't add your record and Linear is back on a plane [doing more promotions] the next week."

"There seems to be this obsession with being first," says Cassidy. "It shouldn't be so backstabbing and cutthroat. It should be more cooperative. I'm willing to do all of [the stations] if they want me."

"It's good to know about [rivalries]," says Dwayne Wiggins of Wing/Polydor's Tony! Toni! Toné!, "but sometimes it can scare you [when] you're caught in the middle of something going on between the record company and the radio station. We don't like to get into that. It's a rough position to be in."

But not every artist has had a bad

experience with rival stations. On a recent visit to New York, Warner Bros. artist Jasmine Guy attended a dinner with staffers of both WBLS and rival WRKS and was surprised at how friendly their staffers were with each other. And MCA country artist Mark Chesnutt tells of a recent stop in Lubbock, Texas, where, after doing an interview with one station, he was surprised when that station drove him around to the other side of the arena for an interview with a rival.

TRACK ATTACK

Although they are often willing to do almost anything for radio, some artists take a dim view of concerts where they must lip-sync to their music. "I hate track dates because we are musicians and we like to play live," says Wiggins.

Pennachio says that now that Linear has established itself as a live band, he wishes it had more opportunity to play live as recently did for WQHT (Hot 97) New York. "I guess sometimes [stations] don't want the hassle [of a band]," he says, "but to the artist it's a little different."

"I've been in the business for 20 years," says Cassidy. "I don't do track dates. The audience doesn't come away with a good feeling. They have a feeling it's too fabricated. I'm particularly sensitive to [that] having come out of television."

LEARNING THE LINGO

Artists say touring stations has taught them a lot about the business of radio. Most confess to having only a basic knowledge of the medium. Guy says that before she began visiting stations, her label had to spend a lot of time explaining radio terminology to her. "I never heard of churban," she says. "I thought someone had a speech impediment."

RCA country artist Aaron Tippin also had to learn the lingo and says he picked a lot of it up having lunch with PDs and MDs who would talk to each other about "adds, and 'how did your book do this year?' That took a little getting used to," he

says. Tippin has also learned that "PDs and MDs are individuals. Some rely on record testing and some go on gut. That's one of my favorite questions now. I ask them how they go about bringing songs onto their rotation list. It's always interesting."

Wilson says that when the group first began dealing with radio, "I didn't know what adding a record to a playlist meant. So when [SBK senior VP of promotion] Daniel Glass said we had 88 adds the first day, I asked what that meant. I thought the DJ decided what to play and then [played] it."

"I have a real rudimentary knowledge of how radio works," says Columbia country artist Mary-Chapin Carpenter. "It's so complicated that I don't expect to understand it all, yet I find it fascinating." But Carpenter admits that some things about radio puzzle her. Several years ago, for example, one of her records was tested by a station and, she was told, got the best listener response. But the station's consultant "declined to add the song because we were not well known at the time. I wonder, why bother doing the test if you're not going to add the record," she says.

Three artists who are very familiar with radio are Dino, Linear's Pennachio, and Cassidy. Before becoming a recording artist, Dino worked as a DJ at Las Vegas stations KYRK (Power 97), KLUC, and KCEP, and was MD at the latter. That experience "helps me now when I visit stations. I can relate to what's going on behind the scenes [and] it helps me be a little bit more patient." Pennachio co-owned his own label, Futura International Records, prior to signing with Atlantic and learned about radio by promoting his own record.

Cassidy says the business of radio has changed a lot since he first became a star 20 years ago, and he is not at all happy with the current state of programming. "Radio is a lot more fragmented now," he says. "As an artist, I'm very concerned about it. I don't think the audience appreciates it really."