



Radio manager tossed into storm after suspending DJs

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Colorado Springs became the unwitting center of the Dixie Chicks universe Wednesday. For radio manager Jerry Grant, it wasn't a pleasant place to be.

After The Gazette published a story Tuesday about how Grant, general manager of KKCS, 101.9 FM, suspended two announcers for violating the station's Dixie Chicks ban, the media went wild with the story.

USA Today, the Sydney Morning Herald in Australia, The Washington Post, Newsday and dozens of other publications turned the Dixie Chicks-related suspensions into the controversy of the day. Hundreds of phone calls and e-mails converged in one place: Grant's office.

Chicks - and disc jockey - supporters called this soft-spoken radio executive a Nazi, a fascist, a Nazi-fascist and worse.

"The savage irony of your pea-brained decision to 'silence' the Dixie Chicks followed by the suspension of (Dave) Moore and (Jeff) Singer for playing the offending artists is that you now share something in common with Saddam Hussein," wrote Jon Klem of Illinois, who read the story on Salon.com.

Not all the calls and e-mails eviscerated Grant. Some were 100 percent behind his decision to pull the DJs off the air.

"Thank you for standing up for America! " George Roberts of Las Vegas wrote. "Entertainers who (bad) mouth America and its leaders in front of foreign audiences don't deserve any air time here."

The station's anti-Chick policy was imposed after lead singer Natalie Maines told a British newspaper she was "ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas," her home state.

Although some local radio insiders suggested the controversy was a ratings stunt, Grant and others at the station insisted it was real.

From his frequent sighs and ragged voice, it sounded as if Grant wished the whole mess had never happened.

How did it happen?

Management said the market - not politics - led to the original ban of the Dixie Chicks.

"This wasn't a decision we made in-house," program director Shannon Stone said. "This was a decision the community made. We take polls. We do research. We try to find out what the people are liking or not."

Suspended DJ Dave Moore, who is expected to return today, concurs.

"Being in Colorado Springs with five military bases in the area, you want to see which way the wind's blowing before you do something or don't do something," Moore said.

"The immediate outcry was, 'Oh my gosh, we probably should hold off on playing these gals for a while.' And I agreed with that. But after about a week or two, I was goin', 'OK, are we done yet?' Because it's not like you're banning some person who's had one hit. You're banning the best-selling female band in music history."

Moore had been vocal about his desire to reinstate the Dixie Chicks to the playlist for some time and admits the station was on the verge of doing so.

But when President Bush appeared on television to announce the end of the major military phase of the war Thursday, the same day the Chicks launched

their U.S. tour, something clicked. He consulted with Singer, and the two hatched a plan.

"Monday morning we each went to King Soopers and grabbed some chips and some sandwiches and some soda and some water and came in with our little coolers," he said. "We locked the doors, and 6:15 we hit the air with it."

They started appropriately with "Long Time Gone" and didn't stop until Grant offered them the ultimatum of suspension or being fired. The onslaught ended at noon.

"I didn't realize the type of emotion that it would stir up on both sides," Moore said. "It's unfortunate that no matter what side of the opinion you're on that people get nasty."

Some of the opinions that came to KKCS and The Gazette during the past two days:

Golden resident Mike MacCarthy, a former Peace Corps member who is a graduate student in Southampton, England, read the story on the BBC news Web site and felt compelled to call Grant "an ignorant moron."

"So, how soon before you start burning books and lynching minorities?" Las Vegas-based Chaco Anasazi asked. He said the situation reminds him of the McCarthy era.

"Maybe if people had longer memories, we wouldn't be in this mess and the Dixie Chicks wouldn't be headed for whatever pop culture Manzanar the right-wingers are sending freethinking entertainers to these days," he told The Gazette.

"You are what's dangerous to America!" Shelley Davis of upstate New York said.

Jim Miller of Buffalo, New York, said otherwise. "I am glad to see that someone has the guts to stick to their guns!"

"You make it appear that it is a constant struggle to maintain this ban, like it was forced on you by some ethereal power," Michael Barron of Pennsylvania said. "When in actuality it was imposed by you in an attempt to jump on the media bandwagon against this group."

Klem, who likened Jerry Grant to Saddam, admits he was within his rights to suspend "or summarily castigate his employees."

"But oh, how I long for the day when a radio director can actually return his/her focus on playing music and stop playing the part of political stooge," he said.

RESPONSE TO KKCS FM's ACTION

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OPINION ON SUSPENSIONS

For or against Dixie Chicks-related suspensions?

In The Gazette's unscientific online poll, readers were split about evenly between those who support the management at KKCS FM for suspending the Dixie Chicksplaying disc jockeys and those who are against the move.

You can still have your vote counted at gazette.com.