

Keeping classic hits alive: Aaron in the Afternoon brings new sound to Glasgow airwaves
By: Brennan Crain

It's not everyday you get to see yourself in the newspaper or on TV. For Aaron Russell, hitting the airwaves of Glasgow, Kentucky is an everyday occurrence.

Russell, senior, works at WCLU, a local radio station. Despite working at the station since Feb. 2017, Russell rarely spoke on-air other than delivering news or obituary announcements.

It all changed on Oct. 17.

Providing Glasgow with classic hits and some top chart songs, Russell began hosting a radio show entitled *Aaron in the Afternoon*.

Russell was initially hired as a video engineer. As former production director, now program director, of BCHS Live!, Russell used his video and web design experience to enhance WCLU's programming.

Russell's first project was improving the morning show. The station formerly broadcasted its radio feed on EPB channel six. Now, the morning show, named *Good Morning Live!*, currently broadcasts on Facebook Live each weekday.

BCHS Live! uses vMix, a video mixing software, to coordinate its broadcasts. Russell took this knowledge and shared it with Henry Royse, owner of WCLU, and Wes Royse, news director. The station is currently using vMix to coordinate *Good Morning Live!*.

WCLU was undergoing multiple advancements at this time. The station changed its methods of reporting and showing news. For example, the station began incorporating more video projects and "infield reporting."

Russell said Henry and Wes were open to new ideas.

"If I wanted to do it, Wes said 'Do it,'" Russell said.

Gradually, Russell joined other aspects of the job.

"I just kept doing more and more," Russell said.

Some of his first on-air personality traits were observed when he was invited to talk on “tidbit news.” Russell remembered he would crack jokes and “put on a show” while on the air.

The discovery came just in time. The weekend DJ position opened and Russell was put in.

Russell was given more time on-air as he broadcasted news, obituaries and other announcements.

“My voice was twangy, but I learned to develop it more,” Russell said. “I learned to slow down and be more loose instead of so professional.”

He also programmed the music for the weekend, something he still does for *Aaron in the Afternoon*.

“I pre-record at least 15 minutes to get me there,” Russell said.

Programming is a process of “loading” numerical codes into an “automation computer.” The station keeps a log of codes the computer reads as certain songs and commercials. The computer takes over responsibilities a DJ would normally do such as transitioning music, cutaways and commercials.

While Russell’s show starts at 3 p.m., he never goes live until after 3:15. Programming is quintessential to Russell’s workflow because he has to drive from school to the station.

When he arrives, he sits down at the console board and puts on headphones. As the last song plays from his programmed list, he goes live. He pushes the button to send him to the airwaves and he blasts his first words of the day.

The show covers basic topics.

“I tell people about the news, weather, sports, and anything else they want to hear,” Russell said.

Russell plays music based on his day.

“I like to specify,” Russell said. “I like to play music specific to the day I had, and to the day others might be having.”

Russell said he sometimes picks songs based on artist days like birthdays, anniversaries and death day.

“If it has been a gray and gloomy day, I wouldn’t play “Walking on Sunshine,” Russell said.

Diversity in music taste is the reason Russell enjoys hosting the show.

“This is the only station I could really do this on,” Russell said.

Other stations may play music solely specific to one genre. Russell worked at Commonwealth Broadcasting before WCLU, and the job involved only country music.

“I like to do a broad range for listeners,” Russell said.

Russell also enjoys the Lite AC genre, lite adult contemporary music. WCLU is a lite station, meaning it plays easy listening hits.

“It is a sought after type of music,” Russell said. “Stores like to play it because it easy listening, and you know it’s going to be clean.”

This music type also appeals to a lot of locals, according to Russell.

“I hear people say ‘Son, you’ve got a good taste in music,’” Russell said. “I get it all the time, people say ‘I hear these songs all of the time, but I never hear them on the radio.’”

The heart of the show’s music choice lies within Russell’s desire to return to a style of music not played often.

“I’m trying to bring a more enjoyable product to the airwaves,” Russell said. “I’m not one to say music died here or there because there is still good music. This is a lot of the music they remember.”

While Russell plays a lot of lite classics, he has incorporated some country music, such as Chris Stapleton, Brother’s Osborne and Old Dominion, mimicking classic singers.

Russell hopes the diversity on the show will attract older and younger listeners.

Aside from music, Russell also announces news and engages his listeners with trivia. At the top of the 4 o’clock hour, Russell does movie trivia. Russell also does sports trivia and gives away free food coupons to listeners.

“I knew when we were thinking of this we had to have movie and sports trivia,” Russell said.

He tried trivia with his audience and the trend caught on.

“We just let it roll,” Russell said.

Years ago, radio was similar to the way Russell does things. A DJ, or disc jockey, would pick songs to play and would monitor the studio. Now, things are different.

“Music is on an automation computer or a satellite,” Russell said. “You usually have a morning guy but after that the music is programmed and played.”

A lot of radio shows play across satellites and online platforms. Shows such as *The Big Time with Whitney Allen* are syndicated programming, meaning they play across multiple stations.

Russell has attempted to prevent local programming from relying solely on such syndicated programs.

“I think people really enjoy knowing I’m sitting here in this studio,” Russell said. “People like knowing the guy picking their music.”

The DJ has slowly become less involved in the broadcasting process. In the past, DJs had to load records on a turntable to be played. Commercial breaks came when the DJ selected a cassette to play on the radio. These processes existed in Glasgow until automation was invented promoting voice tracking.

“Radio wasn’t always like this,” Russell said. “At 10 or 12 at night you’d have someone sign off for the night. It would just be static for six or seven hours until the morning guy came in.”

Despite his live presence, automation and voice tracking come in handy.

Russell programs the show’s latter two hours. After sitting in-studio live from 3:15 to 5 p.m., Russell pulls two large binders, containing music and commercial codes, and loads music for the final hours of the show. After selecting the next day’s songs, Russell goes to the production room, records his cutaways, and signs off, all before 5:30 p.m.

While Russell enjoys his job, he does not intend to continue as a radio personality. He plans to attend the University of Kentucky and major in communications. After college, he plans to carry his experience into sports media.

While unsure of what he wants in the sports industry, he said he will be able to use his experience at WCLU.

“It’s been a great high school job,” Russell said. “I’ve had good help.”

Until college, Russell wants to improve his show.

“I want to start having more guests on the show,” Russell said.

Unsure of when, Russell said sometime in the coming months he would begin bringing more guests on-air to talk with.

For more information on *Aaron in the Afternoon*, Russell can be found on Facebook and Twitter at “Aaron in the Afternoon.”