

Free-Form D.J. Loses Weekly Radio Show

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The last installment of "Idiot's Delight," Vin Scelsa's long-running radio show, ended at 3:25 a.m. on New Year's Day with the sounds of "Over the Rainbow" played on a music box that his producer had given him for Christmas. Mr. Scelsa had been on since 10 p.m., spinning diverse tunes -- from the Velvet Underground to Julie Andrews to "The Blue Danube" -- and telling stories that sometimes would go on for 15 minutes or more, his trademark for more than 30 years.



Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times
Vin Scelsa in the radio studio built for him at J&R Music World.

His station, WNEW-FM in Manhattan, did not renew his contract to continue "Idiot's Delight" into the new year, so he is without a station.

Mr. Scelsa, 53, was one of the last practitioners of "free-form radio" on a commercial station, playing whatever music he liked, indulging himself in monologues and conversations with guests and breaking rules of brevity and programming consistency.

Ken Freedman, the station manager of WFMU-FM in Jersey City, said: "He was one of the last people committed to doing free form on a commercial station in a big market, long after every other D.J. had sold out or given up. He kept the flame alive on New York commercial radio for decades."

Mr. Scelsa co-founded WFMU in 1967 and continues to support that unruly commercial station as a board member.

Mr. Scelsa was at WNEW-FM from 1973 to 1982 and returned in 1996 after an 11-year stay at WXRK (K-Rock) in Manhattan.

Though he is looking for a new station for "Idiot's Delight," Mr. Scelsa continues to broadcast on the Internet.

Last year he began "Live at Lunch," which he conducted out of his home in New Jersey until J&R Music World in Manhattan recently built a studio for him in its store on Park Row.

The show is broadcast Tuesday through Thursday from noon to 3 p.m. at www.liveatlunch.com.

The WNEW decision was mutual and amicable, said Mr. Scelsa and a station spokesman, who both added that avenues had been explored to keep the show going.

"Vin's standards are very high," said Jeremy Coleman, the programming director for WNEW. "His vision is pristine. Better not to continue with the show than to corrupt that."

Mr. Scelsa said: "There's no place to go on commercial radio. I've had a long run and a good run on WNEW. They left me alone and let me do what I want. But in my heart it was beginning to make less and less sense to be there. The environment was so different from what I do."

Mr. Coleman said that for years Mr. Scelsa's show drew a steady audience of about 30,000 listeners a week. "Vin has always attracted a loyal and very dedicated following," he added.

In September 1999 WNEW switched to an aggressive "shock-talk" format, featuring brash and

sometimes foul-mouthed D.J.'s. It broadcasts only one other music program, a heavy metal show on Saturday nights.

Mr. Scelsa casts his departure as a reflection of consolidation in an ever more competitive and segmented radio industry with a limited tolerance for diversity in programming.

"Radio has abrogated its responsibility to turn people on to music and educate people about music," he said recently on his Internet show. "The audience is so fragmented now. Kids don't grow up with a variety of music."

Correction: *January 8, 2001, Monday Because of an editing error, an article in the arts pages on Thursday about the cancellation of "Idiot's Delight," a radio show with Vin Scelsa on WNEW-FM in Manhattan, referred incorrectly to WFMU-FM of Jersey City, where the manager commented on Mr. Scelsa's career. It is noncommercial, not commercial.*