

HISTORY OF RADIO JAMAICA LTD.

The history of Radio Jamaica is extricably bound with the origin of radio broadcasting in Jamaica. Radio broadcasting began in 1939. The first station, VP5PZ, was made possible through the use of the equipment of a local 'ham' operator named John Grinan, who, in compliance with wartime regulations, handed his equipment over to the Government.

Mr. Grinan succeeded in convincing the Government to use his equipment to operate a public broadcasting station; and the amateur equipment was adapted to the demands of broadcasting, and regular scheduled broadcasts began on November 17, 1939, using Mr. Grinads call-sign, VP5PZ.

Initially, there was one broadcast per week, lasting one hour from Mr. Grinan's home at 2 Seaview Avenue, St Andrew; but after May 1, 1940, a small staff was employed and daily broadcasts began on June 3, 1940.

Despite the small and inadequate facilities, the station improved with each broadcast; and with the appointment of Dennis Gick as Programme Manager, the fare offered soon went beyond news and wartime information, to include live performances of local artistes. ZQI, as the station became known in 1940, broadcasted for 10 years.

Under the weight of public criticism at the high cost of running the station, decision was taken by the Government to issue a license to a private company to provide broadcasting services. A license was granted in 1949 to the Jamaica Broadcasting Company, a subsidiary of the Re-diffusion Group, London.

This license gave the company the right to operate regular broadcasting and re-diffusion services, and the Jamaica Broadcasting Company took over the operations of ZQI on May 1, 1950. Commercial broadcasting began on July 9, 1950, using the call-sign, "Radio Jamaica and the Re-diffusion Network", and the well-known RJR was born!

The new company was given a mandate to cover the entire island with radio broadcasting. To ensure that rural dwellers could become oriented to Radio, the company distributed wireless receiving sets to some 200 designated listening posts throughout the island. These were points where people naturally gathered, such as schools, police station and village stores. An important aspect of the license granted to Radio Jamaica was that it was to be a commercial radio station. This meant that radio time would be costed and advertisers would pay according to the time used for their advertisements.

Radio programmes were also to be sponsored by companies, and these two means were to be the station's only source of income. The Jamaican radio audience, though previously informed, reacted with shock and dismay after July 9 when their programmes began to be interrupted with advertisements!

The station was to weather a stormy period of public outcry, with the listeners begging for an end to commercial radio, declaring that the ads made them want to smash their radio sets! In the face of this opposition, Radio Jamaica introduced programmes which were to prove popular. There were radio dramas - in fact, there were no less than eight radio dramas presented weekly in 1960; popular music; and money-winning quiz shows.

Very soon, RJR, as the station was affectionately known, became a household word. In August 1951, the station was moved from its original Seaview Avenue location to what was described at the time as "the modern air-conditioned and excellently equipped studio premises" at 32 Lyndhurst Road in Kingston.

A significant step was taken in 1953 when frequency modulated transmitters were installed at Coleyville and Tinson Pen. This was a historic event, as Radio Jamaica was the first country in the British Commonwealth to broadcast regular scheduled programmes on the FM band.

To increase the reach of Radio, as well as to increase income, a Re-diffusion service was inaugurated in February 1951, under the management of Re-diffusion Limited, a division of the Jamaica Broadcasting Company Limited to provide a special service of programmes transmitted by wire. The service was carried to homes, department stores, bars, hotels, police stations and proved very popular.

One of the important aspects of this service was that it offered complete coverage of national events. By 1958, it was being enjoyed by 15,000 subscribers.

When the Government decided to operate its own public broadcasting station, to be named the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, the name of Radio Jamaica was formally changed to that of Radio Jamaica Limited, the name by which it is known today.

Another service introduced by the company was Reditune, which started in 1962, featuring a special tape machine which provided non-stop music of all varieties. Reditune gave way later to the more sophisticated, Musipage, which provided live music, instead of tapes, broadcast from the station to the subscribers - mostly business houses.

One of the constant goals of the station during its 40-year life has been the providing of a total broadcasting service to the nation.

To this end, Radio Jamaica introduced a second daily transmission in 1972 on the FM band. It was called RJR-FM or Capital Stereo, and filled a need for soothing, uninterrupted music. This service met with such success that in April 1984, the decision was taken to develop it further. A new station was formed using the call-sign FAME-FM - the first part of the name being an acronym for Fraternity of Amazing Musical Expression.

FAME has been a pace-setter, developing programmes which, while playing soothing music, also gives the listener an opportunity to meet the personalities selecting the records.

The experience of 40 years has prepared the company for the latest innovation in its bid to supply complete broadcasting service. This is Simulcast Broadcasting, which has been hailed as a brilliant development and which has been successfully used to cover sporting events, such as the 1990 International Test cricket series, and the annual Budget Debate in the House of Representatives.

ACQUISITION OF TELEVISION AND RADIO 2 ASSETS

In keeping with the company's strategic plan for growth and development into a highly profitable media house Radio Jamaica Limited (RJR) acquired the Television and Radio

2 assets of the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC) from the Government of Jamaica, for an amount of J\$70m. The major terms of the contract between government and Radio Jamaica Limited are as follows:

- RJR has bought the studio, engineering and transmission equipment of JBC Radio 2 and JBC TV, along with the transmitters owned by JBC. RJR will also take over leases on leased transmitter sites.
- RJR will have access to JBC's video and audio archives for a period of 12 years and may incorporate material from the archives in its own programmes without being liable for licence fees.
South Odeon Avenue has not been bought but RJR will occupy it for 18 months, while new studios are being built.

Since the acquisition on June 12, 1997 an interim management company, RJR Interim Management Services Limited, has been put in place. The new name for the television station is Television Jamaica Limited.

It has been a challenging task to date as we attempt to address the critical need for re-equipping the television station. In the short term we are being dogged by technical challenges, which based on our implementation programme, should be corrected by June 1998 when our new equipment will be fully installed. The objective of our strategic management plan is to ensure that our viewers will receive the best service over the long run.

Radio 2 is now located at Broadcast House at our Lyndhurst Road Office and has settled in well with plans in place to take it to greater heights.