



## 70's Oldies – “Stayin’ Alive?”

By Jaye Albright

It has been exactly thirty years since “Brick House” by the Commodores, “Margaritaville” by Jimmy Buffett and 10 CC’s “The Things We Do For Love” were big hits on the radio.

CBS Radio, it could be said, has had about as long a love affair with the songs from that era as any radio group.

For example, fifteen years ago, it was CBS who shot an "arrow" at the 30-something generation target in Washington, D.C., as soft AC WLTT became the third CBS O&O to adopt the "Rock and Roll Oldies" format in the fall of 1993. WLTT changed its call letters to WARW -- "Arrow 94.7," joining other CBS "Arrow" formats in L.A. (KCBS-FM) and Dallas (KRRW-FM).

It didn't take very long to see that those arrows didn't hit the target in any lasting way.

Following a short-term “wow,” their ratings didn't take much more than a year to sag. Instead, the oldies format just moved forward from a primary focus on late 60's music and switched from a 40-49 age target to incorporate the most popular memory songs for 35-44 too.

“Arrow,” it turned out was not a new music format emerging, but instead became an important new category on FM gold stations at the time with songs which proved to be very compatible with the more classic oldies for that slightly younger target, buying another decade of strong 25-54 shares.



Last week, [101.1 Jack FM](http://www.ilikejack.com/) in New York City became a tribute website (<http://www.ilikejack.com/>) as [CBS-FM - New York's Greatest Hits](http://www.wcbsfm.com/) had a party in the control room with two former mayors, a bevy of press (<http://www.wcbsfm.com/>) to witness a twenty minute historical montage that started with Frank Sinatra's “The Summer Wind” and the voices of “Morning Mayor” Harry Harrison and “Good Rockin’ Tonight” Ron Lundy, ending with Sinatra's “New York New York” and those famous “I Love New York” jingles.

Shortly thereafter, New York Daily News columnist David Hinkley added “[A little perspective on WCBS-FM](#)” in a review of the radio event in an insightful column, noting “for those keeping score at home, the honeymoon for the "new" WCBS-FM lasted about 30 minutes. That's how long it took for the first message board poster to say he'd listened to the station's launch, decided it was playing tired and boring songs, and probably wouldn't be listening any more. Tough crowd, New York. WCBS-FM's new jingle for songs from, say, 1972, says, "WCBS-FM remembers 1972." For



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a song from 1984, or 1986, it says, "WCBS-FM remember the '80s." It's flexible. It's open-ended. It lets newer songs be phased in.

"Someone born in 1977, who turns 30 this year, remembers songs from the mid- to late '80s. So maybe you can now entice that person to listen. Now yes, it's true that you don't have to personally remember a song to like it. I like songs recorded decades before I was born. People who are 22 love Temptations songs. I know that. But a huge core chunk of WCBS-FM's listeners want the songs they personally remember. People who have eclectic taste and love their parents' music are wonderful additions to a listener base. For most people, personal memory is the guideline.

"Like any station that was around for 33 years (1972-2005), WCBS-FM has already passed through several evolutions. From 1972 to 1981 or so, it was a '50s-based station, built on Buddy Holly, the Penguins, early Elvis, the Coasters, Fats Domino, etc."

Mediabase ([www.mmr247.com](http://www.mmr247.com)) was monitoring both the final few days of New York's Jack-fm as well as the first few of WCBS-FM and a seven day report shows some fast evolutions.

A George Harrison and a Steve Winwood song from the late 80's each got five plays last week and made the cut with two this week as 60's and 70's returned.

Artist	Title	Rel Date	TW	LW	Move
HARRISON, GEORGE	Got My Mind Set On You	1987	5	2	3
WINWOOD, STEVE	Roll With It	1988	5	2	3
COMMODORES	Brick House	1977	4	1	3
ROLLING STONES	(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction	1965	4	1	3
STEPPENWOLF	Born To Be Wild	1968	4	1	3
STEVENS, CAT	Wild World	1970	4	1	3
BAILEY, P./COLLINS, P.	Easy Lover	1984	3	0	3
BLONDIE	Heart Of Glass	1978	3	0	3
BUFFETT, JIMMY	Margaritaville	1977	3	0	3
DOORS	Light My Fire	1967	3	0	3

Meanwhile, Jackfm staples like Snow Patrol's Chasing Cars (2006), "Over My Head" by Fray (2004), John Cafferty's "On The Dark Side" (1983) and Duran Duran's "Rio" (1982) were gone immediately after the change.

Scott Shannon takes credit for the early 1990's 70's oldies revival, which started the "Arrow" fad as a result of the musical changes he instituted in 1991 when he moved from Z-100 to PD of WPLJ, New York. The station targeted 25-44 and promised "no rap, no heavy metal, no sleepy elevator music." It played top 40 hits from 1970 to 1985 - mainly "good time rockers" like Manfred Mann's "Blinded By The Light" or the Hollies' "Long Cool Woman."

At the time, WPLJ did pretty well 25-54, and that factor could be an ace up the sleeve of today's WCBS-FM. Likewise, you may want to study your market's Hot AC play lists and ratings history from the early 1990's before proclaiming that 'oldies is back' in your town as well.

A few examples come to mind:

In Los Angeles, KCBS' version of "Arrow" from its Fall 1993 launch hyper-targeted 28-46 with "all rock and roll oldies," some late 60's hits, primarily 70's BUT without any disco. BeeGees or Donna Sommer were not heard on KCBS even its most successful (first) book.



Meanwhile, a year before that in San Diego, KCBQ PD at the time Rich "Brother" Robbin focused their research on 27-44 and defines "Modern Oldies" as the greatest hits of the 70's and 80's, plays some disco and NO 60's music.

Also in 1993, Cox's soft AC WARM, Tampa, duopolied WCOF and renamed it "Coast 107." The narrow target of THIS one was 28-42, and called itself "Hits of the 70's." Coast played NO 60's and NO 80's. It covered the disco base by sponsoring disco nights at local clubs.

In the wake of those alterations, Westwood One started by early 1994 to embrace the 70's oldies craze by replacing its weekly dance music show with "The Retro Show," which leaned heavily on disco.

At that time, I was GM of BP Consulting Group (Jones Radio Networks today) and we tasked now KOIT-San Francisco PD Bill Conway and the present Greenstone Media VP/Programming Jim Lamarca, who had been a former XETRA, San Diego PD for Noble and KBSG, Seattle programmer for Viacom to create a rock-AC hybrid format we dubbed "Heart of Rock." It did very well in many markets, debuting as #1 on WRVV-FM, Harrisburg. Target at the time: 28-44. We built that as a more widely-syndicable version of the successful launch of programmer-engineer Cary Pall's (THE original one, I believe) adult rock-ac hybrid [WMMO](#) in Orlando.

The people who liked those formats in those cities back in the early 1990's are by and large between 43 and 59 today.

Top 40 was full of rap music at that time much to the delight of teens and adults were looking for something more palatable to them. And, since country music was the hottest it's even been at that same time, many of them are now our listeners.

If WCBS-FM proves to be successful in New York City as a classic hits-oldies hybrid, there will be many who'll be tempted to put spectrum oldies back in their markets too.

But, a word of caution: before putting an "Arrow" in your quiver, do a detailed study of 25-54 ratings in those markets and the playlists of the stations which were doing well back when the songs you want to play were hits. Then, ask yourself if the people who enjoyed those stations still live in your market and what choices for music they have – and how satisfied with them they are - today.

As if to reinforce the point that music formats reflect local tastes, pop culture and history, the Jackfm brand – which was given the call letters "CKLG" in Vancouver by its owner Rogers as a tribute to the AM top 40 station its adult target listened to in the 1980's as teens is quite healthy in many places, thank you. The adult hits music mix under various brand names, of course, continues to do well in numerous markets from Vancouver, Winnipeg to Calgary to Buffalo, Austin, Dallas and LA

As we all celebrate the return of "The Greatest Hits of the 60's, 70's & 80's" to New York and hope for a big success, this is a friendly reminder to stop before you consider becoming a lemming and do some research.

Check some local history before you try it at home.

*PS: For another insider perspective, click on [Hit The Road Jack](#), as AC consultant Mike McVay provides his first-hand take on the relaunch of WCBS-FM. (or paste [http://www.mcvaymedia.com/oldies/07/hit\\_the\\_road\\_jack.html](http://www.mcvaymedia.com/oldies/07/hit_the_road_jack.html) into your browser)*

