

I began my career in the early 70's as a staff-songwriter for a major music publishing company. I recorded 2 LPs for the affiliated record company and had radio play all over the country. When I didn't produce the hits that they wanted, I was dropped and have played locally ever since. I also released 1 CD in 1996 and another in 2001 on private labels, and will be releasing another in the coming year. I still write songs and pitch them to other artists.

As a singer-songwriter I get statements from BMI that includes radio play from all over the world. I have not had any hits, but have had little successes like songs on TV and in films. As an artist I am an independent. I host an Internet music program once each month where I perform with my band as well as have guest artists. Because I play primarily in Los Angeles, I do not know how many fans I have in the rest of the country or overseas, but I have sold CDs in many states and many countries over the Internet.

As far as I know, there are only 2 radio stations in the Los Angeles area that play local artists: KCRW and KPFFK. KCRW is an NPR station and KPFFK is a Pacifica network station. I was interviewed on KPFFK when I had my major label deal in the 70's, and I have received occasional airplay from the same hosts for my recent music (Howard & Roz Larman), but I don't know of any other DJs in Los Angeles who will play independent music. KCRW has a music director who plays local bands, but I have not contacted him because his tastes seem to run counter to what I do. I contacted a DJ there once by email but was told that I had to go through him. I have received airplay on stations outside Los Angeles by contacting them and sending my current CD, but within Los Angeles it is more difficult. I do have airplay on a few Internet radio stations, but I do not consider them very important for sales.

As for other stations in Southern California, most of them are owned by one of the major groups like Clear Channel who use music just to sell advertising, not because of any merit the music may have. So they will not play anything that is not within the "playlist" that is on every other station.

I do not know the rules that the FCC has defined for radio stations, so I do not know how they can be changed. I would think that there should be at least a few hours everyday when the broadcast originates locally, rather than the tapes that are sent from the main headquarters in some other time zone. I heard about a train derailment in the midwest somewhere where they tried to get the local station to broadcast warnings to the residents that there were hazardous materials on the train and they should evacuate immediately. They were told that they could not do that because their feed came from out of state. This is wrong. Radio in that town cannot even be used as a warning system.

As for radio in Los Angeles, other than the ones I mentioned before I do not know of any independent radio stations that will play independent artists. Radio might make a come-back if the rules were changed and stations HAD to offer local programming. With the music business suffering as it is, there are great successes happening in the world of independent artists and independent recordings, but not on the scale that the major labels want. If commercial radio began promoting and playing independent music, there would be a shift in the business that could be huge. My fear is that commercial radio is too used to being paid for playing music for that to happen.

I believe that the FCC should define "local programming" with an eye on community service and local music. I also believe the FCC should roll back the laws that were passed that allowed companies like Clear Channel to gobble up all the little stations it could. I read that a top director of Clear Channel was quoted as saying that the goal of music programming on its stations was to sell advertising, not to showcase talent or musical merit. This is wrong.

Since there are so many national radio stations, there should be a decent percentage in each area that are "locally produced" and are community-based. I believe radio should include local affairs, local music shows, local town hall meetings, city government meetings, local cooking shows, etc. Much of this is on "public access" TV at present, but if it were made law for a percentage radio programming to include these shows we might see a cultural shift back toward more family-oriented times.

It is obvious that payola is still the major way that artists get radio play on commercial stations. If the FCC is really interested in stopping this practice, they might want to set up a sting operation using an indie artist as bait. From major artists doing "free shows" for a radio station to paid music research people making "programming suggestions" to music directors to labels "buying" news spots about their artist... it's all payola, and it should be stopped.

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read my views. You have the opportunity to change the rules and do something GOOD for America. I hope you act on this "local programming" effort.

Best regards,

Severin Browne
former Motown staff writer and recording artist