

The Core Values of Jazz Music Listening

A summary of the values by PRPD President Marcia Alvar delivered in an address at the 2004 PRPD Conference, San Antonio, TX.

Summary Finding:

For Jazz listeners, all three Core Values categories are engaged as they experience the music. But a unique set of values centered in the Qualities of Heart and Spirit are pre-eminent.

Qualities of Mind/Intellect

Jazz core listeners have a strong interest in learning about the music and its history. Their appreciation for the depth, substance and integrity of the music inspires active listening and involvement. They want Jazz hosts who:

- are knowledgeable and credible
- understand that the music is the star and
- keep a steady focus on enhancing their enjoyment of the music

Qualities of Craft

In craft, listeners expect the pacing and the tone of the hosts to match the authenticity and integrity of the music, and want attention paid to the language, pronunciation and production style that are the hallmarks of public radio's signature sound.

Announcer Break Content: Levels of Value

Jazz listeners echoed Classical listeners in what they had to say about announcer breaks and stopsets:

- First and foremost they want the basics of what is being played
- They love to get a "tidbit" of information that enhances their enjoyment of the music.
- They appreciate arts and concert information but want it short with the chance to get find out more via the Internet or a phone number.
- What they like least is station business. Fundraising messages, PSAs, UW spots – all are seen as commercials and regarded as intrusions for which there is limited tolerance.

Qualities of Heart/Spirit

The unique and most powerful values for Jazz listeners center in Qualities of the Heart and Spirit:

The key emotional value is **Pleasure**. Unlike our classical listeners whose emotional benefit focused squarely on emotions having to do with stress relief – jazz listeners report a broad and complex range of positive emotions – motivating, joyous, passionate and uplifting. Jazz can be soothing. It can be energizing. It can be both at the same time.

There is a deep appreciation for the **authenticity and integrity** of Jazz , and for the music's inherent **spontaneity, improvisation and originality** that make every performance of a jazz tune unique and new.

Listening to jazz connects core listeners to a **history and tradition** that is uniquely American. They take pride in the **contribution that this unique music has made to American culture**.

Looking back over the course of the project, and the five studies that have been done on the core values of public radio, both **common ground** and **distinct differences** have emerged in the different core audiences for public radio's news, classical music and jazz.

Common Ground

Intelligence and learning are valued in all of the formats we studied. And there is a universal desire to hear presentation that embodies a high level of craft - of professional radio skills. But we found dramatic differences in the Qualities of Heart and Spirit – with values that morphed as we moved from news to classical to jazz.

Critical Differences in the Quality of Heart and Spirit:

News Listeners

In news, we met listeners who are deeply engaged in contemporary public life and culture. Whose vigilant curiosity about the world brings them to public radio for depth and context. They see the world as part of an interconnected web of causal relationships and want us to help them connect the dots by focusing on the why, not just the what of issues and events. They believe in the power to find solutions for the problems of their community, their nation and their world.

Classical Listeners

Classical music listeners told us they are drawn to us for largely internal reasons. We provide an oasis from the problems of today's world. They get comfort and inspiration from the music we share with them, are touched by its beauty and majesty, connecting with something that is timeless and enduring.

Jazz Listeners

For Jazz listeners, the music is a source of pleasure and celebration with inherent qualities of originality, spontaneity and improvisation that make every rendition of a song new and different. These listeners take pride in the unique contribution jazz has made to our country's history and culture.

The findings of these studies and what they tell us have profound implications for an array of public radio decision-makers:

- For PDs – those of you who are responsible for the selection, scheduling and development of programming – overseers of the content, talent and the craft of your radio stations.
- The on-air talent who represent our front line with listeners. It is critical that they understand the core appeal of their respective format and the importance of serving their particular listeners.

The news beta project has demonstrated these findings can be forged into tools that can improve our work, strengthen how we critique our work, and help train those new to public radio. Over the next several years, the application of core values findings will be a major priority for PRPD. We believe they are the building blocks for tools that can and will become as fundamental to the way we do our jobs as the "radio basics" and formatics PRPD emphasized at this organization's beginnings.