

'MOURNERS' CAN HARDLY WAIT

MAR 15 1984

KRLA Death Nears

By RAY DUNCAN

The death of a radio station is one of the strangest rituals of modern times. Such a ceremony is about to happen here.

Pasadena radio station KRLA is doomed. As the official death-date, May 1, draws near, the expiring victim is being surrounded by an impatient crowd of people, each of whom is eager to push the

corpse aside and take its place.

This circle of mourners may eventually number as many as 30. They have closed so tightly around the victim that they have earned an angry rebuke from Kenneth A. Cox, member of the Federal Communications Commission in Washington. He deplored "the ghoulish interest" of the interested parties who are watching KRLA expire.

Meanwhile, to listen to KRLA, you'd never know it was sick. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the raucous backwoods wailings, known as rock 'n' roll, which come screaming out of it in death, sound no different than they did in life.

Never has a radio station seemed healthier while perishing.

KRLA is one of the most prosperous radio properties in Southern California. Its value, with a broadcast license (which it no longer owns), has been variously estimated to be anywhere from four to seven million dollars. Its audience is huge. Some polls place KRLA above all Southland radio stations in average listening audiences, others have it fighting with KFWB for first place. KRLA's 43 employees go about their work in the station headquarters in the Huntington-Sheraton Hotel as if unaware of their well-publicized forthcoming disaster.

None of them has ever mentioned anything on the air about the station's difficulties. Everybody but KRLA has been talking about its impending doom.

That doom was sealed about two months ago, when the last appeal failed from the Federal Communications Commission ruling that the station's license would not be renewed. That ruling followed many months of hearings and reviews arising from charges that the station had failed to fulfill its programming promises, and had been evasive in its dealings with the FCC.

The question of what happens to the KRLA frequency is a vital one for Pasadena. It is possible that the facility may be moved out of this city by FCC decision, or by the new owner. Whatever its artistic or musical merits, KRLA is a potentially significant local voice, and its leaders say its payroll and spending in the

Sunday
Special

San Gabriel Valley amounts to perhaps a million dollars a year.

Several local groups are seeking the soon-to-be vacated frequency on a "keep-KRLA-in-Pasadena" platform. Usable radio frequencies are scarce.

The extinction of KRLA, in any case, will raise more questions than it answers. Among those questions the principal ones are these:

1—Who, if anyone, will take over the 1110-kilocycle radio broadcasting frequency now occupied by KRLA?

2—How long will it take to reach this decision?

3—What will happen to the frequency in the meantime?

One Question Raises Others

That final question raises several others. Will the station and its frequency go dead during the debate over its successor? If so, the property will drop in value while it is being fought over. That fight conceivably could last as long as two years, or more, while the would-be occupants of the frequency debate before the commission and in the courts.

Or will KRLA be allowed to continue operation, on an interim basis, during the debate? This could mean that the long-predicted silencing of the much-criticized and much-listened-to rock 'n' roll station may be postponed another two years or more.

Or will some other kind of interim operation be worked out by the Commission, to keep the valuable frequency alive during debate?

If an interim operation of any kind is worked out, what will happen to the very healthy profits being produced by the station, which sometimes has more customers for commercial

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for Replacement of KRLA

(Continued)

cial than it can accommodate?

One of the immediate questions is, how many applicants will try to get the KRLA frequency? That will be answered soon after March 31, the deadline set by the FCC for receiving applications.

It is likely that most applications will arrive at the last minute. This is a poker game for very high stakes, and each applicant will be reluctant to tip his hand in advance.

Each applicant must indicate what kind of operation he proposed for the frequency. Each is likely to try to outdo all others in pious proposals stressing public service, cultural treats, news analysis in depth, popular appeal, or worthy musical fare.

10 to 30 Rumored Vying for Frequency

So far all is rumor. But at least two groups have made public or semipublic indications of their intention to fight for the frequency. Rumor, however, has it that the final list of applicants may range anywhere from 10 to 30.

Several well-known persons are rumored to be potential rival applicants but without conformation so far from themselves.

Among them are Bob Hope, Art Linkletter, wealthy oilman Edwin S. Pauley, and even Jesse Unruh, controversial leader in state Democratic Party circles. The owners of Long Beach radio station KFOX reportedly also has a longing for the ill-fated frequency on which KRLA is about to gasp out its last Beatle record.

Several Pasadena groups are known to be maneuvering. Principal among them, insofar as present information goes, is the group known as California Regional Broadcasting Corporation, headed by Wesley I. Dumm as president.

Dumm is the former owner of broadcast stations in the San Francisco area, and now

worth of equipment, according to some estimates. Yet his station, as a going concern with a license, is worth several million dollars.

Consequently the new owners, whoever they may be, probably will be paying less than \$250,000 for a potential multi-million-dollar property (about \$100,000 for plant and equipment and antenna site, and perhaps another \$150,000 to get through the long and costly hearings that lie ahead). Thus, even if the station operated at a loss for many years, it might represent an excellent long-term business investment. Hence the swarm of potential applicants.

The scramble for the dying station may turn out to be long and bitter. The under-cover mutterings have already included some ugly implications. Even this newspaper was struck a gratuitous blow by one of the Pasadena applicant groups, who said in a recent letter to the FCC that "because of the monopoly of the press in our community we have a great opportunity to be of real service through a new radio station."

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a Pasadena resident active in civic and cultural institutions such as the Pasadena Playhouse. On several recent occasions he has quietly rescued the Playhouse from severe financial difficulties.

His group includes Howard F. Ahmanson, chairman of the board, who is also chairman of the board of Home Savings and Loan Association; and David Crandell, vice president, who is a former broadcast agency executive

and currently chairman of the board at Pasadena Playhouse. Two long-time Pasadenans, attorney Stanley L. Hahn and banker M. D. Jameson, are affiliated with this group.

They have indicated in letters to the FCC and to local people that they plan a complete change of direction for KRLA, if they should get its frequency and a new license. They talk of a cultural station devoted to classical music and discussions in depth, with very few commercials.

Most startling of all, they declare that they won't really worry about making money—or, as they put, "California Regional is not concerned with the commercial potential" and "will not be disappointed if it operates at a deficit."

Concern's Worth Runs Into Millions

This lofty declaration no doubt will be matched by others among the applications finally submitted. And all of them may be quite sincere. The economics of this entire ritual are a very peculiar process indeed. For example:

KRLA's present owner, Donald A. Cooke, shorn of his license, really has very little to sell beyond about \$100,000

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