

THE WEEKEND SUN August 30, 1997

ENTERTAINMENT

New FM station searches the world for its music

KATHERINE MONK

his is where it all kind of started," says Cal Koat, showing off the small, brown-panelled rooms and orange-tinted decor of CJVB's downtown studios.

The Richards Street offices won't be arrund much longer Koat says his face

around much longer, Koat says, his face

glowing.

Like a family that needs another bedroom for the new baby, CJVB will be moving to Broadway and Cambie next month to make room for its brand-new FM sister station, 96.1 CHKG.

When CHKG begins broadcasting live to Lower Mainland residents Sept. 6, it will send a strong, crystalline signal through uncharted territory as the first FM station in North America to try pro-gramming in a world-music format. "Our CRTC mandate is to program to

20 different cultural communities in 15

different languages. But there's another way of doing that other than breaking it up into tight blocks of selected ethnic pro-gramming," says Koat, who carries the ti-tle of international program director for

the new station.
"Why not do it through music? Music is
the universal language and world music is the fastest-growing segment of the market right now, so we're pretty confi-dent that this is the right time to give people a polished commercial station that can reach not only a variety of ethnic communities, but give the mainstream listener a real alternative."

It's a bold experiment.

The world of radio is known for its niche approach in which music is not just an artistic expression, but a format category such as modern rock, dance, CHR (contemporary hit radio) or adult contemporary.

Please see CHKG, B2



TOWER OF BABEL: International program director Cal Koat of 96.1 FM.

Vancouver FM radio frequencies

full refund. Tickets will be re-

funded at the place they were sold. Charge-by-phone purchases can be refunded by mail at the Ticket-Master office at 1304 Hornby St.,

Vancouver, V6Z 1W6. Call Ticket Master at 280-4444 for more in formation.

How the Lower Mainland's \$72-million-a-year industry appears on your dial.

95.3 Z95: Vancouver's leading top-40dance station and a relative newcomer to the grid. Owned by Standard Radio Inc. General listener demographic profile: 18 to 35, with a focus on young teens to early 20s, male and female. Featured arfists include: Puff Daddy and Faith Evans, Backstreet Boys, Coolio.

96.1 CHKG: One of the first commercial world music stations in history. Begins programming Sept. 6. Owned by Fairchild Media Group.

General listener demographic General listener demographic profile: 18- to 35-year-old men and women looking for an alternative to the mainstream selection of rock, pop and dance.

Featured artists will include: Peter Gabriel, Gypsy Kings, Ottmar Liebert, The Ukrainians, Sammi Chang. 99.3 CFOX: Modern rock station and strong supporter of local rock acts. Owned by Shaw Radio/Communications.

Hadio/Communications.

General listener demographic profile: 18-to 49-year-old men and women who want music with a harder edge (leans toward males). Featured artists include: Bit Naked, Matchbox 20, Wallflowers, Our Lady Peace.

97.7 CBUF: SRC (French CBC). Various formats. Broadcasts in French to a potential audience of 200,000 francophone British Columbians. A Crown corporation 101.9 CITR: Radio station for the University of B.C. Owned and operated as a non-profit society by the UBC Alma Mater Society.

General demographic pro-file: 18- to 25-year-old men and women who want to hear music that is not played on commercial radio.

commercial radio.
Featured artists include:
Cub, Brand New Unit, Pinhead Circus or anything on Sub-Pop

103.5 QMFM: Adult contemporary, so rock. Owned by Allan Waters/ CHUM Ltd.

General demographic profile: 25- to 54-year-old men and women, leans more toward women. Featured artists include: Toni Braxton, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston.

HZ KHZ

93.7 JR (CJJR): New-country station.
Owned by the Jim Patti-son Group.
General listener de-

mographic profile: 25 to 54-year-old men and women who like modern country music or crave an alternative to mainstream rock

97 (96.9 CKKS) KISS FM:

Adult contemporary. Owned by Rogers Broadcasting. General listener demographic profile: 25- to 45-year-old men and women (leans toward wom-

Featured artists include: Billy Joel, Jewel, Sarah McLachlan.

101.1 CFMI: Classic rock station recycling past hits for boomers. Owned by Western International Communications. General demographic profile: 25- to 49-year-olds (leans toward

olds (leans toward males).

Featured artists include: Eric Clapton, Pink Floyd, Rolling Stones

101.5 STAR FM (CKSR):

Once a Chilliwack-area sta-tion, the Star is now the station with the largest coverage in the Lower Mainland, extending from Vancouver to Abbotsford The station continues to pro-The station continues to provide adult contemporary programming. Owned by Fraser Valley Broadcasters Ltd.

General demographic profile: 25- to 54-year-old men and women (leaning toward

Featured artists may in-

102.7 CFRO: Vancou ver's Co-op radio (non-commercial). Owned by Vancouver Co-Opera-

tive Radio. General demographic en of all ages who seek multi cultural or special interest group program-ming. profile: men and wom-

105.7 FM CBC Stereo (CBC 2): Multi-format radio that offers a comprehensive that orders a comprehensive selection of all types of music including classical, jazz and (real) alternative rock. A Crown corporation (non-com-mercial).

CHKG flouts mainstream radio's reluctance to try new things

The entire music industry has evolved into these different format "species" in the last 75 years and cross-breeding has, thus far, proved unsuccessful. For instance, when Z95.3 began broadcasting six years ago, it tried to fuse dance and alternative rock.

The station performed well, but it did-n't take long for the format to veer into straight top-40 programming, in which the listener knows what he or she can

There's a genuine reluctance to try new things in commercial radio because of the competition and the general view that people aren't interested in change. We've done a lot of research and we which people do want change, they do want an alternative," says Koat. Ironically, it was the very word "alter-

native" that defined CHKG's main com petitor for the new FM licence handed out last year by the CRTC.

Vancouver-based Fairchild Media Group was in direct competition with three other signal applicants last summer. The largest among them was Montreal-based Telemedia, which was hyp-ing an "alternative rock" format. Koat says as an independent musician

himself (he plays in Custer's Last Band Stand), he was sympathetic to the idea of an "alternative rock" format.

"I think the only skepticism about the whole idea was how long would it remain an 'alternative rock' station before it started programming for the main-stream," says Koat. By the same token, when the CRTC

announced the new FM licence would go to an "ethnic station," many people automatically assumed the new station would be singularly Asian.

"A lot of people just called it the 'Chinese station,' "says Koat.
"There's a lot of ignorance about what the new station will really offer. Sure, there will be some Cantonese-language programming, but the majority of time will be dedicated to music from all around the world.'

HKG's programming will complement the on-air function of its established sister station, AM 1470, which has been broadcasting to Vancouver multicultural communities since 1972

(Fairchild acquired the station in 1993). While AM 1470 currently programs Cantonese and Mandarin shows from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., 96.1 FM will feature a

Latin American and Italian pop from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m., when the programming reverts to a Chinese hit-radio format. "Essentially, the two stations togeth-

er can provide day-long Chinese-language programming — but 96.1 will fo-cus on world music most of the day."

Koat says 96.1 is a state-of-the-art model for the future and the Fairchild Media Group has locked on to the "next big thing" to emerge in radio since the inception of FM.

With a growing media empire that now stretches from Vancouver to Toron-to, Fairchild's holdings now include CJVB and FM 96.1 in Vancouver, AM 1280 and a new, yet-to-be-launched FM station in Calgary, FM 88.9 and AM 1430 in Toronto, the Fairchild TV network and several other interests, including the Chinese-language publication Magazine.

The success of Fairchild is a uniquely Canadian phenomenon. In the United States, for instance, cultural identities come after the prefix "American." Canada, immigrants are allowed to maintain their cultural identities under the "mosaic model."

When ethnic broadcasting started, it

migrant who wanted to listen to a voice from home. What makes 96.1 different is that we're aiming at the second generation who wants to hear modern mu- and also wants to reconnect to their cultural background," says Koat, who adds that on-air personalities will be polished professionals who speak both in English and the selected program language.

For Vancouver's struggling world-music industry, the launch of 96.1 couldn't come at a better time.

"I used to be able to approach Z95.3 for radio support of the shows I'd bring in," says Mel Warner, a music promoter who's booked the likes of reggae stars Burning Spear and Jimmy Cliff.

"But they [Z programmers] don't even address world music any more. There's no one I can really go to for help. An audience is out there, waiting for something like this. I know they are, I

see them at my shows. Another music promoter in the same position as Warner is Brent Gibson, financial director for the Vancouver Folk Music Festival. Gibson says he's had no help from commercial radio in the past.

"The only people we've had a mean-ingful dialogue with in the past has been regional CBC. They've been very supportive, but they can't do the same sorts of things as a commercial station, says Gibson, referring to the type of onair promotion, presentation opportuni-ties and free advertising that mainstream music promoters have at their

Gibson is also a firm believer in the high interest level in world music. "I think the folk fest is just the tip of the

fingernail of awareness in world music."

But Gibson does have a few concerns: You see, I'm old enough to remember CJAZ" (the defunct jazz station that folded two years after it launched). Koat says FM 96.1 will have more to

offer advertisers than the failed CJAZ. did — including a growing population of ethnic listeners, a polished product and deep pockets to keep the station competitive in the \$72-million-a-year

wer Mainland radio market. 'We've invested a significant amount of money in our new studios. We plan on being around for a long time — and being a model for multi-cultural pro-gramming as it heads into the 21st cen-