

INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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WHOLE LOTTA LOVE FOR THE INDUSTRY

by Mike Kinosian, Special Features Editor

Certain on-air talents sporadically explore the deepest and innermost recesses of their memory banks to summon up the one-on-one listener-centric reason which prompted them to pursue this uniquely-magnificent business in the first place.

Economy-dictated cutbacks affecting personalities and/or a pervasive liner-card mentality which can restrict those talents fortunate to still be working in music radio can understandably zap one's enthusiasm level.

Should that emotion – or perhaps more accurately lack of fervent passion envelop you – keep WAXQ/New York 7pm-Midnight talent [Carol Miller](#) top-of-mind.

As much as anyone to be found in this medium, the fetching Miller is an ardent ambassador and prolific cheerleader of it.

Especially in recent months, it can be a challenge to locate someone with this type of authentic fervor but Miller's the real deal.

Early Daze

Over and above her five-hour nightly shift on Clear Channel classic rocker “Q104.3”, Miller lends her recognizable tones and writing skills to “Get The Led Out,” a Led Zeppelin-intensive program she began in 1983 when part of WNEW-FM/New York's air-staff and resuscitated four months ago (January 2009) by United Stations Radio Networks. “It has taken various forms over the years,” Miller remarks. “[Former WAXQ PD] Bob Buchmann [now programming Citadel Classic Rock KLOS/Los Angeles], [Buchmann's WAXQ successor] Eric Wellman and [Clear Channel/New York Senior Vice President/Programming] Tom Poleman really supported me in doing ‘Get The Led Out’ [for United Stations]. I was glad Clear Channel management was behind me. I thought people would ‘plain out’ like it because it's a fun show.”

Moreover it's apropos since this is the group's 40th anniversary. Components of the USRN-supplied, Miller-voiced project include a long-form (one-hour) weekend show and five short-form (approximately 60-second) weekday vignettes about the group.

Production clips weaved in by producer Denny Somach serve as enhancements. “I'd been doing it for a long time but this is the extra special sauce on top,” Miller states. “The [hour-long weekend show] could focus on a band member or a particular year. We also

have special guests like Alice Cooper who've worked with Led Zeppelin and have interesting stories. There's really an endless supply of material.”

From the minute Miller heard Led Zeppelin in 1969, she instantly became a fan and maintains it's the definitive rock group. “The musicianship, vocals and the whole feel transcends the four people,” she opines.

Waiting for the group's first album to be released, music buff Miller distinctly remembers the day it came out. “I played it over and over,” she proclaims. “I saw them [that year] in Central Park. It was a jam band that went on and on. I loved the intensity and how the group was wrapped up with each song.”

Lyrics weren't as important to Miller as they might be to men. “Dazed And Confused” was her favorite track but as she hastens to point out, “It wasn't because I wanted a woman. It just evokes something which hits the nail on the head. It's the epitome of letting it all out as far as what you're feeling.”

NEW Girl In Town

Fascination New York City native Miller has with the medium can be traced to her pointing out radio towers on family train trips and her love of tuning in great New York City AM personalities such as “Murray The K” (Kaufman) and Bruce “Cousin Brucie” Morrow. “I also liked pulling in [out-of-market] stations like [Buffalo's] WKBW and I enjoyed listening to Joey Reynolds,” she notes. “I never thought about [having a radio career] until my parents took us to a trip to Europe. I heard women talking on radio in a fun and friendly way.”

Even so, Miller didn't take the notion all that seriously until she enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania when FM was beginning to gain in popularity. “I thought I'd pick it up as an extracurricular activity,” she recalls. “There was a poster of a person climbing into the back of a radio and the caption was ‘Get into radio.’”

None of her peers had industry ties but the pre-med student – albeit skeptically - thought she'd give it a try and worked at noted non-commercial campus outlet WXPB.

Later goaded into applying for a job at WMMR, Miller did so. While still a Penn student, she landed a position at the rocker and juggled school and work until graduating with a B.A. degree in

1972. "I was WMMR's Music Director for a little bit," she points out. "I really wanted to work in New York City but didn't think that would be possible."

In 1973 however she indeed was able to score a part-time slot at WNEW-FM where she worked with some legendary air talents. "It was kind of intimidating [because] I was the new girl but it was [also] really fun."

That taste of Big Apple radio became even more enjoyable after she joined cross-town WPLJ where then Program Director Larry Berger became Miller's mentor. "I think he's the most brilliant programmer," she declares. "Things he did still inspire people today."

Fiercely Famous Fan

One of Miller's most memorable moments came in 1976 – although at first - she was only indirectly involved with it. The two principals were WPLJ's then wakeup talent Jim Kerr (now doing similar duties at WAXQ) and Paul McCartney.

When Kerr put a microphone in front of McCartney (who was touring with Wings) and introduced himself as being WPLJ's morning personality, the ex-Beatle without missing a beat immediately queried, "WPLJ – where's Carol Miller?" The nighttime talent was sent a pass to meet Paul & Linda McCartney the next night. "Paul McCartney was an avid radio listener," Miller explains. "It was [surreal] to meet him because I went to see the Beatles at Shea Stadium."

Remaining with WPLJ until the end of 1983 when it made its Rock-to-Top 40 format change, Miller states, "I would have stayed but Larry felt the people most associated with AOR didn't fit the station's new image and I understood that. I was very sad but about six weeks later I [went back to WNEW-FM although this time to do] 10am-2pm."

Whatever perception one has of a late-night Rock host is most likely shattered to smithereens by Miller, who holds a Juris Doctorate from Hofstra University's School of Law. "Even when I got a fulltime radio job, I said to myself I would certainly finish [law school]," she insists. "I'm a work-oriented person and don't start something I won't finish. I'm still glad I did it."

Steele-Tight Friendships

One of Gotham's most celebrated talents in building a late-night/overnight audience was Alison Steele.

So much so, in fact, that she was known to her legion of devotees for her "Nightbird" moniker.

Likewise, Miller enjoys toiling during those hours and muses that WPLJ put her on in that day-part to counter Steele. "She was the first woman I heard who had the semblance of a nice job and she worked mostly overnights," Miller states. "I was at WNEW-FM for 17 years [1983-1999] and most of that time I worked 5-9pm and 6-10pm. At the end, we all got bounced around and I did mid-days for a year. I'll work any [shift] but I'm always trying to drum up radio usage. There's no keyboard necessary to listen to radio. It's portable so you can drive around with it. With some sense of humor, I like pointing out this is the most amazing technology."

In addition it's Miller's contention that personality radio may actually be turning around because as she reasons, "It's human nature for someone to want a friend to provide music and information. I don't think anything can top that."

Longtime friendships have been cemented with her listeners. "You might ditch [a belonging] but you're not going to ditch your old friend," Miller asserts. "People like coming to Times Square on New Year's Eve just because so many other people are there at that time. It's not the same to watch it later. There's a group experience with radio that many people are missing out on. I just turned my 13-year-old nephew on to one of my all-time favorite shows - 'Coast to Coast with George Noory.' I drive home and listen to George every night. His show is beyond belief. You might doubt the sanity of some of his guests – others are absolutely brilliant - but they all deal with science and the paranormal."

For approximately the past ten years Miller has been filing regular and lifestyle reports for BBC local radio, clearly a far cry from her classic rock duties but she declares it's been one of her most enjoyable experiences.

Disco-Related Turning Point

Contrasted to the 17 years at WNEW-FM, Miller's five-year "Q104.3" stint is relatively brief however she's still connecting with some of her same friends since 1973. "These people have grown up with me," she emphasizes. "I'm in there at night talking to my

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friends, hanging out and we're having a good time. It's a great way for me [to pretend] I'm still in my room like when I was a kid. The only difference is I'm on the other side of the transistor radio. I'm so relaxed when I go to work. The entire 'Q104.3' staff is terrific and I do my best to see that this station keeps going."

Notwithstanding her deep appreciation of current music, it doesn't phase Miller one iota that the same classics play night after night and she equates the familiar tunes to a person's most beloved article of clothing. "It's comforting to most people to hear their favorite music," she maintains. "In today's world, someone has to provide some stability and I think that's part of my job."

An epiphany experience occurred to Miller in 1975 at WPLJ involving "Get Down Tonight" by disco mainstays KC & The Sunshine Band. "We had a wide variety of music from Keith Carradine to Eddie Kendricks to Simon & Garfunkel to Led Zeppelin," she recounts. "It was just great because we played anything that was popular."

Suddenly it was time for her to air the KC & The Sunshine Band tune. "I was on a mega-station that had a 25-share [among] Teens at night," Miller explains. "That's how big WPLJ was. Once that record went on, the phone lines lit up. Immediately my focus became clear: I want to play what the listeners like."

That highly simplistic philosophy has been her firm mantra ever since. "I'm here to play music on the radio for [the audience]. Sure – everyone thinks they have the world's greatest ears [but] any method that can determine what [listeners] want to hear is a good one."

While some think Miller should have the luxury of being able to select her own music she stresses, "The only thing that should matter is listeners like it. I want information that says more people like one song over another. I don't pooh-pooh it [although] it is music and you should have some instinct about it. Look at the ratings and you'll see Q104.3 is #1 [among] Men."

Talents Span Multi Spectrums

Not only does Miller lend her extraordinary talents to WAXQ, she can also be heard daily on Sirius XM ("Spectrum" and "Classic Vinyl") and she has a Harper Collins book deal for "Radioactive: The True Adventures of Carol Miller, Girl DJ," due out by the end of the year. "Two editors there approached me because they thought I might have some interesting stories," she modestly downplays. "It's like one of those funny action things from the 1960s. It will be about pop culture and [what it was like to] grow up in that era. Mentally, things are going quickly but the typing is very slow."

Although it may appear to be ironic or incongruous that Led Zeppelin expert Miller has actually seen more Bruce Springsteen

concerts, she explains it's because Led Zeppelin didn't tour as much and while clearly a partisan of the group's music she nonetheless comments, "I always try to steer clear of them. You heard all these whacky stories in the 1970s about them being so nutty that I was actually a little afraid of them. Over the years though, I have interviewed Robert Plant a number of times and he's just a lovely guy."

There's less time for Miller to ski and to travel but with the economy being what it is she's quite content to work seven days a week. "For some inexplicable reason, every business seems hell bent to shoot itself in the foot," she comments. "I may be working a tad too much but don't want to turn down opportunities. If someone is running late and I need to do an extra shift, it's all fine with me."

Radio-based discussions with the animated Miller are more like industry pep rallies since as she enthusiastically declares, "I'll happily tell anyone what a great [medium] this is. There's immediacy and a great sound. Just because something was invented yesterday doesn't make it better than something in the technological era which we've been in for 100 years. It also doesn't mean these things can't all work together. People growing up right now who aren't into radio need to be introduced to it."

When that happens, she opines, "They'll think it's the greatest thing since Swiss cheese. It's still the greatest medium for information ever invented. In an emergency, you'll never be told to take a flashlight and an iPod."



WHO: Carol Miller

WHAT: "The Carol Miller Show"

WHERE: Clear Channel Classic Rock WAXQ "Q104.3"/New York

WHEN: Weeknights, 7pm-Midnight

WHAT: "Get The Led Out"

WHERE: United Stations Radio Networks

WHEN: Various weekend times

HOW LONG: Since January 2009

Also five approximately 60-second weekday Led Zeppelin vignettes