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Hook, Line & Singer!
Essential criteria for maximising the playlist potential
of New Zealand music on commercial radio:
A Programme Directors' perspective

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'Station and programme directors act as gatekeepers, being responsible for ensuring a prescribed and identifiable sound or format, based on what the management of the station believes will generate the largest audience – and ratings – and consequent advertising revenue. The...programme director...will regularly sift through new releases, selecting three or four to add to the playlist. The criteria underpinning this process will normally be a combination of the reputation of the artist; a record's previous performance, if already released overseas; whether the song fits the station's format; and, at times, the gut intuition of those making the decision. In the case of the first of these factors, reputation and previous track record, publicity material from the label/artist/distributor plays an important role, jogging memories or sparking interest in a previously unknown artist' (Shuker, 1998, p. 242).

Abstract

For years the commercial radio industry in New Zealand has fought against regulation of local music on the airwaves, citing that in the competitive radio environment (a product of governmental deregulation of the industry) it would be detrimental to both their business and the present levels of local content being achieved voluntarily by radio. It is this same competition that forces commercial radio Programme Directors (PDs) to be ruthless with the music selected for their playlists. With up to 40 new releases a week and only a limited number of spaces available, every track is carefully scrutinised. Justification of decisions are made by the consideration of various selection criteria identified in this study, such as the overseas performance of a track, an artist's profile in the media, and the amount of promotional support they are receiving. Often, these qualities can supersede the sound of the song itself. 'Quality marketing is (arguably) more important than quality music. Not a palatable situation to many music people, I know, but a nasty reality and understandable when you consider the CD clutter that radio is faced with' (Smyth, pers.comm., 27 January 2000).

This situation does not bode well for local musicians, many of whom come to radio without qualities such as a previous radio track record. Additionally, the number of local releases presented to radio is significantly less than the number of overseas releases, yet in order to be considered for playlist selection PDs state that local music must be judged alongside its international counterparts - in other words, by the same selection criteria. PDs do concede, however, that a local music track will be given preference over an international track of equal quality, but only if it satisfies all other selection criteria. While there is evidence to suggest that this decision is political (and

perhaps being used to stem the tide of proposed music regulation), the identification of selection criteria presented in this study, combined with a PD preference for New Zealand music, could give local musicians a chance to secure a spot on the commercial radio playlist that may otherwise be difficult to obtain.

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Music Industry Abbreviations & Descriptors

ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority	<i>Australian federal government regulator of radio and television</i>
AMCOS	Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Association	<i>Represents the interests of music publishers and their writers in Australasia</i>
APRA	Australasian Performing Rights Association	<i>An organisation who collect and distribute royalties on behalf of songwriters in Australasia</i>
KMAG	Kiwi Music Action Group	<i>A group made up of representatives from the commercial radio and recording industries to promote New Zealand music</i>
NZ On Air	New Zealand On Air	<i>Government organisation who use public funding to promote social and cultural values in broadcasting</i>
RBA	Radio Broadcasters Association	<i>An organisation representing the interests of the commercial radio industry</i>
RIANZ	Recording Industry Association of New Zealand	<i>Trade organisation representing record companies in New Zealand</i>
TRB	The Radio Bureau	<i>Represents the national advertising and promotional interests of radio</i>

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Introduction

The Importance of Radio Airplay

Although video and television appearances have become important promotional mediums, it has largely been radio play which has encouraged retailers to stock recordings and consumers to purchase them. As one marketing director remarked... 'If you're going for a Top 10 record, if you're going to appeal to the broadest number of people that might conceivably buy your record, I think airplay is critical: it's absolutely vital' (Negus, 1992, p. 101).

Radio has always been considered central to the success of the music industry. This is the view of local music supporters who believe that, among other things, radio airplay helps to foster local music development (Pickering & Shuker, cited in Negus, 1996). It is also the view of the music industry that radio airplay is imperative to chart success (the sales generated by chart success being the major objective) (Negus, 1996). The latter point is backed by an Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) study, which found that radio is the main medium used by teenagers - some of the music industry's biggest consumers - to access music (Cupitt, Ramsay & Sheldon, 1997). But, as Berland points out, music is not the main concern of commercial radio.

Music-programming is not the main commodity produced by radio, but...the means to the production of radio's real commodity - the audience - to be sold to advertisers in exchange for revenue to the broadcaster (1990, p. 183, cited in Negus, 1992, p. 102).

Revenue gained through advertising is related to a station's ratings performance, radio ratings being the measure by which the radio industry judges itself. 'The higher a radio station's ratings are within its target audience group, the more advertising revenue it should attract from companies and/or individuals wishing to reach the same target

audience' (Radio airplay in New Zealand, 1992, p. 41). On commercial music stations, music is merely the means used to attract the audience.

In order to keep the audience (and its valuable ratings points) radio has argued that it cannot afford to take 'risks' with music; risks which are often associated with local music, as it is commonly untested and by an unfamiliar or unproven artist (Pickering & Shuker, 1993). Local music also has to compete with overseas music, which comes from a proven test ground. 'Because it's so competitive out there, it's simply easier – safer – to play a record that's been a hit overseas than it is to take a punt on a local record' (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a). Occasionally, local music has managed to acquire a track record by being picked up by overseas radio first. One commonly cited example is Crowded House's 1987 hit *Don't Dream It's Over*, which was picked up by New Zealand radio only after it had starting creeping up America's Billboard charts (Dix, 1988). How much importance PDs place on factors such as track record and artist familiarity when making playlist selection decisions will be investigated in this study. But first, an overview of the competitive New Zealand radio market, which underpins playlist decisions and the climate in which local music must survive.

The Radio Business in New Zealand

The best way to deal with radio is to understand who they are, and what they're all about is that they are a business...broadcasting groups are spending literally hundreds of millions of dollars buying these stations, and they want one thing, and that is advertising dollars, and they are not going to take chances (Wilson, cited in Negus, 1999, p. 114).

The focus on radio as a business is particularly pertinent in New Zealand where it is big business; New Zealand has more radio stations per capita than anywhere else in the world (Story & Brown, 1999). Deregulation of the broadcasting industry in 1989, which resulted in the allocation of more radio frequencies and opened up the airwaves to competition, is directly responsible for the large number of stations in the market today. Prior to deregulation there were just 69 radio stations in New Zealand; by 1993 the figure had more than doubled to 164 stations (Wilson, 1994); and now, more than 10 years after the onset of deregulation, New Zealand has over 200 radio stations nationwide (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a; Story & Brown, 1999)¹. This number is likely to increase over the next 12 months with the opening up of the 100MHz band (Shanahan, pers.comm., 17 July 2000).

Aside from the sheer volume of stations, competition in the local radio market is further emphasised by comparing advertising revenue figures with Australia. Story & Brown (1999) state that New Zealand's 200-odd radio stations chase the same advertising revenue (\$169 million) as the nine stations controlling Sydney's radio market. So what is radios' commitment to local music, given the amount of competition in the market? According to NZ On Air 'there is more New Zealand music on radio now than at any time in the last three years' (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/howmuch.html, 2000a). This statement is in reference to current figures that put the total percentage of local music played on commercial radio into double digits (see *Table 1*, p. 4). Barring the odd fluctuation, the figures also show a steady increase in local content on each of the four main format types - Alternative (Alt), Adult Contemporary (A/C), Pop and Rock.

¹ These figures include (government-owned) Radio New Zealand stations, private stations, Maori, access, other non-profit stations and student radio.

Local content figures are collated quarterly by the Kiwi Music Action Group (KMAG) from airplay logs provided to the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA) by the local radio industry (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a). The figures are important, as they are the outcome of the local music selection processes that this study is investigating. In New Zealand local content levels on commercial radio are achieved without the aid of regulatory measures such as music quotas (as seen in countries like Australia, Canada and Ireland). Instead, the local radio industry's free market approach sees each station setting its own local content levels. On application for a licence to broadcast there is also an understanding that stations will support local content.

Supporting 'New Zealand music' is legislatively required of stations when they apply for their broadcasting licence. A central purpose of this requirement is to 'ensure that a New Zealand identity is developed and maintained in programmes'. All radio stations recognise this obligation when they apply for a licence, but content analysis of airplay lists suggest many of them conveniently forget this once they have a warrant to broadcast (Shuker, 1994, pp. 66-67).

The following table shows the current level of support commercial radio gives to local music.

Table 1: *Local Content Levels on Commercial Radio in NZ by Format Type*

Format	Content Level %
A/C	8.75
Pop	9.17
Rock	10.45
Alt	29.37
<i>Overall (all formats)</i>	<i>10.42</i>

(Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmuisc/nov99/howmuch.html, 2000a)

Overwhelmingly, the youth-targeted Alt format type has been able to overcome what some deem 'a lack of confidence' in selecting New Zealand music and achieve levels of local content comparable to countries like Australia, whose local content levels on radio

are often looked at as something New Zealand radio should aspire to (Hobbs, cited in *The Politics of Radio*, 2000)². The Alt format category is made up of figures compiled from student radio (the b.net), which has a strong commitment to local music. Under the b.net charter, stations must play a minimum of 25 percent local content (Wilson, pers.comm., 21 July 2000). This figure has been aided by student radios' safety net of funding, which has undoubtedly succeeded in softening any risk associated with the 'untested' nature of local music. While some b.net stations have now moved away from a large funding base, each station still receives some form of funding (i.e. NZ On Air) to support its existence (Patterson, 1999). Reminiscent of college radio in the States, these Alt formatted radio stations could even be looked upon by the industry as a 'testing ground' for New Zealand music.

In terms of commercial radio (the focus of this study), the next two highest local content achievers are the Rock and Pop format types. The Rock format has been in double digits since June 1999; Pop peaked at 10.34 percent in December 1999, but dropped slightly in the first half of 2000 (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmuisc/nov99/howmuch.html, 2000a). Both of these format groups contain youth radio stations, such as the Channel Z Network (Rock) and The Edge Network (Pop)³. These youth formats have flourished in the deregulated environment, which has not only seen an increase in the number of radio stations, but fewer owners and a burgeoning number of radio networks and networked radio programmes (Duignan, pers.comm., 25 May 2000). This has enabled companies such as CanWest to take a chance with youth brands like Channel Z (expectations being that Channel Z will earn less revenue, allowing it to be more of a risk taker) (Shanahan, pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999). Meanwhile, CanWest's

² See *Appendix ii* for local content levels on Australian radio.

³ A network is a station broadcast to more than one centre.

other networked format brand, More FM, earns the majority of the advertising dollar for the company (More FM targets the household shopper, still regarded by radio as the most lucrative audience) (Ramsay, 1998).

Conversely, New Zealand's A/C formatted stations have always struggled to achieve respectable levels of local content (Neill, 1999) and have never surpassed the double-digit threshold. Wellington PD Eddie Hribar says that because of New Zealand's rock music tradition there are fewer releases targeted towards A/C format types, making it difficult to obtain enough local music to playlist (pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999). New Zealand A/C stations are not alone. Australia's A/C formats have also experienced difficulty in sourcing enough material to playlist (Sichter, pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999) and are therefore only required to achieve local content levels of 15 per cent (significantly lower than some other commercial radio formats in Australia). While Australia's contemporary formats (Pop and Rock) have the seemingly healthy looking figure of 25 percent local content, these stations make up very few of the total number of radio stations in Australia. As A/C is the predominant format type in Australia, it could therefore be concluded that the majority of radio stations play just 15 percent local content, while New Zealand's lower local content figures for most format types could simply be proportionate to the smaller population base (and hence music base) from which the radio industry can draw.

We will always want to see better figures, but I tend to think that if Australia has a regulated 20 percent with five times the population we have, then we are doing pretty well to have voluntary levels at around five to six percent (Moon cited in Kennedy, 1998, p. 4)⁴.

⁴ Although local content figures have changed since this quote was taken (dramatically in some cases), the sentiment remains the same. What it does emphasise (when compared with the figures in *Table 1*) is the increase in local content on radio over the last three years.

While higher local content levels in Australia are a direct result of the music quota imposed on commercial radio (Neill, 1999), the lack of a quota on New Zealand radio has not necessarily meant a lack of local content. KMAG Chairman Mike Regal says, if anything, it has encouraged it. 'The commercial radio industry don't want quotas, so I guess we're getting off our backsides and doing something about it ourselves' (Regal, cited in *Backch@t*, 1999). Whether or not PDs are actively seeking to increase the amount of local content on radio will be investigated in this study.

Promoting Local Music: The Quota Debate & NZ On Air

Despite radio pushing local content figures into double digits, groups like APRA and the Green Ribbon Trust⁵ maintain that 'New Zealand has the lowest levels of local content in the developed world' (Plains FM, 1998), and continue to support the call for regulation of local content on the airwaves. However, while the implementation of a music quota in New Zealand would increase figures for radio stations currently achieving less than 10 percent local content, it would not necessarily increase the overall amount of local content on commercial radio. Currently, the overall local content figure for commercial radio is 10.42 percent (see *Table 1*), higher than the initial 10 percent quota being mooted by the Government. Because of the difficulty in obtaining enough 'suitable' music to play, formats such as A/C would more than likely resort to their back catalogue to meet a quota amount at the expense of new music, resulting in more of the same local content as opposed to more local content overall. This is what is presently happening in Australia⁶ (Neill, 1999).

⁵ The Green Ribbon Trust is a group made up largely of media personalities campaigning for more local content on radio and television.

⁶ Canada has overcome this problem with legislation that requires radio to play a certain proportion of new releases as part of their local repertoire (Shuker, pers.comm., 20 October 2000).

Nevertheless, without a quota commercial radio in New Zealand has managed to increase its local content levels by the playlisting of more local music. Sony Artist & Repertoire Manager, Malcolm Black, says that the increase in local content figures are the fruits of an ongoing process designed to get more New Zealand music on air (cited in *Backch@t*, 1999). A combination of factors has contributed to this process and includes NZ On Air initiatives such as the Hit Disc schemes (which aim to get more airplay for New Zealand music without strict regulation); the addition of NZ On Air New Zealand music 'pluggers' (responsible for the promotion of New Zealand music directly to radio); and the presentation of Double Digit Plaques to PDs who achieve double figures with local content. Other factors include a closer relationship between the radio and recording industries (with the inception of KMAG and initiatives such as the New Zealand Music Showcase, which bring the radio and recording industries together at the annual RBA conference)⁷; and a new wave of PDs with an empathy towards local music (Black, cited in *Backch@t* 1999). This study will investigate how much influence these factors have on playlist selection, and whether there is indeed empathy among PDs towards local music. But before these can be investigated, the general selection processes of music on radio need to be discussed, in order for any disparities in local music selection to be identified later.

Playlist Decisions: The Role of the PD in the Decision Making Process

Typically PDs set aside two to three hours per week for playlist additions and changes (Hribar, Interview, 23 June 2000; King, Interview, 23 June 2000). But the

⁷ The New Zealand Music Showcase, devised by KMAG and hosted by NZ On Air, aims to bring the attention of new or breaking acts to local radio PDs. Examples of artists who featured at the Showcase prior to major radio and chart success include Stellar* and the feelers. (Note: Media publicity released by these bands show their names as written here, and will be displayed as such throughout this study).

rationalisation of choices made at these sessions happen continuously and through various means, including chart listings and record company promotional support. This is necessary due to the large volume of music received by mainstream commercial radio stations each week. Nicky Jarvis, New Zealand Music Promotions personnel for NZ On Air, says that up to 40 new releases can hit a PD's desk per week; that is a lot of music (Interview, 12 May 2000). But according to Christchurch PD Tony Nielsen, out of the new releases he receives each week an average of only one is a local track (Interview, May 13 2000). A station's format type clearly factors in the style and number of tracks available to it for playlist selection. For example, Nielsen is PD of a Hot A/C station, and like other PDs would only receive tracks that suited the nature of the Hot A/C format type.

Conversely, Roger Clamp, PD of More FM and the Channel Z network, may receive up to 10 tracks from NZ artists per week (most aimed at the Channel Z format type) (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000). This suggests that there is more suitable local product available for this format type, and that record companies (including musicians acting independently) may view this outlet as more 'open' to the playlisting of local music. One other reason for the difference in the amount of music presented to radio stations is format suitability. Due to the increase in network PDs (i.e. those in charge of more than one format type), record companies now target their product more carefully - PDs do not have time to wade through music that is not suitable for their format. 'Record companies try to anticipate what musical qualities will attract radio programmers - what songs will 'fit' into their formats' (Rothenbuhler & McCourt, 1992, p. 106). Other music selection processes, such as the appointment of a Music Director (MD), also assist in taking pressure off the PD at selection time.

Generally, a PD will not listen to every new release the station receives; that is the job of the MD. A 1985 study by Rothenbuhler, on the music selection practices of American PDs, cited that MDs were largely responsible for sorting through the music that arrived on station each week and placing the tracks they considered to have 'airplay potential' aside to be listened to again with the PD⁸. Only after this, and the consideration of other supporting evidence, were playlist decisions made (Rothenbuhler, 1985). This has also been the role of New Zealand MDs, but with the increased networking of format brands and subsequent loss of many PD positions, the number of MDs around the country is also likely to have diminished (Duignan, pers.comm., 25 May 2000). This will be investigated in this study, along with the current role of the MD in playlist selection.

The emergence of network PDs responsible for multiple broadcasts throughout the country now sees most programming decisions being made from the centre of the local radio industry, Auckland. While some PDs remain in other major radio centres (Wellington and Christchurch), in the regions and provinces team leaders and senior announcers generally take responsibility only for the day-to-day running of the station, not direct responsibility for music selection. This has changed the way the record companies present music to radio. Record company promotional personnel, whose job it is to promote the latest singles to radio, regularly phone and visit PDs and MDs to promote product. They supplement this by providing CDs to announcers that may have a particular liking or empathy for the product, in the hope that they will convince their PDs to add them to the playlist (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000). This particular strategy has always been a staple of record company promotional attack, particularly in

⁸ Despite the publication date, this study by Rothenbuhler titled *Programme Decision Making in Popular Music Radio* (1985), is still relevant today. Any information deemed inapplicable to the New Zealand radio environment was subtracted from his findings.

Britain and the United States, where the opinions of disc jockeys (DJs) were considered by record companies as 'influential... when attempting to get a record placed' (Negus, 1992, p. 102); and where Payola ('paying DJ's to play records') (Shuker, 1994, p. 45) was commonplace⁹. Instead of being just one of the many ways to create awareness, Jarvis says that announcer contact is now a necessity, as PDs responsible for such large operations no longer have time to listen to everything that crosses their desks (Interview, 12 May 2000)¹⁰. This is why supporting data also plays an important part in playlist decisions.

The Influence of Supporting Data on Playlist Decisions

Programme Directors use various consultants to advise them on trends in programming, and refer to a number of privately run 'tip sheet' magazines which provide detailed information about releases, radio plays across the country and listener responses (Negus, 1992, p. 106).

Rothenbuhler's study on the selection processes of PDs in the United States confirmed that various forms of song verification factored in the music decision-making process, adding record sales charts, industry recommendations and artist trends to the list of supporting evidence for new music tracks (1985). The study also referred to industry magazine *Radio & Records (R&R)*, which contains listings of radio airplay charts from around America - the world's largest music producer. New Zealand PDs are also familiar with *R&R* magazine, and until local airplay charts became available in 1997, it remained the staple of local PDs' 'tips'. 'Old school programmers...copy their playlist

⁹ New Zealand has its own form of 'payola' where record companies agree to do promotions with stations, i.e. trips overseas for listeners and certain radio station staff to see artists in concert, as incentives (instead of payment) for playing certain songs (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000).

¹⁰ It must be noted that since networking has become more prominent, there are now fewer radio announcers around the country. However, the majority are still in the main centres, where programming decisions are made and where record companies aim most of their promotional attack.

out of USA's Radio & Record [sic]' (Cammick, 2000c, p. 11). One of the reasons for this, Negus concurs, is that 'the radio stations of North America and Britain provide one of the most important promotional outlets for popular music, setting agendas for...radio stations throughout the world' (1992, p. 101). In other words, radio looks to other radio for playlist choice. This study will find out how much importance PDs place on both local and overseas radio playlists when making selection decisions.

NZ On Air's Nicky Jarvis, who has a background in record company promotion, says that *R&R* magazine is 'less important now that *RadioScope* is available' (Interview, 12 May 2000). *RadioScope* features a variety of local radio airplay charts as an alternative (or supplement) to *R&R* magazine, and is available online through *Median Strip* (the radio industry trade magazine's website).

Every Monday we collect the top 50 most-played songs from EVERY major contemporary music radio station in New Zealand...and use them to compile the *Median Strip Radio Airplay Charts*. The charts are based on a points system, designed to reflect: *how often a song is played* and *how many people are listening*. Results are used to help determine the New Zealand Singles Chart, which is in part sales airplay, as well as *RadioScope* - a collection of airplay reports, charts and analysis for radio programmers and record company staff (Kennedy, www.homepages.ihug.co.nz/~spoton/charts.htm, 2000a).

RadioScope charts include an overall Airplay Top 50 (all format types), a NZ Top 30, as well as Top 30 charts by format type (Adult, Alt, Pop and Rock). But how much importance do PDs place on this wealth of information available at their fingertips? And, if other radio stations are playing the song, has the so-called 'risk factor' of local music been eliminated? Further confirmation of local song selection is available in *Fresh Air*, the NZ On Air supplement published monthly with *Median Strip*. The supplement includes a tip sheet by PDs for PDs to 'add to their confidence' in selecting tracks for airplay (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000). NZ On Air selects the contributing

PDs, many of whom are part of the 'new school' of PDs partially credited with the rise in local content figures on radio by Smyth (www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a) and Cammick (2000c).

The recent improvements in percentages played by NZ radio are welcome. They are in part due to younger programmers and key individuals who chose to put the time into listening to and selecting local tracks (Cammick, 2000c, p. 11).

Cammick suggests that the departure of certain key individuals (like TRN PD and local music advocate, Grant Hislop, to Warner Music earlier this year), combined with the move towards networking and a continued reliance on overseas consultants advising on playlist choice, could see all the good work undone. 'With several networks dominating radio, just one foreign programmer with no knowledge of NZ music could be imported and local content...halved overnight' (Cammick, 2000c, p. 11). However, NZ On Air's Radio and New Zealand Music Manager, Brendan Smyth, believes this is no longer the case, citing that while three or four years ago consultants may have programmed out unfamiliar New Zealand tracks, these days it is 'hands off the kiwi music' (www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/state.html, 1998b). One reason for this may be the increased pressure on New Zealand PDs to playlist local music. This pressure comes from renewed talk of statutory regulation of local music on the airwaves, and Minister of Broadcasting, Marian Hobbs, believes that current levels of local content are a direct result of the renewed talk of quotas (cited in *The Politics of Radio*, 2000). Commercial radio broadcasters disagree, stating that the election had nothing to do with it (Impey, cited in *The Politics of Radio*, 2000), and remain firmly against the regulatory policy. 'More will be achieved, with less damaging consequences, through continued co-operation rather than compulsion' (Lowe, cited in *RBA Appoints PR Firm to Lobby Government*, 1999, p. 5).

Despite this stance, former More FM Wellington PD, Craig Boddy, says it would be 'foolish' not to be aware of local music in the current political environment, and that it is far better to be seen to be increasing the amount of local content played (pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999). 91ZM Wellington PD Eddie Hribar agrees, and says that 'a fair amount of pressure is put on radio stations to increase their percentage of NZ music' (pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999, p. 22). How much influence this pressure has on a PD's decision to playlist local music will be investigated during this study. It is anticipated, however, that PDs will state that their decision to playlist a local track (or not) will largely depend on the quality of the song itself, and whether or not it fits their format type. 'I personally feel that a song should be added to a station's playlist because it's the best song that the station could add at that point in time, not because of its geographic location' (Weston, pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999, p. 11). Because of this, the song qualities that help to determine 'playlist potential' also need to be investigated.

Playlist Potential: A Look at 'Song Quality'

The common belief is that people only want to hear their very favourite songs (the ones with the best hooks) over and over until they "burn out"...When this happens with a particular song it is replaced by another safe potential favourite in the station's music rotation (Lull, 1992, p. 5).

Like all music, local music also has to conform to or 'fit' the radio formats available. But it is not just the style of the song in question - there are several other factors to be considered when evaluating a song's playlist potential. These factors range from production values (technical quality) to audience appeal (largely denoted by a song's 'hook' or chorus line). Local songs are not only judged by these factors, but also

against international releases. In the past, PDs were reluctant to play New Zealand music because they believed it was of an inferior quality to overseas material. Pickering & Shuker state that a lack of quality output from the local music industry is 'one of the central components of the case against the New Zealand quota, particularly in the opposition mounted by the radio industry' (1993, p. 33). However the validity of this stance in today's environment must be questioned. Advances in technology have made it relatively easy (and a lot cheaper) for artists to record their own music to an acceptable standard, and has even enabled them to supply radio with CDs at a reasonable cost. Additionally, NZ On Air require that all tracks submitted to any of their New Zealand music schemes are of 'broadcast standard'. Technology, it would seem, can no longer be used as an excuse for radio not to play New Zealand music.

Even if we accept some notion of an identifiable technical standard, radio's application of this is inconsistent. Most of the 60's Golden Oldies...are of an inferior standard...compare the original 60's hit "The Game of Love", with the characteristically "thin" sound of that period, to the recent Pagan Records cover version by Tex Pistol (Shuker & Pickering, 1991, p. 43).

If technical quality were to extend to production values (the final overall sound of a song), it must be noted that some of the local artists that have had recent success on commercial radio have had their albums recorded overseas or with internationally acclaimed producers. Examples include Tim Finn (who recorded his latest album *Say It Isn't So* in the States) (Hoskins, www.mediatones.com/tim_news.html, 2000); Fiona McDonald (whose solo album *A Different Hunger* was partially recorded at Metropolis in London and mixed at Sing Sing, Melbourne (McDonald, pers.comm., 20 July 2000)); and Stellar* who recorded their album *Mix* in Auckland with 80s pop star and acclaimed producer, Tom Bailey (Fresh Air: Stellar*, 1998). Equally, there have been several recent local releases from the likes of Shihad, Deep Obsession and the feelers who have

recorded at York Street Studios in Auckland (King, 1999) and who are also receiving widespread radio airplay. One thing these two groups of artists have in common musically is that the singles taken from the albums contain hooks and have a certain 'pop' appeal - which for radio equals audience appeal. *Geographica*, the latest offering from New Zealand band Weta, has also been described as containing hooks (or, as they are referred to here, 'pop motifs').

[*Geographica*] ...is an album which moves from sweeping ballad to pulsing rock anthem with a flick of the overdrive switch. The one common thread throughout, an industrial strength pop motif. "We've always written what I'd consider to be pop songs," says Aaron. "They're pop songs surfing a big wave of rock and roll. A lot of New Zealand music is like that...It's maybe something about growing up in New Zealand" (cited in Fresh Air: Weta, 2000).

A hook is 'the distinctive and repetitive element that would be remembered by the listener and perhaps persuade them to make a purchase' (Negus, 1996, p. 79).

According to Negus, song hooks were adopted by music publishers as early as the 1920-1930s in an attempt to influence what was being programmed on radio (the rationale being that songs with vocal refrains were more likely to be recalled by the listener and announced by the on air talent) (1996). A recent local example of a song with a good hook is the feelers *As Good As It Gets* off the *Savage Honeymoon* film soundtrack. More FM Wellington PD Jimmy Stewart describes the song as having 'more hooks than the proverbial Japanese fishing boat' (cited in Fresh Air: the feelers, 2000). Naturally, the influence of music featured in movies and on movie soundtracks will be investigated in this study.

However, it is not enough for a song to simply 'sound good' to be playlisted.

Commercial radio is in the business of playing the hits and, as already established, supporting data such as charts, overseas playlists and consultant recommendations are

all important 'hit' indicators. When an artist tries to break into another market the general question is 'how well did they do at home?' Negus says that it is a struggle for new artists (particularly those without a following, public profile or huge marketing machine behind them) to make an impact on radio (1992). 'On the promotional battlefield, where record companies are competing for limited amounts of airtime, it is often the new artists and releases that die before even being heard by the public' (Negus, 1992, p. 101). This does not bode well for local artists who quite often come without an established track record, and is why record company promotion and the establishment of artist profile is crucial to the success of local music.

The Importance of Record Company Promotion & Artist Profile

At American radio stations it is the music programme directors who decide which tracks are to be broadcast. Their first concern is inevitably whether a particular recording is compatible with the station's format. After this the programme director considers the 'support' a recording is receiving from the record company (Negus, 1992, p. 106).

Various types of promotional information accompany new releases to radio stations via record companies. Information sent to PDs can include details of an artist's appearance on a television show, a scheduled screening of their latest video, former chart information ('remember their last top 10 hit?') and tour information. But not all releases will receive the same treatment by record company promotional personnel who have a 'priority' list of artists and songs to push; and as most New Zealand record companies are subsidiaries of overseas companies, international music releases must often take priority. In addition, Jarvis points out that it is not in a promotion person's best interest to push every single to PDs, lest they 'lose credibility' (Interview, 12 May 2000). New local artists are, of course, competing against firmly established acts with

track records. For New Zealand artists this does not mean they are just competing against international artists, but also against well-known local artists such as Crowded House and Dave Dobbyn. Not only is it easier for a PD to make a decision about a song from a recognised act (much of the 'risk' being eliminated), but from a record company point of view it is also easier to promote.

Overseas product has already been successful in the marketplace; the record and its artist will probably already have a consumer profile and international record companies will have associated promotional material readily available. Consequently, less effort is required on the part of radio programmers in their use of records from overseas (Shuker, 1994, p. 69).

The proliferation of American music on New Zealand radio is also making it difficult for local acts to find a spot on local radio. They are competing with proven foreign releases in a very competitive and congested radio environment. In Britain, for example, it is easier to break new acts because music radio there is dominated by just one national non-commercial station 'playing an eclectic range of popular music' (Negus, 1992, p. 110). Negus is referring to Radio 1, whose staff are viewed by record companies as a key to a new artist's 'discovery and development' (Negus, 1992, p. 111). New Zealand band OMC even benefited from this scenario.

Do you know how *How Bizarre* became a hit in the UK? Because Chris Evans (breakfast DJ on Radio 1) had the balls to champion two songs a month which he knew were great songs but weren't on the 'safe' list. One week he chose *How Bizarre*. The record company didn't even have it on their release schedule at that stage...suddenly they had people ringing demanding to know why they didn't have *How Bizarre* yet. Most of them probably hadn't even heard of OMC but they went into a panic over a record they hadn't given the time of day before because someone in radio recognised it for what it was – a hit (Stent, cited in NZ music week, 1999, p. 5).

The Impact of Other Mediums on Local Music Airplay

Sometimes music manages to bypass radio and achieve success through other mediums. For instance, Dave Dobbyn's 1986 hit *Slice of Heaven* was picked up by radio as a result of its promotion through the film *Footrot Flats* (Pickering & Shuker, 1993). Television, specifically the screening of music videos, is also important to song success. As early as 1986 the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal reported that music videos 'were believed to play a part in radio programmers' selection of music for air play' (cited in London & Hearder, 1997, p. 29); the reason being that once a clip had been broadcast on television, radio deemed it 'safe' to pick up (Andrew cited in ABT, 1986, p. 45, cited in London & Hearder, 1997, p. 29). NZ On Air's Nicky Jarvis says television is 'crucial' to music exposure (Interview, 12 May 2000); whilst local music promoter Nikki Tysall considers music channels vital for breaking new artists.

No one pretends radio breaks the acts. We were able to bring bands here like Oasis, Blur and Portishead, but I doubt whether they would have been as big if people hadn't been able to see them on TV. The Verve and Radiohead are huge but a lot of it must have been video airplay. Everyone's seen that *Bittersweet Symphony* video. Videos make bands like that more accessible (Tysall, cited in Atkinson, 1998, p. 9).

Part of the reason music quota proponents do not champion television as much as radio may be that since the closure of MTV in 1998, New Zealand has been without a national, fulltime, free-to-air music channel. There are, of course, regional music channels, but these do not have the reach or credibility of being associated with a major television network. Tysall says that the closure of MTV has dire implications for New Zealand music. 'Local bands are not going to get exposure now. People like...Che Fu...where are they going to get airplay?' (cited in Atkinson, 1998, p. 9).

One avenue that has opened up for record companies since MTV's closure are the L&P song spots on TV4, which Jarvis states are 'very affordable' (Interview, 12 May 2000). For two thousand dollars, a music video screened in an L&P song spot will receive a guaranteed eight plays across the course of a week, with bonus spots capable of pushing the total number of plays to 15 (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000). Normal television advertising is also purchased by record companies to promote local and international releases, and in large quantities. Sony Music, BMG, Warner Music and NZ On Air all featured in *AdMedia's* Top 40 television ad spenders for February 2000 (National adspend, 2000). Conversely, radio advertising is usually only purchased if it is a co-op between radio and CD shops (for example, a CD shop might do a radio campaign for a new album which includes a poster giveaway), and are run prior to a television campaign (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000). Aside from film and television, local music is promoted through other media like the Internet and magazines. Considering the vast array of media people are exposed to these days (particularly teenagers, who are large consumers of new music), surely the exposure of music through other media must have an effect on PDs' playlist decisions? How much of an effect will be investigated in this study.

Summary

With the exception of Rothenbuhler (1985), there have not been many studies investigating the playlist selection processes of commercial radio PDs, and certainly no local studies dedicated to selection processes for New Zealand music. This may be because commercial radio is of the opinion that all songs, including local, are selected for airplay because they fit the format and are the best song available (Weston,

pers.comm., cited in Neill, 1999). But background research suggests that this is not, in fact, the case, and that the influences on a PD's choice of music occur continuously – from chart appearances to music heard on other radio stations, seen on other media, read in press releases and pushed by record company personnel. To determine how much effect these, and other factors have on the playlist selection of local music, PDs from the major metropolitan radio centres in New Zealand will be surveyed. The study will also investigate whether PDs give preference to New Zealand music at selection time and, if so, why. It is hoped that this investigation of programming decisions by commercial radio will shed some light on how and why music selections are made, and what the local music industry can do to increase the chances of airplay for New Zealand music.

Method

Implementation of this study contained several steps, outlined below.

Step 1: Background Interviews

Interviews with current and former industry-related personnel were conducted, to gather information on the New Zealand radio industry and the current music selection practices of commercial radio programmers. Interviews were either carried out in person or via e-mail between May and June 2000. The data gathered (along with information contained in the introduction) enabled the identification of a broad number of music selection criteria.

Table 2: *Industry Related Background Interviews*

Name	Position (at time of interview)
Duignan, Gerard	Former Manager, Radio New Zealand, New Zealand
Jarvis, Nicky	NZ Music Promotions, NZ On Air, Auckland, New Zealand
Nielsen, Tony	Programme Director, C93FM & Lite FM, Christchurch, New Zealand
Shanahan, Morry	Former Programme Director, 89X, Auckland, New Zealand
Sim, Jeff	Former Music Director, 91ZM, Christchurch, New Zealand

Step 2: Identification of Music Selection Criteria

Three metropolitan Programme Directors (PDs) representing different format types were interviewed by telephone on 23 June 2000 regarding their views on the significance (or not) of the music selection criteria identified during background

interviews. PDs were also asked to identify any additional criteria considered during playlist selection, including any pertaining specifically to local music. Findings were combined with personal programming knowledge¹, to confirm or deny each criterion a place in a questionnaire for the rest of the radio industry (see *Step 3*). Follow-up calls were made in some instances after questionnaires were returned to clarify points made.

Table 3: *PD Questionnaire Design Interviews*

Name	Station	Format type
Hribar, Eddie	91ZM, Wellington, New Zealand	Pop
King, Brad	The Rock Network, Auckland, New Zealand	Rock
Nielsen, Tony	C93FM & Lite FM, Christchurch, New Zealand	Adult ²

Step 3: Questionnaire Design & Implementation

A self-completion questionnaire was designed asking PDs in the metropolitan radio markets of Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin³ to rate the importance of the final music selection criteria identified in *Step 2* using a 1-5 scale (see *Appendix iii – PD Questionnaire* for full scale). These centres were selected, as they are the bases from which most major programming decisions are made. Criteria were presented as questions, and included a short descriptor to ensure clarity.

¹ Between 1989-1992 I worked as a Music Director on a metropolitan radio station in New Zealand. I am also able to draw on the findings of a study I carried out in 1999 regarding local music content levels on commercial radio in Australia and New Zealand, which included interviews with New Zealand PDs, Australian MDs and other industry-related personnel.

² This study refers to both Adult and A/C station format types. A/C formats come under the banner of Adult, and both are used in NZ On Air and other literature regarding radio in New Zealand. See *Appendix i* for full format descriptors.

³ Student radio stations were omitted from the sample, as it has only been recently that the student radio network (SRN) has come under the 'commercial radio' banner. Results may also have been skewed because the SRN charter requires each of its stations to commit at least 25% of their playlist to New Zealand music (Wilson, pers.comm., 21 July 2000).

In accordance with introductory information and interviews (which established that all songs - local or international in origin - are judged by the same criteria) the first part of the questionnaire was general, and asked PDs to rate criteria according to the importance placed on each of them when considering *any* song for playlist selection. Questions pertaining specifically to local music were listed at the end of the questionnaire so as not to bias responses relating to music in general. As introductory information had also established that a song would only be considered for playlist selection if it suited the format type, this underpinned the entire questionnaire (i.e. when filling out the questionnaire, PDs could assume that the 'song' in question was suitable for their format/s).

Questionnaires were sent to a total of 17 PDs, representing 22 radio stations and 10 radio networks nationwide⁴. There was an 88 percent return rate of questionnaires. Sixty percent of respondents were network PDs responsible for more than one station or format type; the remaining 40 percent were single station PDs responsible for a single station and format only. Individual names have not been associated with responses to ensure confidentiality; instead, PDs are referred to in text as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, and so forth. The following table lists all PDs sent a copy of the questionnaire, along with the stations, formats and markets they are responsible for. All information is valid as at June 2000.

⁴ Three metropolitan PDs outside Auckland were not included in the survey as they were not directly responsible for the music selected on their stations. Instead, the PD accountable for format selection was contacted. Due to the number of PDs responsible for more than one format or station, PDs were only required to fill in one questionnaire covering the selection process in general. To allow for any variation in the selection processes between stations or format types, PDs were asked to acknowledge any differences and provide details at the end of the questionnaire.

Table 4: *PD Questionnaires*

Name	Station(s) / Format(s)	Market(s)
Blomfield, Gretchen	Radio Dunedin	Adult Dunedin
Boston, Christian	Radio Hauraki	Rock Auckland/Waikato
	ZM Network	Pop Auckland/Waikato/Dunedin
Clamp, Rodger	Channel Z Network	Rock Auckland/Wellington/ Christchurch
	More FM	Pop Auckland/Waikato
Dawkins, Andie	More FM	Pop Christchurch/Dunedin
Edwards, Kris	Y99.3FM	Adult Waikato
Grove, Dave	The Breeze	Adult Wellington
Haru, Mike	The Beat 96	Urban ⁵ Auckland
Hribar, Eddie	91ZM	Pop Wellington
Hubber, Russell	91ZM	Pop Christchurch
	Classic Hits	Adult Christchurch
King, Brad	The Rock Network	Rock Auckland/Waikato/Wellington/ Christchurch/Dunedin
	4XO	Adult Dunedin
McRodden, Mike	Solid Gold Network	Adult Auckland/Waikato/Wellington, Christchurch/Dunedin
Nielsen, Tony	C93FM	Adult Christchurch
	Lite FM	Adult Christchurch
Stanley, Jason ⁶	Classic Hits Network	Adult Auckland/Waikato/Wellington/ Dunedin
	Radio I Network	Adult Auckland
Stewart, Jim	More FM	Pop Wellington
Taylor, Manu	Mai FM	Urban Auckland
Wratt, Leon	The Edge Network	Pop Waikato/Wellington/ Christchurch/Dunedin

Results Analysis

The first set of results to be calculated were the *Overall Criteria Results*. To achieve this, a mean score for each criterion was calculated to two decimal places; criteria were then ranked in order of importance. The table below shows how the ranges of scores were calculated.

⁵ Due to the small sample number and return, Urban formats were omitted from this study.

⁶ Jason Stanley fulfils the functions of a PD, but his official title is Presentation Co-ordinator.

Table 5: *Process for Criteria Averaging*

Score awarded by PD	Criteria range	Criteria descriptor
1	1 – 1.9	<i>Not at all important</i>
2	2 – 2.9	<i>A little important</i>
3	3 – 3.9	<i>Fairly important</i>
4	4 – 4.9	<i>Very important</i>
5	5 – 5.9	<i>Of vital importance</i>

Next (and to allow for a more detailed examination), criteria were divided into five groups for an *Overall Category Analysis* (see Table 6). The categorisation of results revealed the types of criteria that had the most influence overall on PD selection of music onto the commercial radio playlist.

Table 6: *Overall Category Analysis*

Category	Descriptor	Criteria
Artist/Song	The attributes of a song or artist that may be considered by PDs when making playlist selection decisions	<i>Artist familiarity, artist track record, song duration, song hook, technical quality</i>
NZ On Air	A unique category, dealing solely with criteria implemented by NZOA for the promotion of NZ music	<i>Hit Disc inclusion, NZ music plugger, RBA showcase</i>
Other Media	The profile of a track on other media, and how these may affect playlist selection decisions	<i>Film soundtrack, Internet exposure, media profile, video airplay</i>
Radio Station	Criteria considered from a radio station point of view by PDs when making playlist selection decisions	<i>Commercial imperatives, consultant opinion, MD/staff opinion, own instinct, playlist balance</i>
Track Performance	Historical or current supporting evidence of the performance of a song in other arenas	<i>International performance, NZ album charts, NZ singles charts, other (local) station playlists, promotional support, record company affiliation</i>

Following the *Overall Criteria Results* and *Overall Category Analysis*, results for individual criteria groupings were presented. After each of these was a discussion of the individual criteria and their relationship to local music. To ensure consistency, any data used to support arguments was taken from a comparable time period to the questionnaire implementation (for example, local content figures were taken from the second quarter ending June 2000 to coincide with questionnaire return).

Results & Discussion

Introduction

Overall, none of the criteria were rated of *vital importance* by PDs. Just three criteria were rated *very important*, and five *fairly important*. The bulk of the criteria (48 percent) were judged only *a little important*; the remaining 17 percent were rated *not at all important*. There were no additional criteria identified by PDs that were not already incorporated into existing criteria descriptors (see *Appendix iii – PD questionnaire* for full criteria descriptors).

Table 7: *Overall Criteria Results*

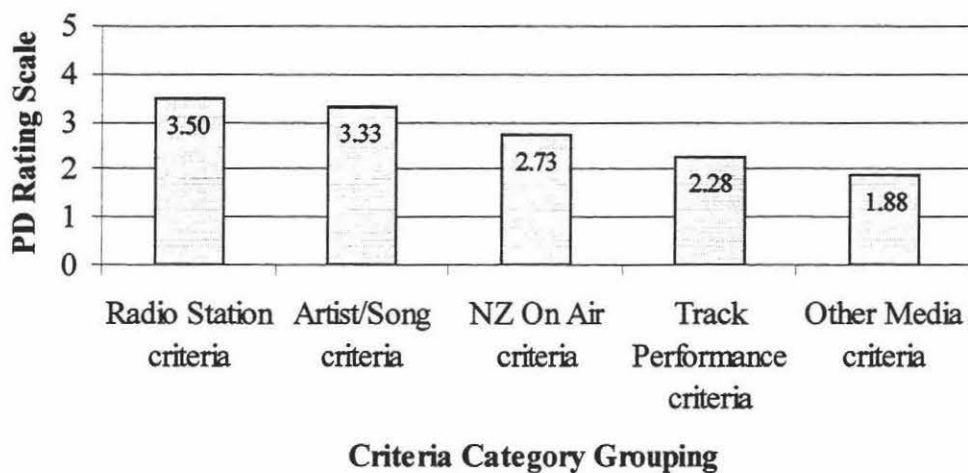
Rating	Criteria	Importance Level	Criteria Grouping
1	Own instinct	<i>Very important</i>	Radio Station
2	Song hook	<i>Very important</i>	Artist/Song
3	Playlist balance	<i>Very important</i>	Radio Station
4	Technical quality	<i>Fairly important</i>	Artist/Song
5	MD/staff opinion	<i>Fairly important</i>	Radio Station
6	Artist track record	<i>Fairly important</i>	Artist/Song
7	Hit Disc inclusion	<i>Fairly important</i>	NZ On Air
8	Artist familiarity	<i>Fairly important</i>	Artist/Song
9	Commercial imperatives	<i>A little important</i>	Radio Station
10	International performance	<i>A little important</i>	Track Performance
11	NZ music plugger	<i>A little important</i>	NZ On Air
12	Consultant opinion	<i>A little important</i>	Radio Station
13	Other (local) station playlists	<i>A little important</i>	Track Performance
14	Song duration	<i>A little important</i>	Artist/Song
15	Promotional support	<i>A little important</i>	Track Performance
16	Media profile	<i>A little important</i>	Other Media
17	RBA showcase	<i>A little important</i>	NZ On Air
18	Film soundtrack	<i>A little important</i>	Other Media
19	Record company affiliation	<i>A little important</i>	Track Performance
20	NZ singles charts	<i>Not at all important</i>	Track Performance
21	NZ album charts	<i>Not at all important</i>	Track Performance
22	Video airplay	<i>Not at all important</i>	Other Media
23	Internet exposure	<i>Not at all important</i>	Other Media

It is interesting to note that the top 35 percent of criteria (either rated *very important* or *fairly important*) all require little work on behalf of the PD to access information. For example, *own instinct*, *song hook*, *playlist balance* and *technical quality* can all be established by the PD simply by listening to the track in question. Additionally, *artist familiarity* and *artist track record* only require the PD's prior knowledge of an artist and his/her past performance on the station; while *MD/staff opinion* automatically forms part of the weekly business of playlist selection. The remaining criteria (in particular 16 to 23) all require some form of effort by the PD to access information; for example attending the *RBA showcase*, scanning the *NZ singles charts* or watching television for the latest *video airplay*. These are also the more public and 'traditional' face of music selection, and it is especially surprising to see the latter two criteria at the bottom of the table, in view of introductory information suggesting otherwise (this will be discussed in more detail later in this section).

Overall, results show that PDs rely more heavily on a select number of criteria to make playlist decisions. However, the fact that some level of importance is placed on most confirms that PDs utilise a wide range of criteria during the selection process (albeit to varying extents). In order to ascertain the types of criteria that have the most bearing on selection decisions, each was assigned to an appropriate category grouping for closer analysis. The groups were: Artist/Song criteria (criteria pertaining to the artist or song itself), NZ On Air criteria (radio initiatives specific to NZ On Air and local music), Other Media criteria (other media outlets where a song may be featured), Radio Station criteria (in-house criteria considered from an individual radio station point of view at selection time), and Track Performance criteria (criteria providing evidence of the

performance of a track) (*see Table 6*). A mean rating was calculated for each group, to account for a variation in the number of criteria contained under them¹.

Figure 1: *Overall Category Analysis*



Radio Station criteria were deemed the most important by PDs when making playlist selection decisions, followed closely by Artist/Song criteria. NZ On Air criteria were third, and Track Performance criteria fourth. Criteria contained under Other Media were rated least important overall by PDs. Each of these groupings and their individual criteria will be discussed next, in order of importance, along with their relevance to the selection of local music onto the commercial radio playlist.

¹ There were no major differences between the overall criteria result, and criteria results by format type. The only real observation is that Adult format types marked criteria consistently higher than Pop or Rock. As Adult formats make up the majority of radio stations in New Zealand (Neill, 1999), their higher representation in this study impacted on findings by increasing the overall rating for criteria.

Radio Station Criteria

The pattern of additions to playlists that ultimately emerged was that contemporary format radio stations in capital cities were generally responsible for the introduction of new releases to airplay, provided the tracks met format criteria (Jonker, 1992, p. 28).

Five criteria made up the Radio Station category. These were the criteria considered by PDs from a radio station point of view when making playlist selection decisions. The top two Radio Station criteria (*own instinct, playlist balance*) were also placed in the top three criteria overall (see *Table 7*). These were followed by *MD/staff opinion* (nearly a whole point behind a PD's *own instinct*), then *commercial imperatives* and *consultant opinion* respectively. The overall average of this category made Radio Station criteria the top category.

Table 8: *Radio Station Criteria*

Radio Station Criteria	PD Mean Rating
Own instinct	4.40
Playlist balance	4.00
MD/staff opinion	3.33
Commercial imperatives	2.87
Consultant opinion	2.73
<i>Total (averaged)</i>	<i>3.47</i>

Own Instinct (Gut Feel)

Certain songs you know will do well... "Pacifier" - Shihad - We started playing this song leading into the Big Day Out last year because it was in my opinion the best song on the album - and not to mention a fantastic radio track - The track wasn't released as a single until May this year. The biggest thing is "how catchy is this" and "what do punters like"? It is a hard thing to define...but generally you know that a song will do well 9 times out of 10 (King, pers.comm., 24 August 2000).

When selecting songs for the playlist, Lull stated that ‘most programmers rely on external indicators of potential’ (1992, p. 5). Among the indicators Lull noted were trade journals (a list of what other radio stations are currently playing), record sales, track records of artists, and the views of national consultants. Yet this study found that an internal indicator - a PDs *own instinct* (or *gut feel* as it is referred to in the industry) was the most important factor in playlist selection. Defining *own instinct*, however, is tremendously difficult.

Perhaps the most obvious explanation is that *own instinct* is a combination of external factors; i.e. the PD’s opinion of the song after they have assembled and considered all of the evidence they deem critical to a song’s success. For example, *song hook*, *playlist balance*, *technical quality*, *MD/staff opinion* and *artist track record* – the top five criteria in this study following their *own instinct*. However, PD Tony Nielsen says that this is not the case. According to Nielsen, *own instinct* is a professional judgement of the hit value of a song for the radio station. Yes, he agrees, it is a judgement of what music the audience finds appealing – but from a professional and personal point of view (internal indicator), rather than a from research base (external indicator) (Interview, 23 June 2000). PD Brad King agrees that *own instinct* is the PD’s own opinion of what the audience will like, but adds that a song should also have an ‘extremely catchy hook’ (Interview, 23 June 2000); *song hook* coming second overall to *own instinct*.

Playlist Balance

The basic kind of music that has broad appeal internationally is...pop music ballads. Ballads always work. It doesn't matter if it's Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Bon Jovi or whoever it happens to be. A ballad is always going to be something that will work in basically every country around the world (McDonagh, cited in Negus, 1999, p. 157).

This implies that if a song is a ballad, it has a good chance of securing a spot on the playlists of applicable radio formats (i.e. A/C, Pop). While in principle this may be the case, what happens if there are already two or three ballads on the playlist that are performing well with the station's audience? *Playlist balance* is an assessment that PDs make on a weekly basis with regard to all genres of music and, as one respondent suggests, too many of one genre type can change the sound of a station. 'We...select music based on style required for music flow e.g. pop rock followed by pop dance and pop alt. To maintain the correct balance on airflow we look to add music to the rotates that will achieve this' (Respondent 8, 2000). This was confirmed by Tony Nielsen, who said that he would generally look for more 'upbeat' songs on his contemporary Hot A/C format, and 'down-tempo' songs for his Adult EZL station (Interview, 23 June 2000).

This does not mean, however, that PDs will overlook a great radio track because of the makeup of the current playlist. PD Eddie Hribar states that he looks for the best of every genre, and even if he had enough of the same genre on the playlist at one time (e.g. ballads), he would not play an inferior track from another genre in place of it (Interview, 23 June 2000). Nor would he play a track that did not suit the format of the radio station. Introductory research and interviews revealed that when selecting songs for the playlist, their suitability for the station's format is uppermost. Additionally, PDs in charge of more than one format type did not identify any differences in the selection process between formats.

MD/Staff Opinion

Despite introductory research indicating that there might be fewer MD positions around the country to coincide with a decrease in PD numbers, 73 percent of PDs who took part in this study indicated that they had an MD, or someone fulfilling the function of an MD, to assist with playlist selection. The majority of PDs who indicated that they had assistance with playlist selection were in charge of a network or multiple format types, and therefore the MD is likely to assist with the programming of more than one station or format type. For example, TRN Auckland has four different networked music stations (ZM, Hauraki, Classic Hits and Easy Listening i), which service 10 station branches around the metropolitan radio centres. However there are only two MDs servicing all of these stations; one that works with the Hauraki/ZM PD, and one with the Classic Hits/Easy Listening PD. Respondents that indicated they did not have assistance with music selection were all single station PDs (in charge of just one station or format type), reinforcing that MD assistance is primarily used for multiple stations or format types.

Additionally, this study found that the role of MD is unlikely to be their primary job on station, and that is why the descriptor for this criterion included 'other staff'; not all persons filling the function of MD are actually bestowed the title. For instance, Nielsen has an 'unofficial' MD who carries out the functions of the job by sorting through the new music prior to attending the weekly music meeting; in this case this person is also the station's Marketing Manager. While Hribar does not have a particular person to assist with playlist decisions, he often seeks staff input for music selection, and says that this is valuable because 'you can get into a mindset about a song - and staff are able to put a different context on it' (Interview, 23 June 2000). As well as giving opinions on

music and sorting through the new releases, PDs who took part in this study confirmed Rothenbuhler's (1985) findings, citing that MDs were also responsible for collating music research. Other duties included scheduling logs and dealing with record companies. While one PD stated that agreement between the MD and PD is reached before a song is added to the playlist (Respondent 4, 2000), findings indicated that the PD is still the main decision maker when it comes to music selection, as highlighted by the high rating for the PD's *own opinion* and lower rating for *MD/staff opinion* (see Table 7).

Commercial Imperatives

Commercial imperatives refer to the business side of radio, and were included in the study to reflect the competitiveness of the radio environment and how this impinges on playlist selection. Introductory information has already established that due to the competitive environment, radio is reluctant to take 'risks' with music (Pickering & Shuker, 1993) and this is why PDs rely on certain music selection criteria. Testing of this particular criterion sought to establish whether PDs were willing to trade leniency in playlist decisions in return for advertising revenue, or an edge over the competition. For example, would a PD be more likely to playlist the latest song from an artist if (1) the radio station had secured rights to a concert or interview with a visiting artist; or (2) if advertising schedule had been purchased to promote the artist (i.e. their latest CD or concert)? Apparently they are - *commercial imperatives* ranked in the top 10 criteria overall for this study. However, Brad King warns that *commercial imperatives* are also a deterrent for radio when it comes to playlisting a song from a certain artist (Interview, 23 June 2000). King cites the example of rock act Pennywise, whose New Zealand tour

was sponsored by Channel Z – a rival rock network – consequently deterring him from playlisting the current single.

Consultant Opinion

Consultants act as contracted advisers to specific radio stations. Their job is to monitor musical trends, track spending on advertising and follow listener research and regional consumption patterns across the networks. They then advise individual stations of the most competitive and commercial strategies. Consultants may suggest that a station stop playing the recordings of specific artists, no matter how successful (Negus, 1999, p. 112).

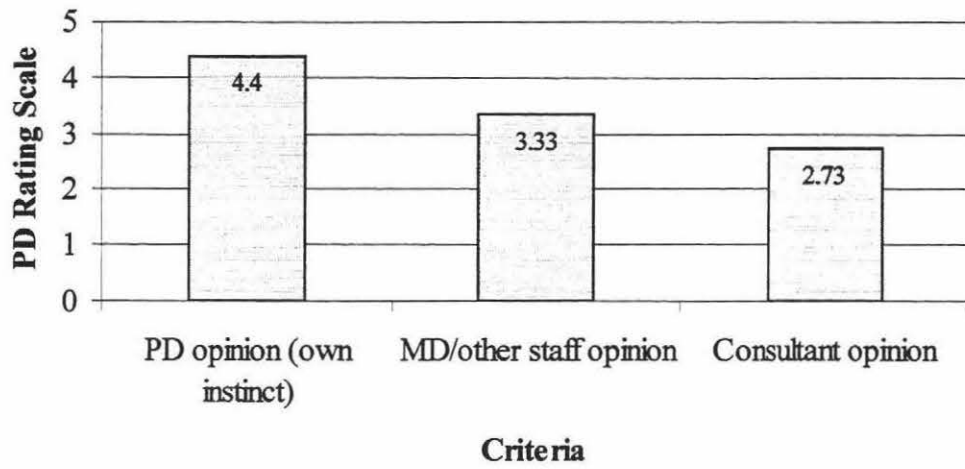
The primary function of a programme consultant is, as Negus states, to give the radio station a competitive edge. Most consultants are ex-radio programmers themselves, and one of their primary concerns is the sound of the station - which extends to on-air features, talent and the playlist. According to Butcher (1999), American consultants ‘descended’ on the New Zealand radio industry after deregulation in 1989 and would ‘scour the playlists with their Californian eyes for “hits”. Ardijah? Who’s that? Never heard of them. Out it goes’ (1999, p. 65). While the employment of a station programming consultant is still standard practice today (Shanahan, pers.comm, 27 October 2000), their power over the commercial radio playlist may be dwindling.

I ring a guy who is programming a successful new rock station in a significant metropolitan market to check out what’s happening. This is about three or four years ago. He sounds glum. He tells me he’s had “the consultant” in town and the consultant has made him take all the New Zealand music out of the playlist. But that’s not the point of the story. The point of the story is that a few months ago I’m talking to an influential programmer for a major national network and he tells me that these days when “the consultant” comes to town the consultant is told that he’s free to meddle with the playlist but there’s one rule – hands off the kiwi music. It stays (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/state.html, 1998b).

Findings showed that *consultant opinion* was only rated by PDs in the *a little important* range. This is likely to be because station consultants are based out of town (or in some cases out of the country) and therefore are unable to be involved with the day-to-day running of the station. Playlists, of course, are updated on a weekly basis (Hribar, Interview, 23 June 2000; King, Interview, 23 June 2000; Nielsen, Interview, 23 June 2000). Hribar, who stated that he only sees his consultant twice a year, backed up this view of a consultant's current influence on the playlist by saying that the consultant only takes a general look at music lists, not at specific tracks (Interview, 23 June 2000).

So why do radio stations still have consultants, aside from any competitive advantage they may bring? Negus surmises it is so 'staff within the radio station do not have to listen to the vast number of recordings being solicited from record companies, as they will be advised by the consultants which ones are hot and which are not' (1999, p. 112). However, as we know, most consultants are not around when the playlists are compiled. Even King, who has an Auckland-based consultant, says that he is more likely to go to other station staff first for their opinion on a music track, and will only use the consultant if he is still unsure (Interview, 23 June 2000). But Negus also suggests that with a consultant, 'individual programme controllers and radio station managers can no longer be held responsible for any bad judgements in selecting music' (1999, p. 112). Indeed, stations have been known to drop consultants if there is a corresponding drop in ratings, but the fact that PDs rated their own opinion above all others (including that of the consultant and MD - see *Figure 2*) indicates that PDs still hold themselves accountable for playlist success, and that they remain the primary decision maker.

Figure 2: *Playlist Decision Makers*



Artist/Song Criteria

Look at all the great rock bands over the years, they've always had a certain make up...The Stones, Zeppelin, right through to U2 and The Smiths. They've always had great songs, a great front person, great guitarist and they've been a band, a unit...They've always had similar qualities' (un-named A & R director, cited in Negus, 1992, p. 53).

The five criteria that make up the Artist/Song category are attributes of either an artist or song which are considered by the PD when making playlist selection decisions. The top two song attributes in this category (*song hook* and *technical quality*) also rated in the top five criteria overall. PDs rated both artist attributes in this category (*artist track record* and *artist familiarity*) fairly evenly at third and fourth places respectively; while the remaining song attribute (*song duration*) was deemed least important. This category was second overall in the PD ratings.

Table 9: *Artist/Song Criteria*

Artist/Song Criteria	PD Mean Rating
Song hook	4.27
Technical quality	3.80
Artist track record	3.13
Artist familiarity	3.07
Song duration	2.40
<i>Total (averaged)</i>	<i>3.33</i>

Song Hook

Pop music is definitely about melodies and about songs...I think second to that comes the actual music and the way it is played (Campbell, cited in The Zed Plan, www.zedquarters.com/htmls/thepress1.html, no date).

Song hook is the riff or chorus of a song that catches attention (Lull, 1992). Next to their *own instinct*, PDs rated *song hook* as the second most important criterion overall for playlist selection, and first in this category. Its ranking may well be attributed to its

expediency; a song's hook - provided it has one - is readily accessible to PDs when auditioning a track (as opposed to a music video, which a PD would have to physically make an effort to watch). As well as appearing in the chorus, a hook can also appear at the beginning of a song; 'If the hook isn't in the first 10 seconds of your song, it isn't a single!' (McIntyre, cited in Blake, 1999, p. 16). PD Brad King listens out for hooks at both points, stating that after listening to the first 30 seconds of a song he will skim through to the hookline (in this instance, the chorus) (Interview, 23 June 2000). The following are good examples of New Zealand songs with a chorus and opening hook respectively.

I don't knooooow oh-oh-oh, why does love do this to me...It's like all great songs... It's essentially a nursery rhyme. You can tap it out on the piano. That's why 'Slice of Heaven' is so ingrained in the national psyche. Think of how it starts: Daa da da. Daa da da. 'Po Kare Kare Ana': da dum-ti-dum-ti daa, da...(Chunn, cited in Butcher, 1999, p. 65).

There are many more examples of New Zealand songs that have 'hook appeal'. For the week ended 30 July 2000, the top four New Zealand singles on the local radio airplay charts (for the second week in a row) were Eye TV's *One Day Ahead*, Breathe's *Don't Stop the Revolution*, the Strawpeople with *Drive* and the feelers *As Good As It Gets* (NZ Airplay Top 30, www.homepages.ihug.co.nz/~spoton/charts.htm, 2000) - all containing the essential *song hook*. However, these songs also have other criteria-based qualities. Both Breathe and Eye TV have been enjoying heavy press with the release of their debut albums in July and August respectively; *Drive* is a remake of The Cars classic sung by high profile local artist Bic Runga; and the feelers track was promoted as part of the *Savage Honeymoon* film soundtrack¹.

¹ These other criteria will be discussed under their relevant categories.

There are two possible reasons why PDs consider *song hook* an integral part of a song's makeup. Firstly, radio is instantaneous, and the PD (listening on behalf of the audience) needs to be assured that the audience will be 'hooked' instantly. This point is supported by Negus, who describes a hook as 'the distinctive and repetitive element that would be remembered by the listener' (1996, p. 79). Secondly (and from a selection point of view), the large volume of music that arrives on station each week means that PDs - particularly those without MDs - may not have time to listen to complete tracks. In this instance, a memorable hook may succeed in cementing a song in the mind of the PD. Nathan King, singer and songwriter with successful New Zealand band Zed, purposefully writes with a strong *song hook* in mind. 'When I write a song...one out of five I might keep because a lot of them aren't catchy...it's the ones that we keep that stick in your head' (cited in *Today Live*, 8 August 2000).

Technical Quality

The biggest problem with local music is the quality of the recording; at times the song is good but the production does not stand up (Respondent 3, 2000).

Like *song hook*, a song's *technical quality* (the production quality of a song) is apparent to PDs on first listening. It is also extremely important; *technical quality* was ranked second in this category and fourth overall in this study. According to Pickering and Shuker, a perceived 'lack of sufficient quality output from the local music industry' (1993, p. 33) has been used as an 'excuse' by the local radio industry for not playlisting more New Zealand music. Shuker goes on to suggest that the technical quality argument presented by radio is generally aimed at alternative music (much of which makes up the playlists of student radio stations), and has been wrongly associated with

all New Zealand music (1994, p. 70). Another reason why New Zealand music should not be singled out is that many oldies-formats play material 'of an inferior standard to the sound quality of the output of even the smaller contemporary NZ studios' (Pickering & Shuker, 1991, p. 43)². The introduction to this study also challenged radio's perception of the quality of New Zealand music in light of technological advancements in the recording arena, such as the ability for artists to produce studio-quality sound at home.

Depending on how you define 'commercial success', Christchurch dub-pop supremos Salmonella Dub must be New Zealand's most successful band ever, reckons Murray Cammick in a recent column for the Xtra website. If profitability is the measure of 'commercial' success, then their 'do it yourself' recording of the stunning *Killervision* album (which has so far sold some 15,000 copies) must represent the best return on investment ever reaped (Pop: Salmonella Dub, 2000, p. 23).

The perception of better quality local music has been assisted by NZ ON Air, whose Hit Disc schemes are responsible for supplying the bulk of New Zealand music to radio (Hribar, Interview, 23 June 2000). Artists that appear on Hit Disc must be affiliated with a record company and their songs must be of sound technical quality. Local PDs Eddie Hribar and Brad King agree that poor technical production values are usually only an issue with local material not supplied by a record company (Interview, 23 June 2000). Julia Deans from Wellington band Fur Patrol believes that local bands need assistance in the production arena. 'The music that is being made is fine...it's...getting the production up to a higher level to get it onto commercial radio stations' (cited in *Backch@t*, 30 July 2000). This was backed up by one of the PDs who took part in this

² Oldies tracks have other favourable qualities, such as artist familiarity and song track record, both of which PDs suggest are harder for local artists to attain (as will be addressed in this section).

study; 'The biggest problem with local music is the quality of the recording, at times the song is good but the production does not stand up'³ (Respondent 3, 2000).

Like format suitability, a good standard of *technical quality* is mandatory in order for songs to be considered for playlist selection. A song should not stand out for the wrong reasons, as Jenni Clapshaw points out in an article for musicians about getting more radio airplay. 'Your recording has to sound good next to everything else on the station. Pick a few songs that your chosen radio station plays a lot. Play them and stick one of your tracks in the middle. How does it sound? Does the quality differ when yours comes on' (www.immedia.com.au/im_m/guest.html, 1999). Clapshaw's quote highlights the fact that not only do songs need to sound good technically, but production values also need to stack up against the wealth of overseas material that still makes up the bulk of the commercial radio playlist. Production values (which refer to the overall way the song is presented and include such things as instrumentation, use of effects and vocal direction) formed part of the *technical quality* criterion, as background research determined that PDs judge all songs - local or international in origin - against each other. 'A good song is a good song whether it's from Africa or Albany' (Respondent 15, 2000).

The public is voting (through record purchases and radio surveys) for music that is international in flavour – and top New Zealand musicians are choosing to record overseas to acquire that flavour' (Radio New Zealand, cited in Shuker, 1994, pp. 69-70).

In order to achieve an international sound New Zealand artists have enlisted the help of overseas producers. The producer is responsible for the final sound of a track.

³ NZ On Air intend to address this issue as part of their 'Phase Four Plan' for local music announced this year, by 're-mixing tracks that have been selected for Kiwi Hit Disc' [in the belief that] 'a radio re-mix will make the difference between getting added or not getting added' (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/fourthphase.html, 2000b).

However, it is not common for new artists (those without a proven *track record*) to record with overseas or internationally acclaimed producers the first time round (Negus, 1992). Music critic Murray Cammick attributes this same scenario to New Zealand artists.

A 900 page Encyclopedia of Record Producers has been published by USA music biz publisher Billboard. It's interesting to look at how many of the 500 "Most Important Record Producers in Music History" have been involved in produced recordings by New Zealand musicians. These big names usually involve a big budget, so not too many NZ musicians have worked with big name producers. Quite a few of the select 500 have worked with NZ recording artists and usually they've worked with a musician with the surname...Finn (Cammick, www.xtra.co.nz/homepage/enert.../0,1166,Entertainment%3Amusic%3A193313.00.html, 2000d).

Some local artists being groomed by record companies for international release have managed to bypass the 'new artist, low budget' clause, and record with internationally acclaimed producers. New Zealand band Weta (now based in Melbourne) recorded their latest album *Geographica* with producer Steve James, whose credentials include the Sex Pistols, The Jam and the Teletubbies (!) (Rudkin, cited in *Squeeze*, 2000a). Christchurch band Zed also enlisted the help of an overseas producer for their debut album *Silencer*, and as *Squeeze's* Francesca Rudkin points out, Zed have another famous associate in tow.

Zed burst onto the music scene in 1988 [sic] with a song about a girl called Daisy, cute we all thought. Then we discovered they were managed by Ray Columbus...and had a Warner Chappell music publishing deal under their young belts...Thanks to Mr Columbus, Zed managed to get David Nicholas, known for producing Ash, INXS and Pulp, to work on their album (*Squeeze*, 2000a).

Internationally acclaimed producers and managers add to the profile of an artist, a point not lost on record companies who often use the information as a drawcard for radio. In a recent interview, local band Mary announced that their latest album was mixed at

Studio 301 in Australia, stating that ‘we got told to master there because all the radio people think it’s flash’ (Dee, cited in *Squeeze*, 2000b). Successful New Zealand band Stellar* not only has a strong producer association, but family association as well. Stellar* is fronted by Boh Runga, sister of successful local recording artist Bic Runga, and their debut album *Mix* was produced by Tom Bailey who was promoted at the time of release as ‘one half of 80s icons The Thompson Twins’ (Fresh Air: Stellar*, 1998).

Though not strictly in the *technical quality* category, another ploy used by artists and record companies to appeal to an overseas audience is the use of lyrics. Even though song lyrics were not mentioned by PDs as a factor in playlist selection (as ‘the “beat” or “sound” of the music is generally considered more important’) (Frith, 1981; Lull, 1982 cited in Lull, 1992, p. 20), lyrics can assist in adding an international feel to a song.

In a discussion about an “international” sound Paul points out how Deep Obsession cleverly sing “You are my one, my one and only” in the style or manner of people who sing English as a second language (Cammick, www.xtra.co.nz/homepage/entert.../0,1166,Entertainment%3AMusic%3A1/62/6,00.html, 2000b).

Chris Banks, former member of Deep Obsession says that the band’s ‘international’ sound is deliberate, but adds that it ‘doesn’t mean feigning an American accent or flying to LA to record your songs’ (cited in Fresh Air: Deep Obsession, 1999). Although not a regular occurrence, some local artists have managed to break into overseas markets before cracking the local one. The most recent and noticeable addition was OMC’s *How Bizarre*, awarded the honour of being ‘the most-played song on American radio in 1996’ (Butcher, 1999, p. 68), and subsequently reaching number one status on the New Zealand singles charts. Success such as this does wonders for an artist’s profile back home.

Artist Familiarity (Profile)

Chunn set about creating a system for independently logging radio stations across the country and produced a figure...Less than two songs out of every 100 on the radio were by New Zealanders, and half of those were Crowded House (Butcher, 1999, pp.65-66).

The name Crowded House is synonymous with the New Zealand music scene (and depending on where you are from, the Australian music scene as well!). Artists with a profile such as this have no trouble introducing themselves to radio; the PD only has to pick up the track, glance at the name, and depending on that particular artist's previous success in the marketplace, form an immediate opinion of whether the track is worthy of consideration for playlist selection even before listening to it. This is a tactic sometimes employed by Auckland PD Brad King, who says he has playlisted well-established or familiar kiwi bands straight away (Interview, 23 June 2000). However, Christchurch PD Tony Nielsen believes that although it is valuable for an artist to have a strong profile, it still does not guarantee airplay (Interview, 23 June 2000).

Like record companies, NZ On Air has utilised the profile of established artists to appeal to PDs through their Hit Disc schemes. While some may be of the opinion that Hit Disc space should be awarded to new and upcoming bands, Smyth ascertains that the established acts featured on the discs are a drawcard for broadcasters – they are more likely to pick the disc up and listen to it if it has an artist on it they recognise (pers.comm., 21 August 2000). However, as most PDs that took part in this study indicated that they already had a 'preference' for New Zealand music, an unknown local act may already have an advantage with PDs. As one respondent observed, 'If it comes down to a decision of a [sic] unknown international or a local act that is as good I would generally go with the local' (Respondent 3, 2000). (This will be investigated further

under the Local Music section of this discussion). Artist association can provide a shortcut to *artist familiarity*, for example both Neil and Tim Finn have achieved success as solo artists following Split Enz; recording artist Che Fu was a lead singer with successful 90s act Supergroove; Andy Lynch, guitarist from Zed, has the honour of being ‘that boy from the Just Juice ad’ (*Ice As*, 2000); and in the case of Betchadupa and the aforementioned Stellar*, family associations abound.

They’ve recorded an EP, been signed by Flying Nun, toured with the feelers, played the main stage at the Big Day Out, picked up major airplay on the likes of ZM, Channel Z and Bayrock...and they’re still in the sixth form. Betchadupa are an Auckland four-piece formed a couple of summers ago when young songwriters Liam Finn and Matt Eccles met while on holiday at Mt Maunganui...Liam is Neil Finn’s son, while Matt is the son of Brent Eccles – drummer and manager of Australian band The Angels (*Fresh Air: Betchadupa*, 2000).

However Roger Shepherd, former Managing Director of Flying Nun, says that ‘short cuts to stardom are extremely rare’ (cited in Smith, 1991, p. 29), and believes that touring is the key to success. ‘Unless you’re going to receive massive radio and television play immediately, you’ve to play to people and build up from that whole grass roots thing’ (cited in Smith, 1991, p. 29). This is certainly the case for local techno-dance musicians; this genre of music does not currently fit into any commercial radio niches and therefore these musicians rely on live performance to build their profile (and to promote single releases) (Negus, 1992).

Public performances...can be a very effective promotional medium...For a new and developing act touring can be used to attract a following, construct a ‘base market’, who will purchase recordings and hence bring the artist to the attention of the press, and television and radio programmers...A visible consumer response to an act that has established a live reputation can persuade radio stations to playlist a record (Negus, 1992, pp. 130-131).

A band's live profile was ruled out as a selection criterion after background information established that the ability to perform live was more of a record company concern (King, Interview, 23 June 2000; Chunn, 1995); and that the song still has to work on radio (Hribar, Interview, 23 June 2000). Tony Nielsen also stated that live performance was not as relevant beyond Auckland, due to fewer opportunities to see live acts (Interview, 23 June 2000). National tours are an exception, although most local acts that play support for international acts have usually already established a local profile. As discussed earlier, PD Brad King warns that this type of association can be detrimental if concert rights are secured by a rival radio station (Interview, 23 June 2000).

It is no secret that when Dance Exponents supported David Bowie on his 1983 tour the effect on record sales was huge. They played to over 100,000 people in the space of two days. Sure, they earned only a few hundred dollars – but it paid off...When DD Smash toured as support act for the Pink Flamingos in 1981 they built up a strong fan base instantly from the full houses the Pink Flamingos were attracting. A few months later the debut DD Smash album *Cool Bananas* entered the national chart at Number 1 (Chunn, 1995, p. 59).

Recent local support acts include kiwi pop duo Deep Obsession, who opened for visiting British boy-band Five in May 2000 (Ryan, 2000); and Tadpole, who supported American act Sugar Ray in February 2000 (Tadpole - The Buddhafinger: Gigs, www.tadpole.co.nz/gigs.asp?action=tourarchives, no date). While successful in their own right, these artists may have been assisted by the profile of other local artists. Sony A & R Manager, Malcolm Black (who, ironically, used to front local band The Netherworld Dancing Toys), believes that having one or two New Zealand acts with a good profile is good for the local music industry. 'What needs to happen now, for everyone's sake, is for one New Zealand band to work. It would take one band to break and more would follow' (cited in Chunn, 1995, pp. 85-86). NZ On Air's Brendan Smyth agrees, and

cites examples of local bands that have built their own profile, and in doing so have paved the way for other artists, giving them the opportunity to build a *track record* with radio.

The value of TrueBliss to the New Zealand music industry is that it gets the big record companies excited about New Zealand music and that means more investment in New Zealand music. Supergroove had that effect. Same applies to The Feelers [sic]. Why has Warners signed Anika Moea? She's a talent, that's for sure, but the reason Anika Moea gets the break is because of The Feelers [sic] (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/slut.html, 1999b).

Artist Track Record

PDs rated *artist track record* almost on a par with *artist familiarity* - and it is no wonder; the two are often intertwined. *Artist track record*, for the purposes of this study, signifies an artist's previous radio success, and an artist who has an established *track record* is also likely to be familiar - previous hits are no secret. However, *artist track record* does not automatically equal inclusion on a station's playlist. PD Eddie Hribar stated that while an artist may be familiar and have a good *track record* nationally or internationally, the artist still has to work in his or her local market (Interview, 23 June 2000). Another PD who took part in the study commented that as many New Zealand artists do not have a proven *track record*, he is more reliant on his *own instinct* for programming these tracks (Respondent 16, 2000). This is dependent, of course, on the track under consideration meeting all other criteria deemed important by the PD. 'Preference is definitely given to NZ music if it reaches all other criteria' (Respondent 11, 2000).

Playing familiar music (in the form of a cover or remake of a previous hit) is one tactic often employed by new artists to establish a *track record*. In 1998 local band Deep

Obsession released a version of 10CC's *Lost in Love* as their first single, which got them noticed by radio and audiences alike. The song reached number one on the New Zealand singles charts, providing radio with a strong playlist hit and the artist with a profile and *track record* to support future releases. Paul Casserly, from New Zealand band Strawpeople, confirms the benefits of releasing a cover. 'One of the best ways to get exposure is to play a song people know' (cited on *Breakfast*, 2000). Local artist Nicollete, speaking about her first single and Mi-Sex cover, *Blue Day*, agrees. 'The cover was a...great entry onto the radio' (cited on *Good Morning*, 2000).

Artists unable to build a *track record* on commercial radio often turn to alternative stations like the b.net for support; both the feelers and Shihad started out on student radio. In her article *Promoting your CD to radio* Tonya Rae reiterated the benefits of gaining airplay on these stations. 'Once you conquer the college charts [the US equivalent of New Zealand student radio], you will have a solid base and track record to promote yourself to the larger stations' (www.immedia.com.au/im_m/archive/990202-145/tips.html, 1998). But while such stations may be more lenient about a lack of *artist track record* or the duration of a song, sometimes they also reject artists who have become too familiar with the commercial radio audience.

It's fashionable to knock The Feelers [sic] and it's fashionable to knock commercial radio but I don't subscribe to either fashion. The Feelers [sic] are alright by me. They are also alright by 15,000 other people who have gone out and bought their record. They are alright by the 1,500 teenagers at the xtrasmokefreerockquest finals in Takapuna the other day. And they are alright by my own daughter who is 26 and who listens to Channel Z... The Feelers [sic] is a success story and we should celebrate success, not dismiss it or sneer at it. We need success stories. I like Shihad Tom Larkin's attitude. Tom's no Feelers [sic] fan - not his cup of tea really which is cool - but he said to me the other day that whatever your take on The Feelers [sic], The Feelers [sic] are good for the industry (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/state.html, 1998b).

Song Duration

Popular recording artists of all types typically write songs that follow a predictable structure of sound. Most pop music writers, for instance, believe that a song should display the chorus as soon as possible, that dissonant instrumentation should be avoided, and that instrumental solos should be kept short if they are used at all... placing their sound within the range of textures record companies believe are marketable (Lull, 1992, p. 3).

The least important artist or song criterion was *song duration*, and the reason for this is simple. The duration of singles released to radio are rarely an issue; most tracks received are standard radio edits of three to four minutes. This is basic marketing savvy. Not only do radio stations require tracks in the correct format (i.e. on CD); radio stations also require songs that are of a standard length and that can be easily slotted onto the playlist (the reason being that the more songs able to be fitted into a playlisted hour, adds to the listener perception of 'more music') (Sim., Interview, 1 June 2000).

Despite only being rated *a little important*, *song duration* is still a selection criterion considered by PDs, as for most formats a song longer than the standard radio edit length would need to be weighed up carefully when making playlist decisions (against the 'more music' scenario above). But PD Brad King did concur that traditionally the rock format does allow for tracks that are longer than five minutes to be played (Interview, 23 June 2000); a good local example of this is Weta's *Calling On*, which comes in at just under six minutes long (Fresh Air: Weta, 2000). Indeed, there are some rock anthems that exceed even this length, for example Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven*. However this song has other qualities deemed important by PDs in this study; including, *song hook, artist familiarity, artist track record* and *technical quality*.

NZ On Air Criteria

NZ On Air's job is to get more New Zealand music played on the radio without the luxury of quotas. It's a tricky task – we are not *making* the music and we can't *make* radio play it. We are kind of piggy in the middle (Smyth, 1996, p. 9).

NZ On Air was established as part of the deregulated broadcasting environment to look after the cultural aspects of broadcasting, including the promotion of New Zealand music. Since its inception, NZ On Air has devised a number of schemes designed to increase the airplay of local music on television and radio. This study looks at NZ On Air's radio-oriented music schemes, which include *Hit Disc*, a *New Zealand music plugger* and the *RBA showcase*. Together, PDs rated these three criteria as the third most important group of selection criteria (after Radio Station criteria and Artist/Song criteria). A song's inclusion on a *Hit Disc* was rated highest of the NZ On Air selection criteria by PDs, followed by the *NZ music plugger* and *RBA showcase* respectively.

Table 10: *NZ On Air Criteria*

NZ On Air Criteria	PD Mean Rating
Hit Disc inclusion	3.13
NZ music plugger	2.80
RBA showcase	2.27
<i>Total (averaged)</i>	<i>2.73</i>

Hit Disc Inclusion

Between 1993 and July 2000, NZ On Air has produced 73 *Hit Discs* and delivered a total of 1,155 songs to every radio station in New Zealand (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/fourthphase.html, 2000b). With this infiltration of New Zealand music to radio every two months, it is perhaps foreseeable that PDs rated a song's inclusion on a *Hit Disc* as the most important NZ On Air criterion for playlist

selection. Part of the success of the *Hit Disc* scheme may be its diversity. Like record companies, NZ On Air now targets radio with a range of format-friendly discs which include the Kiwi Hit Disc (for mainstream commercial radio formats, i.e. Pop and Rock), Kiwi Gold Disc and A/C Hit Disc (for A/C-formatted stations), Indie Hit Disc (for Alternative formats, i.e. student radio) and the Iwi Hit Disc (for Maori radio stations). This study of commercial radio is only concerned with the first three discs - Kiwi Hit Disc, Kiwi Gold Disc and the A/C Hit Disc. Of these, Kiwi Hit Disc (the original disc) remains the staple of all the schemes. As one respondent stated, 'I'll always give a Kiwi track a second or third listen, particularly if it's on the Kiwi Hit Disc' (Respondent 17, 2000).

Hit Discs are distributed to radio free of charge, and feature a local selection of 'radio friendly' songs designed to infiltrate the radio playlist (Smyth, 1996). The *Hit Disc* scheme is based on an American model produced by Century 21 Programming; the key difference between the two being that the American version features tracks bought by record companies, whereas in New Zealand tracks are chosen for their 'broadcast potential' by NZ On Air (Smyth, 1996)¹. While Kiwi Hit Disc is designed as a broad sweep across all format types (particularly Pop and Rock), both the Gold and A/C discs have been set up in response to low local content figures for A/C-formatted radio stations. Craig Boddy, former PD of More FM Wellington², says he had 'dreadful difficulties' in obtaining local music due to a lack of suitable product being produced with mainstream appeal (cited in Neill, 1999, p. 17). This is indicative of A/C format

¹ Initially Hit Disc tracks were chosen by a panel of PDs from the four main format types (thus giving them a vested interest in the scheme). But recently the job was handed back to NZ On Air in a move supported by the radio industry, who are 'in the business of music, not the music business' (Jarvis, Interview, 12 May 2000).

² Up until last year, More FM stations were included in the A/C format grouping; they now come under Pop.

types, as confirmed by another A/C respondent who took part in this study: 'I'm endeavouring to increase the percentage of NZ music we play but [I] am finding suitable...songs few and far between' (Respondent 14, 2000). The introduction of the two discs targeting A/C formatted stations was a pro-active initiative by NZ On Air.

A/C is our New Zealand music archilles heel...Rock and Top 40 radio are looking healthier by the quarter and ALT kind of looks after itself but A/C – which is such a big chunk of radio in New Zealand – has only got past the 5% mark once in the past two years (Smyth cited in *Fresh Air: A/C action!*, 1999).

While still maintaining the lowest level of local content, A/C formats increased the total amount of local content to 8.75 percent in the last quarter (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/howmuch.html, 2000a). There is no doubt that this is the result of a positive response by PDs to the *Hit Disc* schemes. A 1996 NZ On Air survey reported that 75 percent of radio stations found Kiwi Hit Disc 'had resulted in more New Zealand music being played on their station' (Smyth, pers.comm, 1999, cited in Neill, 1999, p. 17). As both the Gold and A/C discs were not devised until 1998 and 1999 respectively, they were not included in this survey. However, positive reports on their impact have come from other quarters.

We launch Kiwi Gold Disc I in August 1996. Radio is all over us like a rash. Radio wants those discs. Eighteen months later, APRA brings the New Zealand music content analysis to Kiwi Music Action Group and Adult Contemporary – which in this context, includes classic hits format stations – is in there at a sorry 2.41%. The 2% is not the point of the story. The story goes on...18 months after we released Kiwi Gold Disc...40 tracks off Kiwi Gold Disc are added to the playlist of a significant national classic hits format and the New Zealand music content doubles to more than 5%. It took just half an hour [and] a box of Kiwi Gold Discs (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a).

Part of the success of the *Hit Disc* schemes can be attributed to their linkages with other selection criteria identified in this study, such as *song hook*, *technical quality*, *record company affiliation* and *promotional support*. Firstly, the *Hit Discs* that this study is

concerned with unashamedly target commercial radio with 'radio friendly songs': 'We have to recognise one fundamental commercial radio reality – commercial radio plays the hits' (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/fourthphase.html, 2000b). Secondly, all songs submitted by record companies for inclusion on a *Hit Disc* must be of sound technical quality – *technical quality* ranking in the top five criteria of this study (see *Table 7*). It is also mandatory for each song submitted to *Hit Disc* to be affiliated with a record company, which Smyth says can be a major record company (e.g. Sony), independent record company (e.g. Wildside), or the band's own record company (cited in *Squeeze*, 2000b). Finally, NZ On Air has employed a range of promotional tactics to support the release of *Hit Disc* to radio.

We've got to accept that New Zealand music won't sell itself to commercial radio. That's the reality. The fact is that commercial radio is bombarded every week with overseas songs that have compelling track records back home. It's too easy for our music to get lost in the rush. We have to make sure that our music gets noticed. We have to be as skilled and as effective at promoting our music to commercial radio so that our music is not swamped (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov9/flash.html, 1999c).

NZ On Air promotional activities include: press releases and the Fresh Air music supplement available in radio industry magazine *Median Strip*; an involvement in NZ Music Week and the production of New Zealand radio shows (both designed to showcase New Zealand music)³; video funding grants (which, despite the findings of this study, Smyth insists are 'a key part of [the] strategy for getting more New Zealand music on *radio* because the music video is a promotional tool for creating...a *hit* and these days, hits are what radio plays'⁴) (www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html,

³ NZ Music Week is one week a year where radio stations are encouraged to play as much New Zealand music as possible. NZ On Air also funds various Radio Shows 'which spotlight and celebrate New Zealand music and play on commercial radio stations and student radio stations around the country' (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a).

⁴ Video airplay, ranked second to last overall in this study, will be discussed under Other Media.

1999a); and finally, the contentious decision to include well-established artists like Neil Finn on *Hit Disc*.

The move is contentious because Finn is already a national and international success story, and because of this his record company (EMI) would easily be able to justify spending money to release product to radio themselves, as they do for their other international acts. As Smyth states, 'recording and releasing singles in the small New Zealand market is basically a loss-making venture' (1996, p. 11). For some artists this means that getting a national release to radio is difficult unless supported by schemes such as *Hit Disc*. *Hit Disc* offers an incentive for record companies to release New Zealand material, in the form of free distribution of the product to every single radio station in New Zealand⁵. Smyth believes that names like Finn appearing on a *Hit Disc* encourages PDs to listen to the disc, which may in turn benefit the lesser-known acts also featured on it (pers.comm., 21 August 2000). Indeed, Hribar states that he 'generally listens to the whole *Hit Disc*' (Interview, 23 June 2000). Part of the reason for this, and another promotional tactic, is the addition of a New Zealand music plugger used to promote *Hit Disc* to radio.

NZ Music Plugger

In 1998...we employed a New Zealand music pusher or "plugger" as they are known in the trade – someone who works *Kiwi Hit Disc* at radio...you can take the water to the horse but the trick is to get the horse to drink. That's the plugger's role (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/media99.html, 1999a).

⁵ Record companies that achieve 'airplay success' with a local song (i.e. by obtaining a certain amount of airplay on commercial radio) are also able to apply to be reimbursed for the costs of recording and releasing the single under NZ On Air's Radio Hits scheme. Another 'rewards' initiative (for radio this time) is the Double Digit Plaque, awarded by NZ On Air to radio stations that achieve double figures for the percentage of local content receiving airplay.

The role of 'plugger' is not unique to the New Zealand music industry; pluggers are also used in countries like England to promote music to radio (Negus, 1992). Smyth describes the plugger as 'an independent person, separate from radio and record company interests...whose job it is to "sell" commercial radio programmers the songs on...Hit Disc' (www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/flash.html, 1999c). While Smyth believes that the NZ On Air plugger has been 'instrumental' in increasing local music content on radio (1.78 Million NZ On Air Boost Focused at Radio, 2000), the *NZ music plugger* was only ranked eleventh overall by PDs. However, its second placing to *Hit Disc* under NZ On Air criteria is fitting, as the plugger is responsible for following up the release of *Hit Disc* with promotional support. The *NZ music plugger* also rated higher than *promotional support* and *record company affiliation* from the Track Performance category. Hribar suggests that this is because the New Zealand music plugger has far more access to radio stations than does any other record company representative offering promotional support (Interview, 23 June 2000). He offers several reasons why.

NZOA plugger has more access on 2 counts...They have a travel budget and commitment to actually getting around and seeing every radio station in the country and they are committed to doing this on a regular basis especially in the major markets where they see the PDs at least every 6 weeks or so. I don't think that in a market like Auckland it would be the same, as the record company reps do have regular access to the stations and have an expense budget which means they can wine and dine the stations on a regular basis...The other factor is the issue of quotas etc, so as a result we are partly playing a political battle where we have to be seen to be supportive etc (Hribar, pers.comm., 24 August 2000).

Hribar also mentions the fact that NZ On Air has the ability to monitor radio music logs via APRA for their collection of local content figures, another of their strengths as record companies are not privy to the same information (pers.comm., 24 August 2000). This access also allows the *NZ music plugger* to see where more of a push needs to be

made with local music. A/C radio is just one area that current plugger Nicky Jarvis has been working on.

Adult contemporary radio remains an [sic] key area in which progress needs to be made, but Nicky is relaxed that AC is a format which inevitably takes longer to turn around than others. "One of the things I've learned...is that AC radio is all about familiarity. Hit artists with hit songs. The only way you can achieve that with any certainty is to develop the emerging pop and rock artists, grow their profile there and nurture them long enough for AC radio to have confidence in picking them up. Part of my job is to make sure AC programmers see the opportunities when Stellar* or Deep Obsession or Eye TV songs cross from Top 40 territory into the broader arena" (Jarvis, cited in Fresh Air: Plugger power, 2000).

Proof is in the playlist. Each of the New Zealand artists that Jarvis mentions above have since crossed over to other format types, resulting in wider exposure for them on commercial radio.

After *Part of Me*, which worked very well for us, we were keen to play more Stellar*, and especially now that they've got such a profile, the familiarity you need with A/C radio is there (Budge, cited in Fresh Air: Stellar*, April 2000).

[Deep Obsession's] *I Surrender*...looks like taking the pop duo into new territory on the country's leading A/C stations (Fresh Air: Deep Obsession, August 2000).

Last year Eye TV's *Just the Way It Is* became one of the biggest local tracks on New Zealand radio, beginning its life on alternative and rock stations before crossing over big time onto pop and A/C formats (Fresh Air: Eye TV, June 2000).

Along with the PDs who took part in this study, both the government and NZ On Air are acknowledging the important role the *NZ music plugger* plays in the promotion of local music, by appointing 'more plugger power' and expanding the plugger team from one to three. 'We're convinced that more investment in this direct...promotional effort will result in more New Zealand music on radio. It is constructive and collaborative and

it pays dividends. Radio and the record companies alike value the support that they get from the plugger' (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/fourthphase.html, 2000b).

RBA Showcase

The RBA has confirmed its annual conference will again include a New Zealand Music Showcase. The show is organised co-operatively by the same key players behind Kiwi MAG – the RBA, RIANZ, APRA and NZ On Air. The showcase, which has previously helped build massive radio support for the likes of the feelers (in 1998) and Stellar* (in 1999), had been an extremely popular element of the conference, says organiser Janine Bliss... The exclusive live performances provided an excellent opportunity for local musicians and radio staff alike, added to the conference experience and were one way of keeping the 'lines of communication' open (New Zealand music showcase returns, 2000, p. 4).

The *RBA showcase* is another strategy used by NZ On Air to promote New Zealand music to radio (Smyth, cited on *Nightline*, 2000). Initiated in 1998 by the Kiwi Music Action Group (KMAG), the showcase is now held annually at the Radio Broadcasters Association Conference (RBA), and gives local acts the opportunity to perform for representatives of the radio industry, including 'virtually every radio PD in the country' (NZ music week, 1999, p. 5). Despite being ranked the lowest of the NZ On Air criteria by PDs, it nevertheless helps to build an awareness of an act (i.e. artist familiarity).

Seeing and enjoying an act at the *RBA showcase* may encourage PDs to look more closely at them on the next Hit Disc⁶. This is certainly a tactic that has worked for Brad King, who says he dismissed Wellington band Fur Patrol and decided not to play them but, after seeing them live at the *RBA showcase*, put them on the playlist (Interview, 23 June 2000). Indeed, many bands that have appeared at the showcase have gone on to achieve phenomenal playlist success.

⁶ Artists who appear at the RBA Showcase have generally just appeared, or are about to appear, on *Hit Disc*.

[RBA Showcase performance] At that stage the feelers were nobody...nobody had heard of the feelers, they'd had one record out...they hadn't had Venus, by then, and subsequently they went on to be a huge radio hit (Smyth, cited on *Nightline*, 2000).

At the Rotorua showcase we had Stellar* who had only had their first single...and I think they've been all over virtually every radio station in the last 12 months. So this year, who's it gonna be? (Chunn, cited on *Nightline*, 2000).

Once again, part of the reason for the positive response to the *RBA showcase* is NZ On Air's commitment to providing a 'radio friendly' sound. This was confirmed by the Manager of More FM Auckland after the 2000 showcase: 'I think all five we saw today will make it commercially' (Summerville, cited on *Nightline*, 2000).

Track Performance Criteria

Those who are opposed to restrictions on radio often argue that quotas will simply result in a quantitative rather than a qualitative approach to radio programming. Instead of the quality of the music and production being judged, broadcasters will need to assess the origins of the artists, and if there are not enough quality recordings available from a pool of national musicians then tracks will need to be added merely to meet the required quota. In their defence, Pickering and Shuker suggest that this is a smoke screen, pointing out that most commercial radio stations judge tracks by their potential appeal in terms of a series of market researched audience 'tastes' rather than any intrinsic qualities (Negus, 1996, pp. 212-213).

Despite Negus's stance, results of this study show that, overall, PDs rated a song's Track Performance (containing indicators of audience 'tastes') lower than the song qualities contained under the Artist/Song category (containing a song's 'intrinsic' qualities). A song's performance in the international arena (*international performance*) was rated the top Track Performance criterion by PDs, followed reasonably closely by *other (local) station playlists* (specific to New Zealand radio). The level of *promotional support* a song receives was rated third in this category, and *record company affiliation* fourth. *NZ singles charts* and *NZ album charts* were rated least important by PDs.

Table 11: *Track Performance Criteria*

Track Performance Criteria	PD Mean Rating
International performance	2.80
Other (local) station playlists	2.67
Promotional support	2.27
Record company affiliation	2.13
NZ singles charts	1.93
NZ album charts	1.87
<i>Total (averaged)</i>	<i>2.28</i>

International Performance

We've always done reasonably well on commercial radio, largely because we had success overseas and, as is often the case, that was confirmation for people here that it was okay to play us. But generally commercial radio are going to play it safe...it's a business and you can understand their situation (Finn, cited in Youth Radio Network Campaign, 1996).

International performance encompasses a song's addition to the playlists of overseas radio stations, and overseas charts or countdowns. PDs rated this the most crucial of all Track Performance criteria, perhaps fittingly so as local PDs are often accused of taking their playlist straight from the back of America's *Radio & Records (R&R)* magazine, which contains both playlist and chart information (Cammick, 2000c). As many current music formats are derived from America (the founder of hit radio) (Barnes, 1988), *R&R* is still a valid research source. However, the overall low rating for the *international performance* category (just 2.8 - *a little important*) could be attributed to the fact that it is often used in conjunction with other criteria. This was alluded to by PD Brad King who uses *R&R* charts together with Australian music charts, citing that they are 'not gospel, but it helps' (Interview, 23 June 2000). Australia's Triple J radio network is another indicator of *international performance*, and regularly showcases New Zealand talent.

Nicole [former NZ On Air plugger] visits a radio station...somewhere in the South Island and she and the PD work their way through a preview copy of *Kiwi Hit Disc 30*. The PD is genuinely interested and receptive. They come to The Feelers [sic] *Super System*. Nicole says *Pressure Man* is on high rotate on Triple J in Australia. The PD says "Wow! Who are these guys - never heard of them!" (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/turning.html, 1998a).

However, Heal (1998) suggests that it is beneficial for an artist to achieve local success before experiencing overseas success. Heal cites the case of Pauly Fuemana from OMC, whose 'stardom was hurried by the success of *How Bizarre*'; alongside Bic

Runga who 'has had the luxury of establishing herself as a successful domestic artist before going global' (1998, p. 46). Local success is not only used as an indication of the overseas potential of an artist, but also as a promotional tool by record companies for gaining overseas release deals for an artist and as ammunition for getting them onto the international airwaves. According to a Sony A & R Manager, it is 'incredibly hard work' breaking into overseas markets (cited in Heal, 1998, p. 46).

Earlier this year, Runga undertook a hectic tour of the United States and Europe known as a "pre-release set-up", where most of her audience were retailers, media and record company reps...The final leg saw her visit eight countries in 10 days. Can a mainstream New Zealand artist expect to do well internationally without such an itinerary? Black: "It's impossible at a multinational level" (cited in Heal, 1998, pp. 46-47).

However, local musician Mark Bell says that 'more than ever before there is an opportunity to be successful from New Zealand without having to necessarily go overseas and slog your guts out...to get noticed' (cited in *Breakfast*, 1999).

Logistically, the playlists of local radio stations are also a more realistic outlet for local artists than the playlists of overseas radio stations, as most artists still gain exposure at home prior to achieving international success.

Other (Local) Station Playlists

Other (local) station playlists ranked almost on a par with *international performance*, and it is easy to see why. The competitive New Zealand radio environment has seen a large number of radio stations competing for a share of the same radio advertising dollar. Not only does this mean that they look to overseas trends in radio programming for confirmation of what they are doing, but they also keep an eye on local radio playlists to see what the competition are up to. PDs Eddie Hribar and Brad King both

stated that they listen to other stations, King mentioning that he specifically listens to stations with similar format types (Interview, 23 June 2000).

PDs can also tap into current playlists for the four main radio format types (Adult, Alternative, Pop and Rock), which are compiled from the playlists of contributing radio stations and published monthly in radio industry magazine *Median Strip*. More comprehensive chart listings, including an Airplay Top 50 (encompassing all format types) and a New Zealand Top 30, are available free and online to participating radio stations. *Median Strip* also features a local music supplement called Fresh Air, produced by NZ On Air. It includes PD recommendations of the latest local releases - yet another confirmation for PDs of playlist choice.

What a real niiiice song! This haunting melody will sound familiar from the first playing. Comparisons are not worthy, but if you insist – it's a bit like Everything But The Girl, but Victoria Kelly's vocal performance is much more controlled. Will sit easily in pop and A/C formats (Stewart, cited in Fresh Air: The radio perspective, July 2000).

Isn't it fantastic to have another great new band come out with a sound and song that will easily find itself all over radio. *Holy* must be a prime pick to be thrashed on all the so-called alternative stations, and I'm picking Top 40 won't be far behind (Wratt, cited in Fresh Air: The radio perspective, July 2000).

The playlists of student radio stations (or 'college' stations as they are referred to in the States) are also available to commercial radio PDs, their playlists featuring in *Median Strip* under the Alternative category. For some musicians, student radio may be a more accessible source of radio exposure and, as Tonya Rae points out, succeed in giving a band a 'solid base and track record' with which to promote themselves to commercial radio (www.immedia.com.au/im_m/archive/990202-145/tips.html, 1998). Certainly, there have been many New Zealand artists who have gained exposure on student radio first.

However, the student radio playlist is unlikely to be taken as seriously here as in the States, where college radio is considered 'a bona-fide wing of the music industry' (Brown, 1992, p. 24). This is because student radio largely concentrates on locally produced, even 'city specific' New Zealand music, which includes some music of poor technical quality (Brennan, 1996, p. 90). Unfortunately (and as revealed under *technical quality*), this has also led to commercial radio attaching the stigma of 'poor quality' to some New Zealand music played on student radio. Furthermore, student radio is still not viewed as a serious competitor to commercial radio, perhaps due to its absence from the all-important radio survey ratings. This must inevitably be reflected in the attitudes towards music supported by student radio.

Promotional Support & Record Company Affiliation

Promotional support and *record company affiliation* are being discussed jointly because of their complementary nature; *record company affiliation* signifies an artist's signing to a record label and *promotional support* the level of support the artist receives from the record company. PD Eddie Hribar considers the two criteria jointly, stating that when considering a song for playlist selection he looks firstly for a commitment from the record company (*record company affiliation*), and then whether they are a priority act (the amount of *promotional support*) (Interview, 23 June 2000). Although PDs placed more importance on *promotional support* than *record company affiliation* (see *Table 11*), according to Hribar a record company's level of commitment to a project is still a 'key' factor in the decision-making process. He cites the example of Stellar*, and says that strong record company support for this particular act made it easier for radio to also be committed (Interview, 23 June 2000). Hribar is referring to the notion that an artist's

affiliation with a record company usually means that the artist will receive some form of promotional support – the level of promotional support equating to the level of commitment to the artist by the record company, which in turn assists radio with playlist choice. In a recent article, Julia Deans from local band Fur Patrol agrees.

Signing with Warners has not had an instant impact on the band's lifestyle so far ("we've all kept our day jobs"), but it has definitely provided a boost in the Wellingtonians' profile – particularly with radio. "We've always had a good relationship with the b.net stations...and Channel Z have supported us from the start, but it's been really difficult for us to break onto the more commercial stations till now...I think being with Warners has definitely helped in getting radio to take a listen" (cited in Fresh Air: Fur Patrol, 2000).

According to Brendan Smyth, a record company can take several forms. 'A record company can be Sony Music [major record company], a record company can be Flying Nun or Wildside [independent record company], and a record company can be the band's own record company where they're doing their own...marketing and promotion of the record' (Smyth, cited in *Squeeze*, 2000b). This study did not ask PDs to state a preference for any 'type' of record company (i.e. major or independent), as it was ascertained that any difference was likely to be in the record company's individual ability to promote a product (and therefore would not impact on the overall rating for *promotional support*). However, it is generally considered that the major companies, with their international associations, have more resources available to promote their product. As Roger Shepherd, ex-Managing Director of local record label Flying Nun divulges, independent labels would often find themselves entering into deals (especially distribution) with major labels to stay alive. 'Trying to recoup your costs in a market as small as New Zealand is extremely difficult. So we had to enter into a deal with a major if Flying Nun was to survive' (Shepherd, cited in Cartwright, 1999, p. 92). In turn, the

major labels scour independent label listings for talent (a bit like radio looking to other stations for confirmation of playlist choice).

Incapable of comprehending where new trends are occurring...the major labels wait and then rush after the repertoires of small independent companies who have already 'tested' the commercial potential of their new talent. This is the well-recounted tale of the major companies continually co-opting or swallowing the small 'indie' companies' (Negus, 1999, p. 34).

Despite having a larger resource, Chunn states that it is not the primary function of major labels to record and release local artists (1995, p. 53), due to their large international repertoire. This is backed by the knowledge that approximately only 'one in eight of the artists that they sign and record will achieve the level of success required to recoup their initial investment and start to earn money for both themselves and the company' (Negus, 1992, p. 40). This means that priority is given to those local acts with the perceived ability to recoup costs, which in part stems from radio's willingness to playlist local music.

The major record labels have a limited amount of resources to allocate to different genres and artists...Resources are allocated to those artists who will bring the greatest return on investment. The top return on investment is produced by 'global' artists performing international repertoire, yet very few musicians are admitted to this priority list...These artists will receive greater investment, will realize larger sales and hence will be able to obtain bigger advances and higher royalty rates (Negus, 1999, p. 169).

Ed Jonker, reporting on an Australian Broadcasting Tribunal study of releases by Australian artists and airplay during the period of 1989-1990, found that 'although independent releases out-numbered those by major labels, the former failed to achieve the same level of success in terms of airplay and charts' (1992, p. 27). This is directly related to promotional resource. Record companies target radio in various forms; through phone calls, e-mails, faxes and personal station visits. However, major labels

are in more regular contact with radio, due to their more 'commercial' repertoire and budgetary allowance. Even closer relations are being sought by some, as evidenced by the recent appointment of former TRN Operations Manager, Grant Hislop, to the newly created position as A&R/Promotions for Warner Music. 'Warners were obviously interested in having someone with radio programming experience' (cited in Kennedy, spoton@ihug.co.nz, 2000c). Other selection criteria detailed in this study are also utilised by record companies for promoting music; for example, an artist's appearance on a television show or a scheduled screening of their latest video. But not all releases will receive the same treatment by record companies who have a 'priority' list of songs to push; and as most New Zealand record companies are subsidiaries of overseas companies, international releases must often take priority¹.

New Zealand Singles and Album Charts

There is no doubt about the impact of airplay exposure on sales as measured by the charts. The 1989 study showed a strong correlation between the charts and airplay both on radio and television (Jonker, 1992, p. 29).

Sales charts are of vital importance to record companies whose income is derived from their outcome. In turn, local chart information is used (in conjunction with other data, such as overseas chart information) as supporting evidence for a song and provided to radio to encourage airplay. Charts are promotional 'weapons', and have been described as such by Negus. 'Radio promotion requires...the adoption of a range of tactics...often discussed with a number of war-like metaphors: Promotion staff are described as being in the 'front line' involved in 'targeting' specific individuals and

¹ 'In New Zealand the bulk of the sales of recordings (91.7%) are made by the five major multi-national labels Universal, Sony, EMI, Warner Music and BMG. Most of the rest of the sales go via Australian company Festival Mushroom Group. New Zealand owned indie distributors would barely muster two percent between them' (Cammick, www.xtra.co.nz/entertainment/0,1733,13-38260,00.html, 2000a).

stations, and enter radio stations 'armed' with recordings and knowledge' (Negus, 1992, p. 101). Hribar confirmed that chart statistics are 'mainly used by record companies' and, along with Nielsen, suggests that their low criteria ranking (last under Track Performance) may be due to the fact that local charts affirm current playlist choices, rather than signalling new playlist material (the focus of this study) (Interview, 23 June 2000). This is because, like the American Billboard charts, local sales charts provided by the Recording Industry Association of New Zealand (RIANZ) are made up of up of 50 percent sales figures and 50 percent radio airplay. However, Hribar says that this is preferable to the old charts, which were based 100 percent on sales, and 'easily hyped and driven out of Auckland' (Interview, 23 June 2000).

The difference between PD ratings for *New Zealand singles charts* and *New Zealand album charts* is minimal. Nielsen suggests that any difference could be format-based; for instance he says that the album charts are more relevant to his two Adult stations which are not as 'mainstream' as the singles charts (in other words, an indicator of longevity over fad) (Interview, 23 June 2000). This also coincides with the larger number of Adult formats in New Zealand, and hence tested in this study. Evidence of longevity can be seen in the album charts themselves: for the week ended 30 July 2000, two of the top five albums had been in the charts over 50 weeks (NZ charts: Top 50 albums, www.top50.co.nz/thisweek_printalbums, 2000b). While not enough to boost the performance of these criteria in the minds of PDs, significant chart action may succeed in bolstering the profile of an artist, both on the local and international fronts.

Not only has the fifth and final single from the quadruple-platinum-selling debut album *Mix* been playlisted en masse by radio stations, making it a strong possibility for a top chart placing under the new 50/50 airplay sales system once the single goes on sale here, but Sony Australia has earmarked it as a potential hit there too (Fresh Air: Stellar*, 2000).

Other Media Criteria

Just as the necessity of making a video puts pressure on artists to present themselves visually, so the need for press exposure requires artists to be able to express themselves verbally and have something interesting to say...to be a musician or singer is not enough, an artist must be able to communicate across multiple media (Negus, 1992, p. 121).

Television. The Internet. Music video. Films. Magazines. In today's multi-media society, people consume music in a variety of environments. But do they have any influence on a PD's decision to playlist music? Apparently not. Despite PDs' high rating for *artist familiarity* (which can be promoted through an artist's exposure on other mediums) PDs rated Other Media the least important category overall. In addition, none of the criteria contained in this category fared well; *media profile* (which includes television exposure) and *film soundtrack* only managed to score in the *a little important* range, and both *video airplay* and the *internet* were deemed *not at all important* by PDs, as evidenced by their bottom-of-the-table rankings.

Table 12: *Other Media Criteria*

Other Media Criteria	PD Mean Rating
Media profile	2.27
Film soundtrack	2.2
Video airplay	1.67
Internet	1.4
<i>Total (averaged)</i>	<i>1.89</i>

Media Profile

The saddest thing I find with television now is...the celebrities...are the television news readers...and the entertainers of this country who do all the charity work and need the profile to make a living are just not used any more. If we don't have profile we don't earn a living...it is destroying professionalism within the entertainment industry in New Zealand (Dugan, cited in Sweet Dreams, 2000).

When considering a song for playlist addition, PDs were asked how important the artist's profile in the media is at selection time. *Media profile* encompassed outlets such as magazine and newspaper interviews, and television exposure. Results showed that PDs rated *media profile* the most important of all Other Media criteria tested; however, it only ranked sixteenth place overall. As this study has confirmed, this could be because PDs place more emphasis on the song itself and their own opinion of the song (see *Table 7*), rather than supporting criteria such as an artist's *media profile*. One respondent alluded to this by stating that 'if the listeners want to hear it we'll play it' (Respondent 8, 2000); suggesting that perhaps an artist's profile in the media is more influential on the audience than on PDs. As discussed under Radio Station criteria, PDs respond to audience wants under their *own instinct* (Nielsen, Interview, 8 August 2000).

Only one respondent singled out a particular media outlet as influential. The respondent, who was in charge of an Adult format, stated that marketplace exposure - in the form of television advertisements or a television series - sometimes played a part in playlist selection (Respondent 1, 2000). The PD used the television series *China Beach*, and a television advertisement featuring The Hollies song *The Air That I Breathe* as examples. But as Hribar points out, television advertisements and shows (like *Ally McBeal*) generally feature older songs and are therefore not applicable to younger format types (Interview, 23 June 2000). This is because most songs that feature in advertisements and television shows are older, more established hits and are therefore already likely to be on the playlists of some stations (particularly Adult). Their new television exposure may simply mean that they are put onto a higher playlist rotation. There are, of course, exceptions. The song *Eagle Rock* by Daddy Cool, which was used in an Australian Tourism Commission advertisement promoting Australia, went to

number one on the New Zealand singles charts (Chunn, 1995, p. 122). Alas, New Zealand artist Chris Knox, whose song *Not Given Lightly* is featured in a Vogels Bread advertisement, has yet to make a re-appearance in either the local playlist or singles charts.

Chris Knox's hit single *Not Given Lightly* has received the highest possible praise – to be used as the backing track of an ad for Vogel's bread. No word about how much Knox was paid, or whether it was in cash, or sponsor's product. Either way, Knox always said he hoped one day to make a lot of bread...or be rolling in dough...*sigh* (Alt: Chris Knox, 2000, p. 25).

Local artists have, however, gained exposure through Coke advertisements, where the artist and song take centre stage. But the obstacle is that the songs featured are actually written for the product and are not released as singles in their own right.

Stretch yer mind back to the days of the mid 90's when the Coke ads on the tele featured such NZ artists as Bic Runga and the Exponents...well Coca-Cola is to record a series of radio ads featuring three of the country's "best loved acts". It's still a secret just who will be performing Coca-Cola's new theme song 'Enjoy' in their own styles. Un-chart-ed's sources say this will be followed by a call for entries from unknown and/or upcoming artists to receive the chance to have a session in a recording studio to do a version of 'Enjoy' in their own style (Mitchell, news@base2.co.nz, 2000a).

In Australia, local songs that feature on advertisements are part of a 'synchronisation' of music into different areas, these being film soundtracks, television and advertising (Chunn, 1995, p. 121).

Mushroom music has standing deals with several established series in Australia: *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *Flying Doctors*. We supply music exclusively to those programmes. The most important fact about that is the performance money when those programmes are screened in the UK and Europe. There is substantial royalty from the Performing Right Society (PRS), APRA's equivalent in Britain (Chunn, 1995, p. 121).

The potential is also there for New Zealand, with local offerings such as *Shortland Street* currently being screened offshore. Certainly, one New Zealand initiative – the *PopStars* television series – has been picked up and run successfully in Australia. While some may suggest that the success of kiwi popstars TrueBliss was due to their appearance on the show, NZ On Air’s Brendan Smyth responds similarly to the PDs who took part in this study by stating that the profile gained by the band on this media outlet did not ‘guarantee’ them radio airplay and a number one song. ‘Generally...I will go for song quality rather than hype over a particular TV Show’ (King, Interview, 23 June 2000).

A \$290,000...nine-week documentary playing in primetime *won't* give Thorazine Shuffle a #1 record. And, for that matter, there was no guarantee that it would give TrueBliss #1 either. PopStars was high risk. It could have bombed big time if it didn't connect with the audience (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/slut.html, 1999b).

As suggested earlier, media exposure such as this almost certainly bolsters an artist’s profile with the audience, which in turn assists with *artist familiarity* - a key criterion for PDs when it comes to playlist selection. Therefore it can be concluded that an artist’s profile on other media such as television and magazines at the time of release may indirectly assist with playlist choice. ‘If recordings are not receiving airplay, record companies can use alternative promotional activities as a means of bringing an artist to the attention of the public, and in order to persuade radio stations to programme a recording’ (Negus, 1992, p. 114).

Video Airplay

In the hearings for Australian Music on Radio, the ABT was told that music videos were believed to play a part in radio programmers' selection of music for airplay (ABT, 1986, p. 45). Once a clip had been broadcast on television, the record was deemed to be 'safe' for commercial radio (Andrew for 4ZZZ, in ABT, 1986, p. 45, cited in London & Hearder, 1997, p. 29).

Despite these findings, and Negus's contention that music videos are regarded as an 'integral part of the pop process' by the music industry (1992, p. 93), PDs placed *video airplay* second to last overall in the selection process. Nielsen says that music videos are more of a record company concern (Interview, 23 June 2000), as concurred by Schwichtenberg. 'Although music videos have now evolved as products in their own right, they are first and foremost promotional tools for albums funded by record companies' (1992, p. 119). Nielsen also suggests that due to a typically younger viewing audience, *video airplay* is not applicable to either of his Adult format types (Interview, 23 June 2000). Eddie Hribar, PD of a youth format type agrees that music videos do not have much impact on playlist selection, and says that while a video may be 'kind of cool', it does not necessarily mean that the song will translate to radio (Interview, 23 June 2000). This, despite the obvious crossover between music television and radio. 'Video...uses the conventions of popular radio (rotation of favourite songs played repeatedly throughout the day; the presence of "veejays"; concert and music information, and so on)' (Lull, 1992, pp.11-12).

Limited opportunities for video exposure in New Zealand may be a reason for the low ranking of *video airplay* by PDs. Since the demise of MTV in 1998, New Zealand has been without a full-time, free to air music channel, a situation Atkinson finds astounding. 'It is surprising that for a country that's among the world's top 10 consumers of CDs per capita we can't support a music channel' (1998, p. 9). NZ On

Air does plan to address the issue of more music television as part of their Phase Four plan, which will involve (among other things) marketing more New Zealand music (Smyth, www.nzonair.govt.nz/nzmusic/nov99/fourthphase.html, 2000b). Counihan suggests, however, that a lack of video exposure is not necessarily bad news for local music, and still cites radio airplay as the key to local music success.

An unpublished 1989 study by ABT illustrates the 'correlation between the charts and airplay both on radio and television' (Jonker, 1992, p. 29). All of the 104 Australian singles that made the top 100 list in 1989 received radio or television airplay, or both. Only 11 succeeded on video airplay alone (Counihan, 1996, p. 21, cited in London & Hearder, 1997, p. 222).

Film Soundtrack

The emergence of radio and the application of sound in the cinema were two further technological developments which changed the way in which music was experienced, and contributed to a further reorganisation of the recording industry. Companies initially structuring around the electrical connections of sound technologies now began to re-organise to become an integral part of a wider entertainment industry. From its earliest days radio programmers used recorded music. Radio became a primary source of music listening and an important medium for marketing recordings (Barnard, 1989). The cinema provided a further opportunity for placing songs and recordings of music, and formal links began to be established between the entertainment media (Negus, 1992, pp. 23-24).

The appearance of a song on a *film soundtrack* was also ranked at the bottom of the criteria list by PDs who took part in this study. There were two reasons why it was included as a criterion for testing. Firstly, during initial interviews PD Brad King cited that *film soundtracks* can be effective as the movies they are associated with are often 'high profile' and therefore of great interest to the audience. King used the example of the *Scream* soundtrack, which received large exposure on television, as having an impact on playlist selection (Interview, 23 June 2000). Secondly, it was anticipated that New Zealand's recent film successes (which have given prominence to local

filmmakers) might have had a spin-off effect on local music. Indeed, the recent *Savage Honeymoon* soundtrack featured local bands the feelers, HLAH and Hello Sailor. On a larger international scale, local artist Bic Runga appeared twice on the *American Pie* soundtrack, once with her single *Sway*, and then again with *Good Morning Baby*, a duet with Dan Wilson from American band Semisonic.

Internet Exposure

The first single from Dave Dobbyn's eagerly awaited new album is launched tomorrow – on the Internet. *Just Add Water* will go to radio soon – but even before that, the song will be made available to fans via his website... To download the track, go to <http://www.davedobbyn.co.nz>. According to the PR, the track “echoes the quirkiness of *Slice of Heaven*” and is “dripping with pop sentiments and the sing-a-long chorus from hell” (Kennedy, spoton@ihug.co.nz, 2000b).

PD Tony Nielsen added the new Dave Dobbyn single to the playlist after hearing it on the abovementioned website. Nielsen utilises the web in playlist selection, mainly to look at international radio station playlists like WPLJ in New York (Interview, 23 June 2000)¹. Findings of this study showed, however, that Nielsen is in a minority. *Internet exposure* was not only the lowest rating criterion in this category, but the lowest ranking criterion overall in this study. Despite the low usage by commercial radio, music consumers are tuning to the web in large numbers to check out the latest releases. Napster's controversial MP3 website (which allows punters to download the latest music tracks) has amassed a staggering 20 million users (Napster Prepares Brief Due Friday in Copyright Suit, www.stuff.co.nz/inl/index/0,1008,32018a1897,FF.html, 2000). Along

¹ International station playlists came under the *international performance* criterion, rated tenth overall, suggesting that (in this instance) the web is simply being used as a modern vehicle to access international playlists. There is also an online version of *R&R* magazine available to subscribers.

with other MP3 sites, Napster has been under fire from the music industry who regard them as a threat to their livelihood².

Local musician Dave Dobbyn has embraced the technology. Dobbyn says he sees 'the computer network as a way for me to be far more accessible to the existing audience and to find new listeners' (cited in Pamatatau, www.infotech.co.nz/homemar/pxdoby.html, 1996). Tadpole are another New Zealand band who realise that there is a large audience to be tapped into via the web, and have cleverly involved this audience in helping to determine the next single from their latest album *The Bhuddafinger*, which entered the New Zealand album charts at number two in its first week of release (NZ Charts: Top 50 Albums, www.top50.co.nz/thisweek_printalbums, 2000a).

With grungy Auckland band Tadpole's album officially selling like hotcakes, their record company is giving the power back to the punters by throwing open selection of the band's next single to a fan-voted poll...Visitors to www.emimusic.co.nz can pick a favourite from three of the album's tracks, the most overwhelmingly popular of which will be Tadpole's next single release (Mitchell, news@base2.co.nz, 2000b).

Music websites aside, there are other promotional opportunities for artists on the web. In what was described as an 'Internet marketing coup', Bic Runga and the video for her single *Sway* were featured on the front page of Apple's QuickTime website, 'an extremely busy international portal' (Pop: Bic Runga, 2000, p. 23). International and local surfers can also tune into The Kiwi Music Channel, an online music channel featuring all-kiwi music, which reportedly attracted 13,000 national and international listeners in its first two weeks of broadcast in July 2000 (Kennedy, editor@medianstrip.com, 2000d). Perhaps PDs do need to be more aware of the *Internet*, which is expanding rapidly and already changing the way in which some users choose

² New Zealand's own MP3 site was launched in August 2000 and is 'dedicated to promoting and selling the work of local bands' (Pullar-Strecker, www.stuff.co.nz/in1/index/0,1008,24467a1896,FF.html, 2000).

to consume music. But this study has shown that for the PDs at least, they prefer the simple art of listening to a song to make their playlist selection choices, over the influence of other media outlets such as the *Internet*.

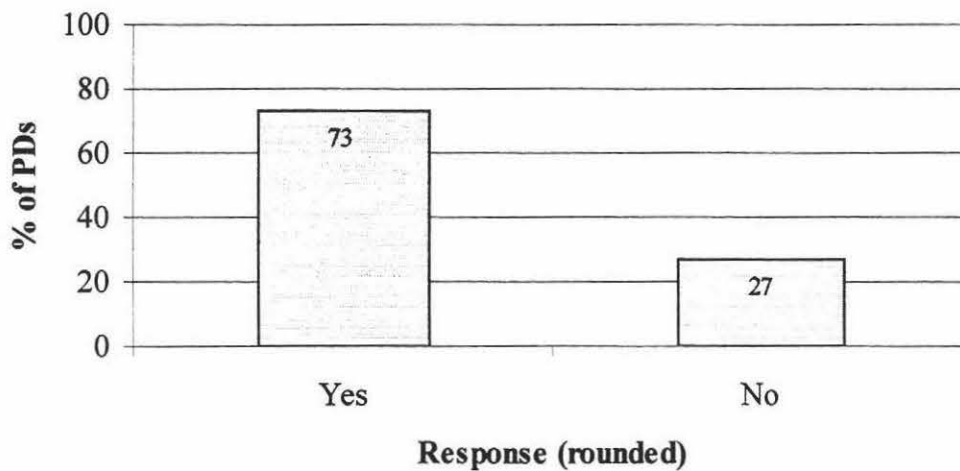
Local Music Findings

Background research and interviews established that PDs judge all music - both local and international in origin - by the same selection criteria. This was re-affirmed by PDs who took part in this study. Findings also showed that there were no additional selection criteria (over and above those already identified) considered by PDs specifically in the case of local music. However, a small number of PDs did concede that the importance of some selection criteria might change in the case of local music.

One PD suggested that *artist track record* (rated sixth overall in this study) would be less important on a local track because 'New Zealand music doesn't have a track record already' (Respondent 16, 2000). However this assumes that the local music track in question is by an unknown artist (and therefore could also be applied to an unknown international artist). In this instance the same PD indicated that his *own instinct* would become more important, but once again this could be applied to an international track. Another PD admitted to a slight 'bending of the rules' for local music when it came to format suitability. The respondent stated they would playlist a 'good' kiwi song even if it did not strictly fit the format, to show support for local music. 'There is perhaps more leeway [sic] when selecting local music for our stations, an example being our responsibility to show support for certain artists simply because they are local' (Respondent 5, 2000). Contrastingly, *technical quality* was one criterion on which a number of respondents were unwilling to bend. 'Ultimately it all comes down to the quality of songs. We will do our best to support New Zealand music, but whether it is Dave Dobbyn, Margaret Urlich or Neil Finn, if the song is not of the quality we require, it doesn't matter whether it is local or not' (Respondent 5, 2000).

Despite these minor changes, overall results show that local music must abide by the same selection criteria as all other music. However, this does not mean that local music has no home-advantage over international competition. The willingness to playlist local music cited in the above examples were also echoed by other PDs who took part in this study, when asked if they gave preference to local music at selection time. 'Preference is definitely given to NZ music if it reaches all other criteria...however it must reach criteria' (Respondent 11, 2000).

Figure 3: *PD Preference for New Zealand Music*



In total, 73 percent of PDs indicated that they give preference to local music at selection time. The 27 percent of respondents who do not give preference to local music indicated that it was because all tracks considered for playlist selection 'are judged equally not based on country of origin' (Respondent 8, 2000). In response to this, some PDs on the affirmative noted that if they had a local and international song of equal standard (and they both met the necessary selection criteria identified in this study), they would add the local song to the playlist in an effort to 'support' the local music industry. 'If it comes down to a decision of a [sic] unknown international or a local act that is as good I would generally go with the local' (Respondent 3, 2000).

For many, the decision to increase the amount of local music played is political. This was the finding of a 1999 study by Neill on local content levels on radio in Australia and New Zealand. In this study, PDs from both countries stated that the current political climates meant that they needed to try and playlist more local music.

All PD's and MD's interviewed for this study acknowledged a commitment to local music, each giving it careful consideration when selecting tracks to playlist (provided the song suited the format). However they conceded that the reason for doing this was a desire to increase the amount of local content played on their radio station. For Australian MD's this was based on an awareness of their obligations to the music quota imposed on them by the broadcasting environment; the broadcasting environment also swaying New Zealand PD's. Craig Boddy said that would be 'foolish' not to be aware of local music in the current political environment, and that it was far better to be seen to be increasing the amount played (pers.comm, 1999). Eddie Hribar agreed, stating that 'a fair amount of pressure is put on radio stations to increase their percentage of NZ music' - the pressure of course being attributed to renewed talk of statutory regulation (Neill, 1999, p. 22).

This study garnered a similar response, 'sometimes we do [play New Zealand music] as it's good for us as a station and the industry in general to support local music as much as possible' (Respondent 10, 2000); one PD also indicated that radio was responding to a general audience 'acceptance' of New Zealand music. 'There does not seem to be the audience negativity to kiwi music there once was, so we look more at toleration levels than positive acceptance and favourite ratings' (Respondent 17, 2000). According to Brad King, gauging what the audience wants to hear is critical to the decision making process (Interview, 23 June 2000). King gives another valid reason for playing local content.

According to King, New Zealand music is already a point of difference for local radio stations and will become increasingly important as advancing technology (including the Internet) allows foreign radio stations to be broadcast here. 'Kiwi content on radio can

help differentiate it from other music infiltrations' (King, Interview, 23 June 2000) - an astute comment in an increasingly global broadcasting environment. The recent rise in local content figures (particularly for the A/C format type) suggests that if there were more New Zealand songs to choose from, perhaps local content levels would be even higher. However, local music must still meet playlist selection criteria deemed important by PDs, and cannot always rely on its local status for assistance.

My policy is not to play it simply because it's Kiwi...but to play it because it's good quality. The onus must be on the musicians to ensure their product is the best they can make. We can't let parochial pride compromise our professional standards - nor can musos expect airplay (either voluntary or Government-dictated) simply because they're kiwi (Braithwaite, cited in *Fresh Air: A/C* edition, 1999).

Conclusion

Drive is going to be...big... The song is...a cover of The Cars classic, which was a radio hit in its own right in the eighties. This time round, Paul Casserly has reworked it for the new millennium, inviting Ms Runga to contribute her vocal magic – something radio PDs were more than pleased to hear as they await her second album. Although it's been some time since her last solo single was released, Bic's profile...could hardly be higher. *Good Morning Baby* – the duet with Semisonic's Dan Wilson – has become one of the most widely played A/C tracks of the last 18 months. That track, plus her own *Sway*, were both included on the international box office hit movie *American Pie*, she featured recently on the front page of the Apple Quicktime website and picked up the international Achievement Tui at this year's New Zealand Music Awards (Fresh Air: Strawpeople featuring Bic Runga, 2000).

Familiarity. Track Record. Profile. Not all New Zealand artists could hope to gain this type of exposure, but without it, what are the chances of securing radio airplay? Each week, New Zealand Programme Directors make crucial decisions about which songs and artists to add to the playlist. It is not an easy job. With up to 40 new releases a week and only a limited number of playlist spaces available, each track is carefully scrutinised. It has to be - competition in the New Zealand radio market is fierce. So too is the competition between artists and songs; and in the mix of releases sit local acts vying for their spot on the playlist. But how do they get noticed alongside the wealth of overseas material available to PDs? This study set out to answer the question by examining how playlist decisions are made.

To begin with, it was established that PDs judge all music, including local, by the same selection criteria. Furthermore, results showed that most of the criteria tested were used to some extent by PDs during playlist selection; and no additional criteria were identified that were used specifically in the case of local music. This puts local music at

a relative disadvantage. Overseas music not only makes up the bulk of material presented to radio, but it also comes to radio with many of the selection criteria already satisfied. For example, an overseas song will more than likely come to radio with *artist track record*, *artist familiarity* and *international performance* criteria all in place – each of these rating in the top 10 criteria overall in this study. New Zealand artists (particularly new or unsigned acts) would be unlikely to meet all of these same criteria on presentation to radio.

This does not mean that PDs do not support New Zealand music; in fact, quite the opposite - the majority of PDs who took part in this study acknowledged a preference for local music during playlist selection. However, this ‘preference’ would seldom be exercised. This is because local music is only given preference if it is of equal standard to overseas tracks, and if it meets all the other selection criteria that PDs deem important. The immediate satisfaction of some selection criteria for overseas music means that ‘less effort is required on the part of radio programmers in their use of records from overseas’ (Shuker, 1994, p. 69); a pertinent point in today’s competitive radio environment where PDs (particularly those in charge of networks or multiple formats) have less time available for playlist selection and look to reduce the time required to research selection criteria. Evidence of this can be seen through PDs high ratings for ‘accessible’ selection criteria such as *song hook* and *technical quality* (both able to be judged simply by listening to the track in question), and *artist track record* and *artist familiarity* (which only require a PD’s prior knowledge of an artist). In addition, Radio Station criteria (those in-house criteria deemed important from an individual radio station’s point of view and thus ‘on hand’) were rated number one overall with PDs. This puts the onus back on local artists (and/or their record

companies) to ensure that information is readily available for PDs, in an effort to see more selection criteria satisfied.

Fortunately, the NZ On Air category (rated third overall) gives local musicians the opportunity to have some selection criteria satisfied; and is a category not available to overseas musicians (and therefore may assist in counteracting some of the advantage overseas music initially brings to playlist selection). Additionally, local musicians are able to manipulate many of the higher rating criteria (particularly those contained under the Artist/Song category, rated second overall) and therefore increase their chances for playlist selection. For example, Artist/Song criteria *song hook* and *technical quality* are directly in the artist's control as author and performer respectively. And *artist familiarity* (while difficult to directly control) can be enhanced through strong marketing efforts either by the artist or on behalf of the artist by the record company (for instance, an artist might aspire to develop a positive profile with PDs by offering to play at station events for free, therefore creating awareness of their act). Out of the high rating Radio Station criteria, artists can also influence *playlist balance*. By listening to their local radio station, artists can ascertain the balance of songs currently on the playlist. If there is a glut of ballads around from well-established artists such as Mariah Carey, a local artist might choose to delay a similar-style release, or expedite a release to fit current market trends.

However for a local artist to maximise playlist potential, they must develop their profile with radio stations and PDs through other means as well; because, as this study has shown, local music often has a lower profile than overseas music and cannot rely on its local status to achieve playlist selection. Building a profile directly with the audience

(and therefore creating a demand for their product) is an avenue open to artists and, if done well, one that is likely to attract the attention of PDs. This is in view of the fact that audience desires were clearly important to PDs at selection time, reflected by the number one rating for their *own instinct* (*own instinct* being the PD's opinion of a song from an audience point of view) (King, Interview, August 24 2000; Nielsen, Interview, 8 August 2000). Fashion is one avenue that international artists such as Madonna have used as a selling point with the audience (Reporter, 2000). 'Pop stars have always been adored as much for their idiosyncratic glamour and stadium-sized personalities as for their lyrics' (Vogue editor, cited in Reporter, 2000, p. 68). This has caught the attention of media outlets such as radio; the current popularity of electronic dance music on radio is testament to this, after moving from the dance-floors, to the catwalks, then the airwaves.

British dance culture and DJs – The sportswear fashion trend comes directly from the dance floors and nightclubs specialising in electronic music. Because it's more sensible to dance all night wearing sports shoes and comfortable clothes. Hooded tops, sloppy pants and trainers soon hit the runway (Reporter, 2000, p. 68).

Currently, other promotional outlets have not made much of an impact on New Zealand PDs, hence their low rankings for most Track Performance and Other Media criteria. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is that most of the criteria contained in these categories require 'effort' on behalf of PDs to access information (for instance, gathering chart information or watching music videos on television). Secondly, the lower profile in New Zealand of outlets such as music television may mean that PDs do not consider these avenues as important audience indicators. Certainly, this may be a reason why record companies continue to push their product onto radio. Despite this, more of an effort needs to be taken by the music industry to use other promotional

outlets, and research also needs to be undertaken to determine which criteria the audience consider important when deciding on personal music preferences.

Another area of research that would assist the music industry to achieve more radio airplay for local product would be investigation into the genre and number of local music releases in New Zealand. For example, higher local content figures for youth formatted radio stations (such as Alt and Rock), coincides with an increase in youth formats in the last three years (Neill, 1999). Hribar believes that there is also more product available for these format types (pers.comm., 1999, cited in Neill, 1999). Is the music industry simply not supplying A/C formatted radio (which still make up the majority of stations in New Zealand, and have the lowest local content figures) with enough suitable local product? A PD of an Adult format who took part in this study believes so. 'I'm endeavouring to increase the percentage of NZ music we play but [I] am finding suitable...songs few and far between' (Respondent 14, 2000).

A recent initiative by NZ On Air may help to overcome this by enabling artists to remix songs for different radio formats. PDs in charge of more than one format type did not indicate that a song with crossover potential is looked at more favourably than others during playlist selection. However, these PDs are in the unique position of being able to trial a song on one format first, and if it proves a success, cross it over to another format type. In a sense, such a song will have succeeded in acquiring a track record on radio, and will have bolstered the artist's profile (or familiarity) in the process. 'With the remixing of songs for particular radio formats an increasingly common practice worldwide, local artists will now be able to apply for special funding to remix a track - where there is clear demand from commercial radio and the promise of resulting

airplay' (1.78 Million NZ On Air Boost Focused at Radio, 2000, p. 4). Some artists have already made this move, signalling a more music-savvy collective of New Zealand musicians who are embracing radio airplay. 'After a long run on rock and alternative stations with their last single, *Now*, Fur Patrol [sic] latest offering is *Holy* - a pop song remixed especially for CHR radio' (Fresh Air: Fur Patrol, 2000). More carefully targeted product, especially if it has already been broken on one format type, will succeed in giving the artist the familiarity and track record they need. Additionally, format suitability (which was inherent in the questionnaire) is uppermost in the minds of PDs at selection time.

Summary

This study outlines some key factors that can be used by local musicians to maximise playlist potential for their music. It has also outlined that commercial radio does, in fact, treat music 'fairly' (in the sense that all releases are judged against the same set of selection criteria). While much of the music from overseas comes with the advantage of having more selection criteria already satisfied, many of the same criteria are achievable by local artists. Those that are more difficult to achieve (i.e. *artist familiarity*) could be manipulated by an increased marketing push from the New Zealand music industry, equivalent to that of most international releases. The music industry has already begun to move in the right direction, with an improvement in the technical quality of local recordings (previously a reason identified by PDs for not playlisting local music). Advances in technology have meant that most music has a good chance of being produced (i.e. sound quality) and reproduced (i.e. CD quality) to an acceptable

broadcast standard. (Further, advances in technology have allowed the technical quality of music to improve without an associated increase in the cost of production).

More initiatives aimed specifically at the promotion of New Zealand music are likely to result in increased local playlist selections, especially given the success of current NZ On Air schemes. This is already happening with NZ On Air's Phase Four plans and, though not directly targeted at radio, the new schemes are targeted at the promotion and recording of product for radio. An increase in quality output from the local music industry, especially in areas where there is a shortage of suitable product (i.e. A/C material), may also see more local music on the airwaves. Pressure should be kept on the New Zealand radio industry to continue to support New Zealand music. Even though 'PD preference' for local music is only instigated if it satisfies many other selection criteria, it is still an advantage that New Zealand music should seek to utilise.

Achieving playlist success through such means is far more desirable than any initiative that 'forces' radio into playlisting local music. New Zealand is a small market with limited potential to support a music industry on domestic sales alone. If musicians aspire to make a living, and develop a career, they must look to success in overseas markets and therefore must compete with the offerings of international musicians. By positively encouraging local musicians to aspire to the international standards set by the global music industry, we are better preparing them to meet the competition they must ultimately face for success.

Appendices

Appendix i

Format Descriptors

Format	Descriptor	Example Stations
A/C	Adult Contemporary: softer-edge mainstream music targeted at an adult audience	<i>C93FM, More FM¹</i>
Adult	Encompasses all format types aimed at an older audience (e.g. A/C, Gold and Easy Listening)	<i>Classic Hits, Easy/Lite FM, The Solid Gold Network</i>
Alt	Alternative: progressive/non-top 40 hits and artists	<i>b.net (student radio)</i>
Pop	Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR): the latest top-40 pop hits	<i>ZM, The Edge network</i>
Rock	Classic and new rock tracks	<i>Radio Hauraki, The Rock network, Channel Z network</i>

¹ PDs who returned questionnaires from More FM listed their stations as A/C. However, More FM comes under Pop in NZ On Air local content figures.

Appendix ii

Local content levels on commercial radio in Australia

Local content levels in Australia are set by the Australian Broadcasting Authority under Code 4 of their Industry Code of Practice for commercial radio (referred to as the 'music quota'). Stations are categorised by format type and a minimum proportion of local content assigned. These proportions are the only available source of local content figures for commercial radio; there are no calculations available over and above these amounts (White, pers.comm, 1999, cited in Neill, 1999).

Category	Format	Proportion (not less than)
(A)	CHR (encompassing Pop/Rock, Album Oriented Rock)	25%
(B)	Adult Contemporary Hits and Memories Gold (encompassing Classic Hits, News/Talk)	15%
(C)	Easy Listening – Country	10%
(D)	Niche Formats (e.g. Jazz, Big Band)	5%
All other	All Formats (other than Niche)	10%

(Australian Broadcasting Authority, www.aba.gov.au/what/program/ozradio.htm, 1997)

Appendix iii – Programme Director Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this research on the selection processes of music on commercial radio playlists. The information is being collected as part of a Masters Thesis for Massey University, and Programme Directors from all major metropolitan radio stations New Zealand are being surveyed. By completing and returning the questionnaire you have given permission for the data to be used, but please be assured that all information will remain anonymous; no station or individual will be highlighted. (See covering letter for forwarding details).

1. What station(s) are you in charge of programming? [Please list]

Station _____	Format _____
Station _____	Format _____
Station _____	Format _____
Station _____	Format _____
Station _____	Format _____

2. Do you have a Music Director or specific station staff member to assist you with playlist selection? [Please circle]

Yes

No

If yes, please detail the level, and form of assistance they provide.

On the following pages you will be asked to rank a list of criteria that you may / may not take into account when selecting a song to put on your playlist. Please rate each of the criteria by circling a number on the 1-5 scale provided: 1 being 'not at all important' (you never consider it) and 5 being 'of vital importance' (you always consider it). There are also a few open-ended questions to answer at the end of the questionnaire. Remember, each question relates to the *amount of importance you place on the given criteria when considering a song for playlist selection*. (Please note: If you are PD for more than one format type, please rate the criteria generally; there is a specific question relating to the differences in format selection near the end of the questionnaire).

3. **When considering a song for playlist selection, how important is the familiarity of the artist in the marketplace?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

4. **What about the artist's track record (e.g. previous airplay success)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

5. **Do you consider whether the song has got a musical or vocal hook important (e.g. is it catchy or familiar; can you sing along with it)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

6. **In terms of production, how important is the song's technical quality (e.g. is the production standard/technical quality equal to songs already on the playlist)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

7. **How important is playlist balance (e.g. there are already a few big ballads on the playlist - do you have room for another)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

8. **What about the appropriateness of the duration of the song for the format type (e.g. is it too long; is there a radio edit available if the duration is inappropriate)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

9. **Is it important for the artist to be affiliated with a record company (e.g. signed to a major, minor or independent label)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

10. **Is it important for the artist to be receiving strong promotional support (e.g. is the artist a priority act for the record company; or being supported with on-air giveaways)?**

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

11. Is it important for the song to be receiving video airplay?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

12. How important is the artist's profile in the media at the time of release (e.g. articles or interviews in newspapers or magazines; television news items)?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

13. What about the song's inclusion on a film soundtrack?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

14. Is the presence of the song/artist on the Internet considered important?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

15. Is it important for the song to be successful on the New Zealand singles charts?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

16. Is it important for the artist to be successful on the New Zealand album charts?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

17. What about the inclusion of the song on other radio station playlists (e.g. in your market or nationally)?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

18. How important is the song's success in the international market (e.g. overseas radio station playlists, sales charts or countdowns)?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

19. Do you consider audience feedback important when selecting a new song for the playlist (e.g. listener requests or in-house audience research)?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

20. How important are commercial imperatives when making playlist decisions (e.g. the artist is in New Zealand and your station has secured rights to a concert/interview; or advertising scheduled has been purchased to promote the artist)?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

21. How much importance is placed on the opinion/recommendation of your station's programming consultant?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

22. What about the opinion of the music director or other radio station staff?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

23. How important is your own instinct (i.e. 'gut feel') in the selection process?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important A little important Fairly important Very important Of vital importance

24. Are there any **OTHER CRITERIA** (not listed above) that you take into account when considering a song for playlist selection? Please provide details.

Thank you for taking the time to fill in the questionnaire. If you would you like an executive summary of results once the study is complete, please provide contact details below:

Name _____

Postal Address _____

E-mail _____

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