

life Music

Confessions of a 'radio-active' narrowcaster

BY PETER JONES

My name is Peter... and I was a disc jockey. It's not an easy admission in this era of corporate radio, where creativity, except for shock-jock tedium, is as rare as that golden oldie, the Fairness Doctrine.

Once upon a turntable, though, DJs had a say in the music they aired.

Playlists were paper to scribble on after the fact.

Radio consultants were the stuff of paranoia.

'It was hard to get the next Dick Clark out of my Wheaties.'

And, some woman named Goldie Hawn would call me to ask about music.

Times have changed, e.g., the new alternatives of satellite radio, Internet broadcasts, iPods and other media that have rendered terrestrial radio a quaint, even irrelevant, commodity, especially among the ever-distracted youth, and Aspen celebrity culture.

As for me, I escaped it all in a crudely-built spaceship with intelligent apes. I would have settled for a few coherent program directors, but survivors

can't be choosers.

A time-travel scenario allows me to disguise my age in sci-fi gobbledygook, but I remember when *Billboard*, the leading international music-industry trade journal, did not have a fax machine, much less email, thus forcing me to send my then-editor hard copy via overnight US mail. Cell phone, schmell phone.

Anyway, back to the break-neck narrative. I beamed off that dying planet called music radio just in time to land in the pre-Rush Limbaugh era of talk radio.

Jumping from the frying pan to the fire? No. In the 1980s the format had not yet been segregated ideologically. JFK conspiracy theories, even-handed debates, strippers, UFOs, has-been TV actors and free food were all in a day's work.

What's more, I could paradoxically play DJ on talk radio by hosting live, in-studio performances of my own choosing, playing records with a vague lyrical relation to the topic at hand, or by prompting Ian Whitcomb to perform his one hit, "You Really Turn Me On," live on the phone from Los Angeles, all in the same day!

Try that on ultra-formatted FM circa 2007!

Despite my ambitions to be radio's next Dick Cavett, it was hard to get the next Dick Clark out of my Wheaties.



AT KBX-AM, A FORGOTTEN DENVER TALK STATION, future *LIFE* columnist Peter Jones was a disc jockey and was occasionally visited by such music-related guests as Tim Reid, the actor who played 'WKRP' DJ Venus Flytrap.

At KBX-AM, a forgotten talk station that once roomed with KBPI in the Tabor Center, my music-related guests included Wolfman Jack, Sonny Bono, Richie Furay, Casey Kasem and Tim Reid, the actor who played "WKRP" DJ Venus Flytrap.

I had a few WKRP-like moments of my own, especially at KMDK.

In 1988, when Denver's sure-fire medical format fell on deaf ears... with "The Urology Hour" in morning drive... how could anything go wrong? The plastic surgeon who ran the empire, quickly, via an unerasable marker, turned the station into a heavy-metal format, "Z Rock."

"Man, I just got out of Denver County Jail," a headbanger told me when he dropped by Z Rock's Cherry Creek offices one afternoon to claim his free bum-

per sticker.

"Oh, yeah?," I replied, coyly in my shirt and tie.

"Yeah, and my friend here just got out of Canon City."

"Uh-huh," I remarked, looking for cover.

"Dude, everyone in the whole jail is talkin' about this great new radio station!"

Wait for my screenplay for the rest of the story.

I continued my experiments at Colorado Public Radio's KCFR-FM, back when the station co-sponsored the Denver Botanic Gardens' concerts. Although I was a news reporter for an ostensibly classical station, I often worked music of decidedly different varieties into my stories, the only times in CPR's history, without a doubt, that the Dead Kennedys and Flash Cadillac & the Continental Kids were ever heard on KCFR. Sabotage? You decide.

As can be concluded, radio gets in your blood, not to mention other body products. Even so, it's just as hard to get back into the

industry as it is to finally ring it out of your socks. A few years fly by. You lose your contacts. You battle your demons. You change careers. You change your mind. FCC ownership requirements get loosened. And, before you know it, the balcony has closed in radio's Theatre of the Mind.

Despite it all, you eventually land a weekend talk show, before getting fired for your politics. Then you audition for a new station. They say that they like you, they *really* like you, until they go off the air permanently a week later.

As a recovering radio guy, you do get used to it. You try to grow up and maybe get a real job. Still, everyone asks, what's all this (expletive) radio doing on your resume?

Yes, I admit it. I was a disc jockey. Past tense. Never again. Okay?

Resume available upon request.

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