

CLASSICAL RADIO: DENVER'S KVOD FINDS COMMERCIAL SUCCESS WITH FRESH 'MASS APPEAL'-STYLE FORMAT

By PETER M. JONES

After more than 20 years in its radio market, Denver's KVOD has been named Arbitron's top commercial classical station for the spring book. Taking a 3.6 share, a considerably high rating for a classical format, KVOD managed to surpass the typically high ratings of such major market classical station as WGMS Washington, D.C., KFSD San Diego, and KING Seattle, the previous leader.

KVOD's management credits the station's success to its approach to the format. According to general manager Jim Teeson, "KVOD's presentation is more mass appeal than the stereotype classical station." Teeson, who has managed several of Denver's stations including AC KMJI and sister station KRZN, plus outlets KPPL and KLAK, believes the presentation of classical music should be similar to that of contemporary music. "People enjoy KVOD because they can enjoy it," says Teeson. "They don't feel intimidated. There are enough elements I can bring from the other formats I've run that can be implemented into a classical station."

One of those elements to effect KVOD's overall accessibility has been the implementation of a regular promotions department. Before Henry Broadcasting bought the station in 1984, KVOD had done, comparatively, little marketing for a city the size of Denver. While the station continues to center promotions around the Denver Symphony Orchestra, classical music concerts, and Beethoven's birthday, KVOD has also launched a variety of non-classical promotions.

Call-in contests are common-place on KVOD. "Discover America," a recent promotion, offered

trips to New York City and Washington, D.C. For a time, whenever Vivaldi's "Autumn" from the "Four Seasons" was played, listeners had a chance to win an autumn trip. In parting with the traditional classical format, KVOD offers ski reports, and a talk segment with Denver Bronco Karl Mecklenburg, a program which, according to Teeson, has received very few complaints from classical music purists.

According to program director Charley Samson, the station's promotions are aimed at broadening both the audience and its perspective of a classical format. "As people get older," Samson says, "they get tired of rock'n'roll, and we get them."

One way KVOD is attracting listeners is through

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continued use of its compact disk library. At least one tenth of the music heard on KVOD originates from CDs and on Tuesdays, the station plays only CDs. "We use them as much as we can," says Samson. "The dynamic range of this music lends itself to the advantages CDs have."

Although the station has had successful ratings for most of its existence, KVOD has never sub-

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scribed to Arbitron. According to Samson, "It's our experience that if you live by the ratings, you die by the ratings . . . the ratings are gravy." Nonetheless, Samson admits the benefit in holding a 3.6 market share. "Other commercial classical stations just drool when they see these numbers," he says, "because they know certain national accounts will plug-in when you reach the top ten."

In the 36-station Denver market, which has one public station that predominately plays classical music, KVOD has long stood alone on the commercial classical front. "Most [of the other Denver stations] don't regard us as a threat," Samson says, "because we don't compete in format with theirs." At one time, in fact, the station had most of the fine arts advertisers all to itself. "It used to be that there was a client base of KVOD type advertisers," Teeson says. "We had all the art galleries . . . then one day, the other stations got smart."

Eventually, KVOD had to seek out mainstream advertisers. Although the station now runs many of the same commercials that other Denver stations carry, Teeson insists that there are still limits to what a classical format can allow. "We try to make the commercials as appealing as possible," he says. "We have turned down some that were too obnoxious."

If KVOD has any competition in Denver, it is public station KCFR. Both Teeson and Samson, though, are quick to point out the differences between the two stations' basic formats. KCFR is not a full-time classical station. KCFR includes "new age" classical in its programming, KVOD does not. KCFR also plays a good deal of folk and bluegrass; KVOD plays very little. And while much of the NPR-affiliated KCFR's day is spent on "All Things Considered" and

local news, KVOD's half-time news director is also the station's half-time promotions director. KVOD is proud to bill itself as the full-time "Fine Arts Voice of Denver."

Nonetheless, Teeson says that it is the approach to the music that sells the station. According to Teeson, most of the nation's successful classical stations have long realized the same thing. "KING in Seattle and WGMS in Washington, D.C. [two other classical format leaders] treat their radio stations like radio stations," he says. "Gene Amole and Ed Koepke [KVOD's original owners] built a dynasty. They get the credit for what the station is doing today."

From left: Kiri Te Kanawa, Philip Glass, and Richard Stoltzman.

