

arts/entertainment

Newscasts play up reporting skills; news suffers

The latest trend in television news presentation seems to be what I would call the "we really are reporters" approach. Gloss is out, or at least on the wane; news anchorpersons dressed in matching blazers and hiding behind their desks in the studio grow fewer in number all of the time.

The fad now is to remind the viewer that these people who give us the televised news are honest-to-goodness reporters, and not just an announcer.

Scene: A newsroom. The camera is focused on a woman about 30 years old, sitting in a chair. This is the anchorwoman, who we will call Alice (first names only is the rule on these newscasts). She has a stack of papers in one hand, and a telephone receiver in the other. From our camera angle another camera is clearly visible, as are a boom mike and several anonymous employees.

"Good evening and welcome to *The Real News*," says Alice. I have a lot of stories here in my hand, but I can't relay them to you yet, because as you can see I am on the telephone. As you know, I am not just an announcer, but a journalist first and foremost, and since I have been trying all day to reach this lead on the telephone, you'll just have to wait until I'm done here

to get tonight's headlines. In the meantime, roll the commercial."

A minute later we return, and Alice is off the phone. "The lead story tonight is supposed to be Gary's report on that big three-alarm fire at the Amalgated Chemical plant, but Gary is late with the story. That happens a lot with Gary, just as it can with any professional reporter. So, instead of Gary, let's go to the live Actionfilm Update on that daring escape from the minimum security facility on 144th Street. And here with that update is Linda."

The camera continues to focus on Alice. Panic strikes the other employees, who flip buttons and shout rapid-fire instructions in attempt to switch us to the live update with Linda. But all is in vain. Alice says, "Well, I guess we won't have that update right now, but that happens sometimes when your on-the-announcers are real professional journalists like Linda. We'll try her again after these commercials."

Get the picture? Too often current television news shows seem so interested in showing us the fact of reporting, the action of reporting, that we never do get the actual news. I have never had any doubt that the people who present television news are professional journalists, perfectly capable of conducting interviews and doing legwork for news stories. But is it so important that I see them do it?

It doesn't matter to me whether the anchorpersons went out and got a story, as long as I eventually hear the story on television. If I want the pretense of journalism and "life in the newsroom" I'll watch *Lou Grant*.

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The most glaring example of this trend is WQWT's *Live at Five*. Here we avoid the traditional studio altogether; there is an anchorwoman, but she sits at a small desk or a table in the middle of what looks like a newsroom, full of the sounds of clanking typewriters and telephones. The key phrase to remember here is "looks like."

There is something else about the set of *Live at Five* that doesn't strike me as real, and I think it's the clutter. Sure, there is clutter; in the background we can see books aslant on their shelves, people walking in and out of camera range, stuff like that. But it looks like organized clutter, planned clutter; there is only a semblance of disarray. I think this works against the purpose.

If I were directing a program that had decided to go to the "we really are reporters" route, I wouldn't settle for half-measure, for only the semblance of chaos and disarray.



Sykes album could be hit relief to winter doldrums

By Casey McCabe

Uh-oh, the albums are starting to pile up again. As it gets colder and hibernation starts sounding like the only viable alternative to work, school and responsibility, I welcome the opportunity to curl up with my space heater, and a stack of albums, to start sifting through the music. Next to video games and thermal underwear, it is one of life's greatest simple pleasures.

album review

Here are four interesting discoveries.
Keith Sykes/*I'm not strange I'm just like you*/Backstreet Records

Sykes, like many others these days, is interested in reviving the lost roots of rock 'n' roll. What George Thorogood does for remembering the spirit of Chuck Berry, Sykes does in recapturing the early rock-blues of Eric Clapton.

With his Clapton-like voice, Sykes moves well through his nine original compositions, which touch base on some surprisingly well-crafted rock variations. "B.I.G.T.I.M.E." modernizes the Jerry Lee Lewis ethic with a bit of Clapton's "Blues Power" thrown in, while "Love To Ride," with a guitar lick straight from Creedence Clearwater Revival, is one of the best blues/rock synthesis to emerge in some time.

On side two, Sykes wanders into a slightly more mainstream fold, adding female backing vocalists to punctuate the choruses with pleasant pop deliberateness on "I'm On A Roll" and "Makin' It Before They Got Married."

Despite the numerous comparisons that can be made in such an offering, Sykes shows a nice degree of authenticity, creativity and conviction. *I'm not strange I'm just like you* could really be a sleeper hit as the winter doldrums roll around.

Asleep At The Wheel/*Framed*/MCA

A truly innovative band, Asleep At The Wheel pursue their vision of bar band music with flare and precision.

Labeled a country-swing outfit, the band continues along those lines though they certainly aren't confined to them. The production and tightness of the band is excellent on *Framed* as pedal steel blends into slap bass, horns and the clean Andrews Sister-style vocals of Chris O'Connell and Maryann Price.

Ray Benson continues to compose fine, detailed music in a field that is largely uncultivated. He shows great adeptness at inserting elements of funk, jazz, ballads, and rock without lifting the band out of its boundaries.

By the way, the band, along with some twelve guest artists (including Bonnie Raitt), put out some of the tightest, most fun music within anyone's boundaries.

Suggested cuts on *Framed* include "Slow Dancing," "Cool As A Breeze" and "Fiddle Funk-Corn Fusion." The Tremblers/*Twice Nightly*/CBS Records

Whether they want it or not, the Tremblers main claim to fame is that their front man is none other than Peter Noone, the cherubic boy wonder of Herman's Hermits.

The fact that Noone has chosen to stage a legitimate comeback while most of his 60s pop contemporaries are resolved to fading into the woodwork is admirable. The fact that he is rocking with a harder edge than his complacent Hermits ever dreamed of, shows he is not unduly nostalgic.

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KQKQ adopts Top 40 format

By Bob Crisler

If you've been scanning across your FM dial lately, expecting to come across the familiar old sound of KQ98, think again.

The KQKQ of old was replaced a month ago by a Top 40 format reminiscent of early-seventies AM radio.

Bill Cunningham, a radio programming expert who has won eight Programmer of the Year awards from *Billboard* magazine, was asked by KQKQ's owner to come to Omaha a few months ago to be executive vice president at the station.

According to Cunningham, he was given free rein of the station.

"Most of the changes are my doing. The owner came to me like a patient comes to a doctor and said 'Fix it, doc,'" he said.

Cunningham attributes his overwhelming success in other markets like Miami, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, to name a few, to his practice of bringing back, in his words, "showbiz radio."

According to Cunningham, the selection of songs is "pretty well spelled out" to KQKQ's disc jockeys.

"When I came here, there was an overwhelming vulnerability in the market," he said. "The mood of the AM stations was lost in the last eight to 10 years. In this market, no one else is having fun."

Describing the personality of his station as "predictable unpredictability," Cunningham explained his strategy.

"I try to create a new form of hip, and that form of hip is called fun," he said.

All fun aside, the appeal of any radio station lies in the music it plays.

According to Cunningham, "We don't play obscure music. We research everything that we play to the point where we know our target audience is going to like what we play."

According to sales secretary Jan Dvorak, who oversees station promotional campaigns, "We don't feel that being trendy works. What we're going with is what's proven." KQ personnel peppered the interview with references to Omaha rock station Z-92 (KIZO), hinting that they consider that station the one to beat in the Omaha market.

To move their station up in the ratings, KQKQ (now christened "Sweet 98") is going all-out on promotions. According to Dvorak, the station is now in the process of giving away \$65,000 to people who answer the phone with the phrase "I listen to the new sound of Sweet 98." Of the total to be given out, \$15,000 has already been awarded, and KQ staff is working on the remainder.

To bring in a younger audience, the station, along with the makers of Bubble Up soda, has a promotion centered around a disc jockey job called "Supermouth." The winner will become a full-time disc jockey, with \$1,000 pay per month for a year, plus a \$1,000 wardrobe from the Hitchin' Post & Wooden Nickel, and the use of a custom "Supermouth" Pontiac Firebird for a year.

According to Dvorak, contestants must be between the ages of 14 and 19, and will be judged on their ability to communicate one to one with a radio audience. She said she plans to have a winner by Christmas. Auditions will be live on the air via telephone.

"This radio station plans on being Number One," said Dvorak. "Although if you listened to us for eight hours, it would tend to get repetitive."