

# The Night Rock ‘n’ Roll Woke Nobody

Growing up trapped in a Chinese restaurant family in the Fifties and early Sixties, I had radio as my lifeline to the outside world—to music, to baseball, and to other wonders. I got into radio in college, and that experience, along with a stint as an all-night announcer at a “beautiful music” station, can actually be credited with getting me in as a regular contributor to *Rolling Stone*. I’d only written a short item in March, 1968, when the staff of KMPX, one of the first free-form FM rock stations in the country, went on strike. It was the first “hippie strike,” as the papers put it. I offered to help cover the story, saying I had experience in FM radio. I was teamed with a staff writer, but after our first story, he left *Rolling Stone*. As the strike dragged over several months, it became my beat, and when it finally ended, I moved on into other assignments.

On staff at the magazine, I continued to cover radio-related news, whether it was a fistfight at a Top 40 station or the FCC threatening to fine stations for airing songs containing lyrics about drugs.

At the *San Francisco Chronicle*, I wrote a radio column. That assignment may have come my way after I suggested the following, a first-person piece about that job at the “beautiful music” station.

After three years of mourning the death of the rock-and-roll, “Jive 95” era of KSAN, where I spent nine years freely spinning records, I’ve found a new favorite radio station: KFOG. I love the way it came on, as low-profile as the “beautiful music” it used to play. Up to the second of the format change on September 18, 1982, there was no hint of anything afoot.

The same sonorous announcers; the same Muzak. But then at noon, one last reading of the slogan: “All music .. all the time.” And instead of a segue into Mantovani, it was THE STRAY CATS! “Rock This Town!” Then “Ticket to Ride!” Then a mistake, and we heard “Yesterday,” the closest KFOG would get to the old sound again.

And it's been non-stop rock ever since, most of the latest stuff, blended with some of the best from the Sixties, sometimes tossed in an LP side at a time, just like the old days of "free-form" radio, whenever the jocks had to visit the john. Features like "10 at 10" and "Psychedelic Supper" (programmed excuses for splurges of oldies).

Endorsements from rave comics such as Rodney Dangerfield and other goofy hirelings such as TV announcer Don Pardo. DJs with no discernible personalities, but all personable, nevertheless.

But it may well be that I'm fond of KFOG for a whole 'nother reason. You see, I was the first DJ to play a rock song there, a bit' before September 18, 1982. A good guess would be August, 1967. That's when I was in the middle of six months there as the all-night announcer, my first break out of college. 1967. I know: The summer of love. Flowers in your hair. And there I was, playing Mancini and 101 Strings. But it was a radio job, in San Francisco, for pay (\$400 a month for six nights a week, including typing program logs and writing commercial copy, and Kaiser Broadcasting, the owners back then, made me feel lucky).

I remember feeling pretty smug having to leave parties at 11 so that I could get to the station in time. And I remember feeling pretty nerdy when anyone asked *which* station. What a bummer. On top of that, my program was, in fact, someone else's, pre-taped and shipped to us by the sponsoring Holiday Inns. My job was to play the tapes and break in twice an hour for news and station IDs. All the other jocks at KFOG actually played records, and had their own rules: no vocals, and nothing even close to fast. Don't wanna wake the listeners, you know.

For someone who was regularly going to the Avalon and Fillmore ballrooms, who was building a record library ranging from Animals to Zombies, with plenty of Kinks in between, who was getting high and watching the fireplace nearly every night with his roommates, KFOG was too weird. That's why, three months into the gig, in the middle of one of the numerous deep dark nights I worked in that studio in Ghirardelli Square, I broke the rules.

I snuck in a couple of my own albums - not a particularly difficult feat, since there was no one else at the station except the announcer before me - and, at a point when I was feeling particularly revolutionary, dumped the Melachrino Strings and broadcast ... yes, a

VOCAL! And not just any vocal, but the Mamas and the Papas. And when no one called to fire me immediately, I went onto the ledge again, this time with the then-prince of psychedelia, Donovan. And, finally, totally gripped by the abandoned, wiggled-out zeal of the Age of Aquarius - or maybe because it was the only other album I'd brought in -- I played the group who'd quadruple-handedly begun the end of middle-of-the-road music, the kind of waste matter KFOG was airing. I played the Beatles.

I must admit here that it wasn't "Day Tripper"; it was "Yesterday." It wasn't "Straight Shooter," it was "California Dreamin'," And it wasn't "Universal Soldier," it was "Mellow Yellow." In other words, I didn't-disrupt the near-dead beat of the station; I didn't go all the way.

But it was far enough that I got some phone calls. Nobody upset, mind you, just a couple of my invalid regulars who needed the concept of "lyrics" explained to them. Plus a couple of my college pals who happened to be up at 3 a.m. (a common occurrence back then), tune in to have a laugh on me, and got freaked out. One of them didn't even say anything. He just copied a trademark started by Russ "The Moose Syracuse, then the all-night jock on the rock station KYA, a falsettoed, stretched out, questioning, "WHAAAAT?"

And I felt just like The Moose. I. felt like rock and roll. It made my morning. It made me all the more-appreciative of KMPX and KSAN, the pioneer "free-form" or "underground" stations; all the more sad when their time passed, all too soon, and all the more pleased that KFOG has come along. Again.

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