WKAR Radio is a valuable part of Michigan's capital area advancement.

The station provides public broadcasting service with WKAR (AM), WKAR-FM, online, and the Radio Reading Service.

Serving a 60-mile radius from East Lansing, WKAR is involved with nearly 80,000 weekly listeners. WKAR’s range of programming includes WKAR News, classical music, folk, jazz, participation in community events and with station representatives serving on a variety of boards and community committees; and community support through student learning internships.

In FY21, WKAR provided these vital local services:

- Two Radio Stations
  - WKAR (AM) 870 & 105.1 FM
  - WKAR-FM 90.5
- One Television Station with five channels
  - WKAR-HD
  - WKAR-Create
  - WKAR-World
  - PBS Kids
  - Michigan Learning Channel
- Online Streaming (24/7 Classical, Jazz, and News streams)
- WKAR Radio Reading Service
- National and local news, public affairs, arts and culture, health, science, and education programming.
- Music education throughout Michigan’s capital area.

WKAR’s local services had deep impact in Michigan’s capital region.

WKAR reached a weekly audience of nearly 80,000 listeners through the station’s partnership with local educators, businesses, governments, arts organizations, schools, and social services agencies.

Through our timely local and national news reporting and coverage, WKAR helps local non-profits and government agencies reach and engage new audiences.

Volunteers at WKAR’s Radio Reading Service read local newspapers to area listeners who are unable to see or turn a page.
This past year at WKAR (July 2020-June 2021) was marked by more news, more classical and folk music, and a greater digital presence.

News that matters, Music that inspires
For 99 years, WKAR from Michigan State University has informed and entertained listeners across the capital area of Michigan. That tradition continued in 2020-21, as WKAR filled the airwaves from Grand Rapids to Detroit with news, classical music and an intense dedication to connecting with our community.

NEWS
As a swing state, Michigan was in the national spotlight as politicians campaigned in advance of November’s general election. WKAR rose to the occasion, with 20 features heard nationwide on NPR News magazines including Morning Edition, All Things Considered, and Weekend Edition. WKAR News reporters were also heard during several NPR News national newscasts, NPR’s Up First and Politics podcasts, and BBC’s Outside Source. In partnership with other public radio stations in the state, WKAR shared 289 stories with the Michigan Public Radio Network (more than twice the number of stories shared during FY20).

Throughout FY21, WKAR provided constantly updated information about the evolving COVID-19 pandemic situation in Greater Lansing via the Live Updates: Coronavirus In The Lansing Region web page. The page won Best Public Service in the 2020 Michigan APME Broadcast Contest.

The election coverage from WKAR was dedicated not only to the candidates and issues on ballots, but also to the process of running elections, counting votes, and certifying results. WKAR brought our audience along for conversations with US Senate and US House candidates. We even had a reporter on the Michigan Senate floor to provide a first-hand account of the state’s electors casting their votes.

WKAR’s strategic plan calls upon the station to expand, diversify, and engage audiences. In 2020, in an effort to fulfill this vision, WKAR created the position of Bilingual Latinx Stories Reporter; hiring Michelle Jokisch Polo to fill that role. Michelle has actively engaged Latinx communities, sharing stories with a broader audience about the struggle of ethnic business owners during the pandemic, and how undocumented immigrants formed learning pods so that parents could continue to work while children learned virtually. Michelle also told the story of how a composer at Michigan State University’s College of Music received a nomination for a Latin Grammy, weaving together music from the composition with his thoughts about diversity and how it influenced his work.

During Black History Month, WKAR produced a special broadcast of conversations with prominent members of Michigan’s Black community. WKAR News host Sophia Saliby spoke with Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist, and novelist Alice Randall. WKAR News reporter Abigail Censky reported on how a group of Black women in Detroit played a pivotal role in the 2020 Presidential Election, and WKAR News reporter Scott Pohl talked to author and columnist Rochelle Riley about her new children's book.

On April 5, 2021, Michiganders aged 16+ became eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. WKAR produced a special entitled Your COVID Vaccine Questions Answered. Listeners submitted questions about the vaccine and ongoing pandemic. Ingham County Health Officer Linda Vail and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel joined WKAR News host Sophia Saliby to answer those questions.

In May 2021, WKAR increased service to the local Latinx community by launching ¿Qué Onda Michigan?, a weekly Spanish-language podcast from WKAR News hosted by Michelle Jokisch Polo. The podcast features original content as well as reporting broadcast on WKAR. The launch of the podcast was an opportunity to partner with Araceli Cresencio, a bilingual reporter at local CBS affiliate WLNS. In the short time since the launch of ¿Qué Onda Michigan?, the podcast has already been recognized by several prominent members of mid-Michigan’s Latinx community as a positive contribution and has resulted in funding for a new student intern reporter to focus on mid-Michigan’s Latinx community.

Throughout 2020-21, the Michigan Minute, a locally produced daily look into historical events around the state continued to be appointment listening during Morning Edition. WKAR News is heard on WKAR (AM) and WKAR-FM 7-days per week, and is available online at wkar.org and through the NPR One app.
CLASSICAL

WKAR’s classical music programming remains a mainstay for 90.5 WKAR-FM. WKAR also operates WKAR-Classical, a 24/7 web stream entirely devoted to classical music programming. During 2020-21, WKAR broadcast 2,028 hours of locally produced classical programming presented by WKAR’s classical music hosts. In addition, WKAR also broadcast 52 hours of classical music programming produced by and made available to us by partner stations in Michigan.

WKAR’s flagship Michigan Music program: Great Lakes Concerts, began its third season highlighting a variety of ensembles in Ann Arbor, Interlochen, Jackson, Lansing, and Traverse City, the Saginaw Bay Symphony and the Michigan Philharmonic in Detroit; as well as smaller in-state partnerships with the Absolute Music Series in Lansing and the Baroque on Beaver Island Festival right in the middle of Lake Michigan. The program continues to fulfill its goal of knitting together more of The Mitten’s classical music makers into hour-long programs.

Other unique local classical music programming initiatives included assisting local organizations transition into the new streaming reality of the mid-pandemic. WKAR’s Jamie Paisley helped guide the Absolute Music Chamber Series by continuing to serve as their concert guide, but with an entirely remote audience. The usual concert lectures were filmed more intimately to reflect this, while also soliciting audience questions for the artist(s) to encourage interactions from the otherwise home-bound, often isolated community members. For that reason, we took a week in July of 2020 for “At Home Getaways,” featuring musical journeys around the world to ease the stress of cancelled plans and missing some of the great outdoors during the COVID-era. In Michigan Matinee, we highlighted a new biography about early synthesizer composer, and Transgender pioneer Wendy Carlos. On March 8th, we launched our 5th annual day of airing works by only women composers to commemorate International Women’s Day, which caused enough interest that we created a playlist document to send inquirers so they can find the recordings and more information about these often-repressed composers. It was a true thrill to publicly celebrate a long-time host at WKAR, Jody Knol, who on January 13th, 2021 marked his 35th anniversary on the mic here in mid-Michigan with a recreation of the playlist he had on his very first day at the station.

WKAR continued its statewide partnership with Detroit’s WRCJ-FM and Traverse City’s Interlochen Public Radio, producing the programs MSU In Concert, Michigan Matinee, The Fugue, and Great Lakes Concerts for broadcast on those stations.

FOLK

In 2020, American Public Media announced they would cease production of its nationally distributed show, Live From Here. While this was sad news for folk music fans around the country, it was an opportunity for WKAR to increase the amount of broadcast time devoted to local folk music. On September 5th, 2020, the WKAR produced show, Folk With Matt Watroba, expanded from two hours on Sunday evenings, to five hours across Saturday and Sunday. Folk With Matt Watroba is hosted by local folk legend Matt Watroba and features acoustic folk, blues, bluegrass, and more, performed by artists from the Great Lakes region and from all over the world.

COMMUNITY

During 2020-21, many in-person events were either cancelled or reformatted to virtual events due to the coronavirus pandemic. Fortunately, classical hosts Jody Knol and Jamie Paisley were able to continue their involvement with local music ensembles by participating in virtual events with such groups as the Lansing Symphony Orchestra, the Absolute Music Chamber Series, the Jackson Symphony Orchestra, and the MSU College of Music.
WKAR Promotes Community Dialogue

WKAR News highlighted the local need for alternative paths to getting the COVID-19 vaccination. Depicted in this image is Allyson McCann, who brought her son, Sean, to a sensory friendly COVID-19 vaccine clinic after she wasn’t able to bring him to his doctor’s office to get the shot.

In a news special titled Your COVID Vaccine Questions Answered, health experts answered questions submitted by WKAR listeners.

WKAR Engages with our Community

Great Lakes Concerts brings performances from concert halls around the state into the homes of classical fans with weekly broadcasts.

WKAR classical music host, Jamie Paisley (shown at left), acts as concert guide for Lansing’s Absolute Music Chamber Series.

A week of At-Home Getaways provided musical journeys to listeners during a summer when many were forced to cancel plans due to the pandemic.

5th annual day of dedicating an entire day to airing works by women composers in recognition of International Women’s Day.

WKAR News

Politics, education, health and safety, and reaching out to underserved communities were cornerstones of news coverage provided during 2020-21.

WKAR’s Politics & Government reporter, Abigail Censky (shown at right) was present as Michigan’s electors cast their votes on the floor of the Senate.

WKAR launched ¿Qué Onda Michigan?, a Spanish-language news & information podcast.

WKAR News won the Outstanding News Operation award from the Michigan Associated Press Media Editors.
WKAR continues to play an essential role in Michigan’s Capital Region as a key source for quality news, music and cultural programming, giving a voice to a broad and deep variety of conversation, community, concerts, and more. WKAR commits to expanding its community relationships to better share the talents, interests, concerns and cultural backgrounds of the people in mid-Michigan.

WKAR engaged with our community through live and virtual hosting, and by leading discussions at live and virtual music performances.

We expanded our programs and specials to showcase Michigan Capital Region talents and professions.

We increased awareness around local issues, providing timely and quality news content and discussions.

As a result, membership andlistenership are up and our audiences are more diverse.

“Thank you for being there. Classical music is comforting. There is a lot to learn by listening to Jody Knol and Jamie Paisley.”

Diane from Albion, MI

“WKAR has gone beyond being a community and regional cultural resource, reaching out beyond its broadcast range to provide Michigan and communities beyond with access to its programming in places that have lost their or never had such capabilities. It recognizes and is responsive to the diverse communities it serves, and supports the finest traditions of the Land Grant university traditions. Its services are particularly valuable during the Pandemic, when other performance and arts opportunities are limited, and helps maintain continuity and awareness of the need to support the performing arts and music, to maintain these capabilities in our communities”

Andris from Holt, MI

“Appreciate the cooperation between WKAR and the other Michigan Classical Music stations. The whole state benefits.”

Gary from Rochester, MI

“WKAR has been a source of reliable and useful information during this election and pandemic year. Working from home means I have WKAR radio on more hours of the day. I also enjoy the music, Wait Wait Don’t Tell Me, and the local programming”

Thomas from Eagle, MI

“WKAR has long been an important news source for me. Both the breadth and depth of coverage is exceptional. The music programming has become increasingly valuable to me as well. Many streaming and radio sources are repetitive and predictable, but that is never the case with WKAR. Keep up the good work.”

Bryant from Bath, MI