

# History of KalaMusic

*Courtesy of Don Hobson*

Here is a brief history of "how" KalaMusic started. MetroMedia bought WOMC in 1973 and didn't know what to do with the station they just bought for, I believe, under \$400,000. They didn't care due to the fact that they bought the station with John Kluge's (CEO of Metro Media and one of the wealthiest men in the world at the time) pocket money. In any event the WOMC Sales Manager, Bob Reinhardt, drove out to Kalamazoo to make a sales call on Consumers Energy as their Ad Agency was based here. He heard our own WQLR-FM, loved what he heard, and came to our offices in downtown Kalamazoo (what was then the ISB, now Comerica, building) to ask what "syndicator" we used as he loved our format. We said, GULP, that we helped build the Susquehanna FM station group based in York, PA, and that we programmed our own station. The very next day he called my partner, Stephen Trivers, and asked if we would program WOMC? We said we were too new and couldn't afford the investment needed; the next day he called again and said John Kluge would cut us a check for whatever was needed to set us up in the business IF we'd program WOMC on a minimum 3-year contract. The rest is history!

We NEVER intended for the company that became known as KalaMusic to be anything more than the company that programmed our own FM stations (WQLR-"clear 106"-Kalamazoo MI, WEZV-Fort Wayne MI, and WNCW-"nice 97"-Lexington KY) plus MetroMedia's WOMC in Detroit. Had we intended to create the next SRP (Jim Schulke and Phil Stout are STILL to be commended for being the single company that finally put FM stations on the map) we would have probably, with all due respect to SRP, called our programming company FBC (Fairfield Broadcasting company), not KalaMusic. The "Kala" is obviously the key part of the city we continue, 30-years later, to call...home!

By the way WOMC moved from 28th (in an overall market of 30 rated Arbitron stations, to 3rd overall in our VERY FIRST Arbitron in Detroit. We were blessed that WJR-FM, which was an SRP station, didn't have the same commitment as WOMC's ownership had. WJR-AM was, by far, the #1 station in Detroit but WJR-FM was fully automated. The Motor City LOVED the fact that WOMC was "live and (while we didn't use this phrase) lively." We mixed, even in 1973, music into our EZ mix that was considered taboo within the (then) beautiful music format. It worked for us here in Kalamazoo where WOOD-FM was a "twin" of WJR-FM; WOOD-AM was the #1 station, by far, and WOOD-FM was an outstanding radio station but if it hadn't been for SRP's great programming, WOOD-FM would never have been one of the very first (actually I believe it was the first) FM stations to rank #1 12-plus.

SRP was, by far, the very best competitor KalaMusic could ever have. Their format was, in many ways, superior to ours, especially in the early-mid 70's. However many of their clients had huge AM or TV (or both) stations and the FM was relegated to a closet. Despite those odds, SRP's strength was in it's simplicity...run our format EXACTLY as needed and your station will be #1. This format "guideline" worked SO WELL that the FCC did a formal inquiry into "who" controlled the FM licenses of SRP's stations...the licensee or SRP. In hindsight, 20+ years later, the FCC was politically correct to do this but many of those FM stations would still be waiting for FM to come of age if it hadn't been for SRP.

IBMA was a collection of various broadcasters: KalaMusic/Fairfield Broadcasting, Greater Media, Susquehanna, EZ Communications, Park Broadcasting, the above mentioned Jerry Lee's

WEAZ in Philadelphia, Tribune's KCTC in Sacramento, and Ed Winton's WWBA in Tampa. Jerry Lee, Ted Dorf (of Greater Media), the late Ed Winton, Art Keller (of EZ) and I comprised the Board of Directors and, yes, it was mostly a loose collection of similar interests pooling our resources together to produce new EZ music; we were incorporated and, despite the "loose" affiliation, were a formal group that spent LOTS of money over the years and also created some GREAT music!

As Paul Harvey would say..."the rest of the story" is how IBMA's ending happened. Jerry Lee convinced all of us, and we were ALL in agreement, to do a research project on the future of the EZ format; I produced several different "clusters" of music; one was a similar cluster of music to what SRP was doing, one was a cluster of Bonneville's musical style, one was a cluster of KalaMusic's music, and several clusters were presented for music looking forward. The research was under the direction of Bill Moyes who, essentially, used the IBMA funded research project to create what became known as Format 41 and this (Format 41) was the beginning of the end of the EZ format as we all knew it on the radio. Trust me that this story is MUCH longer than presented here but this covers the essence of it.

We sold KalaMusic to Broadcast Programming in Seattle in 1990 so our own radio stations, WQLR-FM in Kalamazoo and WEZV-FM in Fort Wayne, could program the "cluster" that scored the best with the research project targets. The first couple of years that we transitioned from EZ to lite A/C were GREAT musical years because we still incorporated instrumentals (including some GREAT material by people like David Lanz, Jim Brickman, and others) into the mix of lite A/C artists like Neil Diamond, Elton John, Whitney Houston, etc., etc. Sadly the lite A/C format was in many ways doomed itself because the major record labels kept devoting fewer and fewer of its resources into new material. At the end of the day any format that does not introduce new music and new artists is, by definition, a nostalgia format and will ultimately fail as a mass appeal music format.

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