

DJs thin in town

BY SEAN MCCARTHY

The sometimes improvised, more often rehearsed banter of the radio disc jockey has a smaller part of the airwaves in Lincoln stations these days.

With money-saving options like automated systems and nationally syndicated personalities filling radio slots, more stations are rethinking the role of those who sit behind the mike, asking the question: Is the job of a DJ in danger?

At KKNB, formerly 104.1 FM The Point, the format was changed from a soft alternative genre to Top 40. Now, it's called KISS 104 FM.

Clear Channel Communications Inc., which owns KISS 104, released morning show personalities Brady Goodman and Matt Rydberg in late November. On Jan. 16, KISS will begin broadcasting a morning show hosted by Rick Dees, a nationally syndicated talk show personality.

Julie Gade, Lincoln general manager for Clear Channel Communications Inc., said with syndicated shows, "the clear advantage is financial," as buying Dees' program costs the station a fraction of the price it would take to employ local talent.

Still, Gade said radio stations need a local voice to thrive.

"Right now, you're going to see a definite need to keep local talent. There's not a lot of good syndicated shows out there," Gade said. "It has to be awesome for you to give up local talent."

KISS will hire two full-time DJs, but don't expect them to be in the studio much. For one slot, Gade expected the person to broadcast live for events, help out in promotions and assist in community projects. If a station relies too much on live feeds from nationally syndicated programming and automated music selection, it can suffer, Gade said. Local talent is needed to know the heartbeat of the market, she said.

"Radio is just air and sound, if it is geared around a staff," Gade said. "And when you don't have a staff, the belief and excitement goes out the window."

Gade said she thought more job opportunities could be available through larger stations like Clear Channel Communications Inc., which owns more than 900 radio stations throughout the U.S. The chance for promotion and advancement is greater than it would be if it were a strictly locally run station, she said.

Linnea Boswell, a junior broadcasting major from San Francisco, said she is not worried about the shift to a less DJ-oriented format in commercial radio.

"Hopefully, I'd like to start off in radio then go into something like sound editing," Boswell said.

Boswell said she was disappointed in the KKNB change.

"In some respects, it's one less opportunity to have a job," she said.

Boswell said a local DJ is needed to break up the monotony of a radio block of songs. The role of a DJ is pivotal when it comes to making a station one for the community, she said.

"When you're in L.A., you don't know the demographic - the sense of humor and what (the community) want to hear from a DJ," Boswell said.

Rick Alloway, a UNL broadcasting lecturer and manager at 90.3 FM KRNU, has been following the format switches at KKNB. He has not had any students approach him with concern about the recent changes at KKNB.

"The semester is young; I expect it will probably come up," Alloway said.

Alloway said the switch to a less DJ-centered format depended more on the target market and less on a universal trend for stations. He didn't go as far as to say that the job of a DJ was in danger, but he pointed out some signs of the demise of on-air local talent.

"There are fewer people doing it," he said.

Alloway cited two factors in the decline of a DJ's role in a radio station. First, a continued development in radio technology that enables voices from other locations to sound like they're local. No. 2 is group ownership of radio stations. Fewer people are running more radio stations.

Alloway said students who go into the broadcasting department to land jobs in on-air radio should focus on diversifying their skills and prepare for changes in the market.

"I don't encourage people to pigeonhole themselves into one particular job market," he said.

Walking down the runway: Friday's fashion show odyssey

BY BILLY SMUCK

Don't be too alarmed if you happen to be entering through the north entrance of the Nebraska Union Friday night and models are walking down the front steps.

They're part of the second annual University of Nebraska-Lincoln Juried Student Exhibition and Reception held in the Rotunda Art Gallery in the Union, with this year's edition entitled "2001: A Fashion Odyssey."

The event, put on by Montage, a textiles, clothing, and design

student organization at UNL, will have a reception with refreshments from 6:30 to 9 p.m. and a live modeling show beginning at 7 p.m. on Jan. 12. The art exhibition will run from Jan. 12-18.

UNL merchandising senior and Montage treasurer Beth Hunsicker said the modeling show will feature 16 garments, while the exhibition will feature 20 projects by junior and senior design students from various areas of textiles, clothing, and design, including weaving, surface design and visual presentation.

Senior merchandising major and Montage President Liz Sievers said each student was allowed to submit six pieces for the event.

A panel of three judges critiqued artwork based on craftsmanship, innovation, integration of color materials in form, as well as presentation and overall showmanship. Sievers said there will also be a best of show award for both the modeling presentation and the exhibition, in which one student will be chosen for each.

"The audience will cast ballots to determine the winner," Sievers said.

Hunsicker said she was very enthusiastic about potential audience members not so familiar with their craft to see the show.

"It's a great opportunity for the rest of the university to see what the area of textiles and design is about," Hunsicker said. "It allows students to show their creativity and talent off to the public."

Hunsicker, who referred to the exhibition as Montage's "big event," said a lot of effort has gone into preparing it, dating back to September.

UNL textiles, clothing and design professor and Montage

sponsor Barbara Trout said the students "organized pretty much everything. They're the energy and the brainstorm that makes this event happen."

Montage is also sponsoring a clothing drive during the duration of the gallery exhibition. All of the clothing will be donated to the Good Neighbor Center and the YWCA.

Trout, who recalled last year's show, looks forward to the 2001 version.

"There will be some exciting and dynamic work to view in the exhibition," Trout said.

Movie critics eat Crowe

Will 'Almost Famous' return from the dead to win an Oscar?

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

There's no more famous movie return from the dead than the 1967 classic "Bonnie and Clyde," the violent biography that turned Warren Beatty into a strange sort of star (willing to play a violent and sexually dysfunctional rogue, and yet seem so ... matinee idol in the process) and erupted a new age of Hollywood films that quickly segued into Sam "The Wild Bunch" Peckinpah's era of violence as opera - one that continues with a flourish today, invigorated by the Tarantinos and Soderberghs of modern times.

Frankly, as it was opening during its original run, the movie, which starred Beatty and beret-wearing Faye Dunaway as the reckless and dangerous title duo, was buried by print critics, partially because of the bias against violence (it pales to today's gun orgies), partially because it contained poetic, long scenes of Midwestern arthouse sentiment, much unlike any most big sky country spaghetti westerns. It was "Grapes of Wrath" with taste for blood.

The audiences followed suit of the critics, as the production company, Warner, tossed in Texas drive-ins and left it to die. But critics began to turn the tide, as the bluegrass soundtrack did well among music listeners, and slowly, and surely, the film regained its footing and came out one year later. It garnered 10 Academy Award nominations. It is, and will always be, one of the most beautiful films ever made - violent, visual poetry.

"Bonnie and Clyde" sticks out in lore as one of those films that reversed its tag of imperfection, through the critics, and willed its way into the hearts of many viewers. Beatty and Dunaway evolved into instant stars; both had their faces plastered all over movie posters in the 1970s. Sometimes, through persistent badgering of its incumbent greatness, a previously unknown movie makes its way into the vernacular.

In that vein comes "Almost Famous," a film that started out with the best critical reviews of 2000 - not exactly the tallest of feats - and yet did miraculously poor business for its efforts.

It has been nominated for four Golden Globe Awards. Critics and the film's production company, Dreamworks, will employ a see-it-and-you-will-love-it tactics among Academy voters for Oscar nominations. It's my sense it'll work. And "Almost Famous" writer-director Cameron

Crowe's drippy love-letter to the 1970s rock music scene, will return to theaters to recoup its cash. Mark that down. But will it work?

The story behind the movie is fairly well known: Crowe, at 15, followed the 1970s stalwart The Allman Brothers around, fooling rock mag Rolling Stone into thinking he was an adult so he could write a profile.

Crowe flourished as a rock journalist, then moved onto movies, writing the screenplay for "Fast Times at Ridgemont High," and finally directing a small teen romantic comedy in 1989 so puppy dog good that the film attained cult status among teenage girls. He made the underrated "Singles" in 1992 and then struck studio gold with

Film Commentary

"Jerry Maguire" in late 1996.

Not unlike the success of "Boogie Nights" afforded director P.T. Anderson the chance to make whatever movie he wanted next - he wrote the operatic, unforgettable "Magnolia" - Crowe was given what he termed a freebie to make his most personal movie yet, and based on his talent, was allowed to sink some \$60 million into it.

He produced "Almost Famous," a nearly three-hour story fictionally chronicling the life he led as a young boy. In the Allman Brothers' place, a wannabe stadium band called Stillwater filled in, along with groupies led by Kate Hudson (who was made star, quite certainly, by her presence in this film) while Rolling Stone and other real set pieces remained with their original name. Though rated R, it is a sunny, mostly positive affair,

with the rock stars, on the whole, treating young William Miller better than anybody could have expected.

I wasn't particularly fond of the movie for that sunny outlook, and predicted (accurately, I might add) it would sink at the box office, especially with viewers under 30, who might scoff at the relatively innocuous surroundings compared to the visceral images such atmospheric pieces of today afford. Hey, we've seen "American Beauty." And you want us to go back to before the bullshit?

Dreamworks' release plan, a slow, word-of-mouth kind of thing, didn't work either, because word of mouth didn't exist. Rather, the film was released in can't-miss huge cities like Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, where you can drum up enough fans for anything and then, as the film moved to wide release, it dropped like a quail. In its second week, "Almost Famous" made \$6.296 million on 1,193 screens. Two weeks later, on 2,085 screens, it made \$3.718 million. Small town USA sunk the critics' darling.

Crowe did interview upon interview for the film. And then, as it failed miserably, he closed himself in his house and sulked. How could the can't-miss journalist, always on the pulse of it, misfire so badly? Simply, his heart flew too close to the sun on this one, and he got burnt for it. Consider that Beatty, though he denies it, reportedly got on his knees and begged for "Bonnie and Clyde" to be made. Crowe put the blood, sweat, tears, out there, got a big promo spread in Vanity Fair, got all the critical breaks, and still yucked out.

Could America have been that wrong? Yes and no. Clearly, "Almost Famous" was well made, mildly amusing, even funny. Had Brad Pitt, who was attached to the project, stayed in the game to play lead guitarist Russell Simmonds (which Billy Crudup played), well, that would have brought some money in. I gave ★★ ½ - better than most that opened around that time.

And yet, music operas are always iffy. The pop generation we're mired in doesn't lend well to the dreaded crossover market phrase. This is a pop movie - a smiley face button is all over it - and lacks the drug-fueled pain the film needed to declare itself "important."

These days, you're either on mark - an airy, sexy romp like "Charlie's Angels" - or you're important - say, "Traffic" - or you're a knockout hit with the women - "Erin Brockovich," and surprisingly "Gladiator."

"Almost Famous" spends a lot of time ogling easy, breezy groupie girls rockin' out to 1970s tunes and otherwise engaging in music snobbery. Just what above group does that fit into?

It was the almost perfect movie for Hollywood - everything but the demographics - which was curiously left out for reasons unknown. Can critical clout save it? Maybe, like "Bonnie and Clyde," yes. Then again, remembering "Almost Famous" in 33 years seems a stretch, indeed.

Kate Hudson signaled her arrival a star in "Almost Famous" just Faye Dunaway did in "Bonnie and Clyde." But will Hudson's movie return from the dead as well?



Melanie Falk/DN