



30 YEARS OF ROCK

It's Only Classic Rock But We Like It—Format Turns 30.

★CLASSIC★ Rock

It was nearly three decades ago that a radio programmer said in *Billboard*, "Classic rock is a nice place to visit, but I don't know that people want to live in a museum." With the successful staple format turning 30 this year, it appears plenty of folks feel just fine behind those walls. Fred Jacobs launched classic rock on FM at WMMQ Lansing, MI in 1985, a time when "MTV was the big thing and its focus was all on new, new, new," he told *Billboard*. "Hot Hits was the big radio format at that time, all about Michael Jackson and Madonna and all those artists." A new rock splinter format that relied entirely on gold titles "just totally took off."

Today, while some of classic rock radio's

male-skewing 25-54 target audience has aged out of the demo, the format remains relevant with gains among a new generation. Its 18-34 audience share in November was up a significant 13% from a year earlier, according to Nielsen. Overall, 6+, classic rock ranked No. 8 among radio formats in November, with a 5.1 audience share; while among 18-34, it's No. 9 with a 4.4; and No. 7 with a 5.5 share 25-54.

Edison Research VP of music and programming Sean Ross notes that classic rock remains relevant as kids study rock's legacy. "The format has benefited from a more-than-anecdotal number of 18-year-olds discovering Led Zeppelin," Ross said. Another factor is the waning prevalence of the guitar in current alternative music, he told *Billboard*. "If you are 18 and don't consider Walk the Moon rock'n'roll, that leaves classic rock."

The classic rock playlist has also evolved, with the inclusion now of '80s and '90s acts such as Nirvana, Def Leppard, Metallica and Pearl Jam. "That's a small part of why you see that younger appeal," says Jon Miller, Nielsen VP of audience insights. Add to that the fact that mainstream rock has struggled to develop new artists and new approaches since classic rock radio proved it could attract more higher-income male listeners than formats open to newer sounds in rock, said professor and music author Eric Weisbard. Ross added, "More than any other time in history, timeless records are timeless.

There's no dishonor in listening to your parents' music, and it's not your parents' music anyway. It's a blind playlist that your buddy sent you."