



JOHN SCHOENBERGER
jschoenberger@radioandrecords.com

National Programming For Noncomm Triple As

There's been a good start, but more is needed

Noncommercial educational radio and Progressive Rock radio were born siblings and grew up side by side in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They eventually took separate paths, but in recent years they've met again — as grown-ups. Now public radio and Triple A are finding they have a lot in common.

The most important thing they share is their listeners, who have similar lifestyles, values and interests. Any Triple A or public-radio PD who has looked at audience-sharing patterns knows that quality contemporary music and in-depth news go together like hand and glove. In Chicago, Triple A WXRT shares significant audience with noncomm WBEZ. In San Francisco, KFOG listeners also tune to KQED. In Minneapolis, KTCZ listeners often choose KNOW.

The rapid rise of listening to public radio is remarkable. While overall radio listening has declined about 1% a year since the late 1980s, public radio's weekly come has grown at a rate of about 3%-5% a year. The roughly 800 Corporation for Public Broadcasting-funded radio stations had a combined weekly come of almost 30 million in the fall 2002 book.

The engines that drive increased listening to public radio are focused formats and magnet national programs and personalities, particularly programming distributed by National Public Radio and Public Radio International.



Ken Mills

A big difference between public radio and commercial Triple A is in the relative importance of national programming. Because financial resources are scarce, public radio relies on cost-effective national programming. Additionally, programming consistency enhances the public-radio brand.

National programming and personalities create a sense of community that resonates with listeners. *All Things Considered's* Robert Siegel, *A Prairie Home Companion's* Garrison Keillor, *This American Life's* Ira Glass, the *Car Talk* guys, *Fresh Air's* Terry Gross and *Weekend Edition's* Scott Simon are not only loved by listeners, they are trusted. This trust runs so deep that listeners give millions of dollars each year to local public radio stations that air these shows.

National Programming On Noncomm Triple A

The primary public-radio formats, News and Classical, have plenty of national programming available to them, primarily from NPR and PRI. Classical stations can choose from three national 24/7 satellite services,

and even Jazz stations have a full-time satellite stream and a couple of popular overnight services.

But what about cost-effective, compelling national programming for the growing universe of full- and part-time noncommercial Triple A stations? In the just-completed "KMA Triple A National Programming Study" — revealed at this year's Noncommvention in Louisville — we observed that there aren't many choices for Triple A programmers.

KMA examined dozens of April 2003 program schedules for noncommercial Triple A's, and we were able to identify:

- Thirteen noncommercial stations that air 100 or more hours of triple A music per week. We classified these stations as "Level One." Several of these stations are considered leaders in the noncommercial Triple A format.
- Fourteen noncommercial stations that air between 50 and 99 hours of triple A music per week. We classified these stations as "Level Two."
- About three dozen noncommercial stations that air less than 50 hours of triple A music per week. We classified these stations as "Level Three."

For this report, we focused on the Level One and Two stations.

In Depth

Triple A is a full-time format on Level One stations. These stations air Triple A music and programs during an average of 81.9% of their broadcast hours, and an average of 26.7% of their programming is from national distributors. Nationally distributed Triple A programming comprises an average of 12.6% of their weekly schedules, and they get an average of 84.7% of their Triple A programming from local sources.

Level Two, "dual-format" stations air Triple A programming part-time. Eleven of the 14 Level Two stations we found to air the NPR newsmagazines *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. These stations air Triple A music and programs during an average of 34.4% of their broadcast hours and get an average of 49.5% of their programming from national distributors. Nationally distributed Triple A programming comprises 9.5% of their weekly schedules, and 72.1% of their Triple A programming originates from local sources.

This data clearly shows that most Triple A programming on the 27 Lev-

Level One Stations Surveyed

Level One stations in the "KMA Triple A National Programming Study" air 100-168 hours of triple A music per week

Calls/City	Triple A Hours/Week*
WTMD/Baltimore	163
WNCW/Greenville-Spartanburg, SC	162
WYEP/Pittsburgh	161
WXPB/Philadelphia	161
WRVG/Georgetown, KY	159
WAPS/Akron	146
WFUV/New York	144
WBJB/Lincroft, NJ	134.5
KUMD/Duluth, MN	133
KTBG/Kansas City	116.5
WYCE/Grand Rapids	105
WFPK/Louisville	102
KNBA/Anchorage, AK	100.5

Level Two Stations Surveyed

Level Two stations air 50-99 hours of Triple A Music per week.

Calls/City	Triple A Hours/Week*
WNKU/Cincinnati	82
KUT/Austin	74
WUKY/Lexington, KY	67
KAXE/Grand Rapids, MN	65
KUNC/Greeley, CO	61
WCBE/Columbus, OH	60
WDET/Detroit	60
KTCL/Salt Lake City	60
KCRW/Los Angeles	59
WNRN/Charlottesville, VA	57
KSUT/Durango, CO	57
WUMB/Boston	54
WFHB/Bloomington, IN	52
KRCC/Colorado Springs	51

*April 2003, as posted on station website and/or submitted by station.
Source: KMA

el One and Level Two stations comes from local sources. But nationally distributed programming on format-focused News and Classical stations has driven most of the growth in public-radio listening over the past 15 years. That raises the question of whether cost-effective and compelling national programming might do the same for noncommercial Triple A.

There is no doubt that some local hosts provide a powerful direct connection with listeners. But the tight budgets of noncommercial radio also often mean that unprofessional and inconsistent hosts are on the air in valuable dayparts, when the most people are using radio. This results in listener tune-out and aversion.

What Noncomm Triple A's Need

Our conversations with leading noncommercial programmers have shown that public radio needs a new generation of daypart-oriented programming. Only *World Cafe* and *Echoes* provide enough hours of weekly programming to create day-to-day consistency. Several programmers we talked to said that noncommercial Triple A stations need the equivalent of a *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered* or *Classical 24*.

This is particularly important as more public stations consider switching to the Triple A format or adding more hours of triple A music. Before jettisoning hours of Jazz or Classical programming, programmers and managers need to know that Triple A programming exists that will draw a significant audience.

Triple A has the opportunity to replace Jazz as public radio's second music format. The right elements are in place: Triple A is compatible with public-radio news programming, and it has similar listener attributes and a sense of "mission"; that is, a sense that the integrity of the artists and their music is more important than a big bottom line. This sense of integrity is public radio's most important core value.

National Programs That Work

PRI's *World Cafe* is the thousand-pound gorilla of noncommercial Triple A radio. It claims 52.2% of the 500 weekly Triple A program hours on the 27 Level One and Level Two stations. *World Cafe* is carried by 62.0% of noncommercial Triple A stations, more than any other program.

Hosted by David Dye, the show features a rich variety of new artists and core format favorites. In addition to ample CD tracks, *World Cafe* presents interviews and live performances, as well as segments on books, movies and TV and lifestyle features.

Some stations use *World Cafe* as a discrete program, others use it as a daypart. According to PRI, more than 150 noncommercial stations air *World Cafe* — and it's particularly notable among the programs in the study because many stations air it during peak dayparts.

World Cafe had a fall 2002 weekly come audience of 487,700. It is produced and originates at WXPB/Philadelphia. For more information, log on to www.worldcafe.org.

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Triple A National Programs

These are the carriage levels of national programs on 27 Level One and Level Two stations as reported in the "KMA Triple A National Programming Study."

Program	Distributor	Percentage Of Stations
<i>World Cafe</i>	PRI	63.0%
<i>American Routes</i>	PRI	48.2%
<i>E-Town</i>	Independent	44.4%
<i>Beale Street Caravan</i>	Independent	29.6%
<i>Echoes</i>	PRI	29.6%
<i>Grateful Dead Hour</i>	Independent	29.6%
<i>Putumayo World Music Hour</i>	Independent	26.0%
<i>Mountain Stage</i>	PRI	18.5%
<i>Sounds Eclectic</i>	PRI	18.5%
<i>Thistle & Shamrock</i>	NPR	18.5%