

# THE GRAMMYS



peter max

**THE 45TH ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS**

THE RECORDING ACADEMY • CBS TELEVISION • COSSETTE PRODUCTIONS  
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**WE'LL TAKE...**

DJs HAVE RULED  
THE RADIO CULTURE IN  
AMERICA'S MOST  
INFLUENTIAL CITY



# MANHATTAN

"I NEED the energy, the electricity of the city." Bruce Morrow, better known as "Cousin Brucie," the legendary Top 40 DJ, was talking about why he's spent almost his entire career in New York City.

He began in 1959 at WINS, the first New York radio home of Alan Freed. He became a star on WABC and later worked at WNBC. Today, he spins oldies on WCBS. Actually, a computer plays the songs and, on a monitor, gives Morrow the copy for his commercials. He's on FM now, not AM. And, oh, yes: many of his "cousins" are now grandparents. But he's still a DJ in New York City. Life is good.



DJs, l-r: Jocko Henderson, Tommy Small, Alan Freed, Bruce Morrow, and Murray The K

BY BEN FONG-TORRES



From the beginnings of radio, New York was there, front and center stage. Even before radio, the first successful wireless transmission in America, in October, 1899, was a report of the America's Cup yacht race, and it was flashed by Guglielmo Marconi to the offices of the *New York Herald*.

Although the first radio stations in the United States were located in California, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, it was WEAF in New York that is credited (or blamed) with sending out the first commercial over the airwaves. The year was 1922. In the mid-'30s, when radio was dominated by networks and live programs, disc jockeys were unheard of. That is, until Martin Block began playing records on WNEW in 1935. Soon he was hosting a show called "Make Believe Ballroom" (along with Al Jarvis in Los Angeles; each contended he originated the show), and DJs became part of the radio landscape.

When television became a major force in the early '50s, radio turned increasingly to DJs. As it was in the golden age of radio, New York was the place to be.

On the eve of rock and roll, the top DJ in the city was Alan Freed, who discovered rhythm & blues when it was still called "race" music. That was in Cleveland. He came to call his show, a mix of jazz, jump, and blues records, a "rock and roll party," and was credited with coining the phrase *rock and roll*. His all-star concerts drew both black and white music fans, and they were a riot

—literally. He took his act — and his acts — to New York City, where he became a mammoth star on WINS. The payola investigations of the late '50s took him down, and, ultimately, out. But his passion for the music, and its fans, inspired a generation of radio personalities, in, and far beyond, New York.

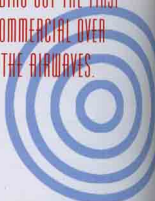
Along with Freed, DJs like "Symphony Sid" Torin (on WHOM and WOV), Tommy "Dr. Jive" Smalls (WWRL), and Douglas "Jocko" Henderson (WOV) were radio pioneers long before Top 40 took hold in the late '50s. Torin played jazz, gospel and "race" records in the late '30s, and when he hosted a jazz show from Birdland in New York in the mid-'50s, one of his many fans was the very young Dick Clark. "Dr. Jive" gave Freed a run for his concert money, producing big R&B shows at the Paramount and the Apollo. "Jocko" was one of the first to make up spontaneous rhymes on the air, pre-dating rap by more than three decades.

Top 40 radio, as a format, is said to have been invented in Omaha around 1955. It arrived in New York first at WINS in 1957, and then at WMCA, WABC, and WMGM. Early on, the biggest of the evening stars — when the teenagers were tuned in — was Murray the K. From the first time he opened his microphone at WINS in 1961, Murray Kaufman clicked with the kids. He staged wild concerts in Brooklyn and Harlem, and when the Beatles broke, he became known as the "fifth Beatle," traveling with the band and scoring exclusive interviews. Murray even had a language of his own: "Meusurray."

"Symphony Sid" Torin: A pre-Top 40 pioneer.



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WHEN ROCK HIT FM,  
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FREE-FORM PROGRAMMING  
OF ALBUM CUTS,  
OF NOT ONLY ROCK, BUT  
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R&B, FOLK AND JAZZ.



Provocateur Howard Stern came to WNBC in 1973, putting an indelible stamp on mainstream radio.



New Yorkers heard the take-no-prisoners approach of Don Imus, who joined WNBC in 1973.

While Kaufman created what amounted to a huge "in" crowd, Bruce Morrow called himself — and his listeners — "Cousin," and made his audience one big family. He hosted all-star shows at Palisades Park, an amusement park in New Jersey, and waded into the battle for the Beatles, winning often enough to make WABC a winner in New York City's fierce Top 40 wars. Alongside Morrow were the DJs, known collectively as the "All-Americans," including the lightning-quick Dan Ingram, Herb Oscar Anderson (who'd be known for years as "The Morning Mayor"), and the suave Scott Muni.

Originally, the DJs were called "The Good Guys," but WMCA took the name and ran with it, outfitting its own DJ lineup with matching outfits and creating a true team, led by morning man Joe O'Brien, Harry Harrison, Dan Daniel, and Jack Spector ("Your main man Jake"), with B. Mitchel Reed, whose "wide wide weird world" and rapid-fire delivery drew a huge teen audience in the evening.

Top 40 ruled from the late-'50s into the mid-'60s. By then, the Beatles, the Stones, and Bob Dylan had begun to change the sound of rock music. As the music began to grow beyond the formatted confines of Top 40, it looked for new radio homes. It found the FM band. It had always been around, but, despite its audio superiority to AM, had been kept under wraps. Station owners usually simulcast their AM programming on their FM outlets; other FM stations appealed to audiophiles and fringe audiences with classical, jazz, and foreign-language programming. But that was all about to change, as the FCC issued a directive to large-market owners to split their stations for half of the day.

When rock hit FM, it was with free-form programming of album cuts, of not only rock, but also blues, R&B, folk and jazz. The disc jockeys, many of them refugees from Top 40, could say and play whatever they liked. One of the first was Tom Donahue, whose work at KMPX in San Francisco in 1967 drew national attention. But an earlier, albeit less successful, radio revolution took place at WOR-FM in New York, where Murray the K and Scott Muni (and Rosko) began playing album cuts. A fellow pioneer, Pete Fornatale, was doing free-form at WFUV at Fordham University. Fornatale wound up on one of the major progressive rock stations in New York, WNEW.

As the FM band grew in popularity, programmers came up with a seemingly endless variety of formats. Free-form became a "progressive," then AOR

(album-oriented-rock). A lighter variation of rock, dismissed as "chicken rock," led to what is called AC (adult contemporary) today. As music fragmented in the '70s, New York listeners heard stations devoted to R&B and disco (with Frankie Crocker at WBLS), country, alternative rock, and hip-hop. Top 40 moved over to FM smoothly, updating itself with such concepts as the Morning Zoo, a rowdy mix of music, risqué jokes and stunts, in-studio and phone interviews, and rude song parodies, usually featuring a DJ and several sidekicks handling news, sports and traffic reports. Scott Shannon, one of the pioneers of the idea, perfected it at Q105 in Tampa before bringing it to New York City, to Z100, in 1983.

By then, New Yorkers had already heard the take-no-prisoners approach of Don Imus, who joined WNBC in 1973. The same year that Shannon arrived in town, WNBC hired another provocateur, Howard Stern. Radio has not been the same since. Nor, for that matter, has television.

A look at recent radio ratings reveals that Stern is no longer the "King of All Media" he clearly was when he turned a best-selling book into a blockbuster movie. His home base station, WXRK ("K-Rock") was in the Top 10. But Elvis Duran, current Zoomaster at Z-100, has higher ratings. So do Star and Buz Wild ("the Cheech and Chong of the hip-hop generation") at WQHT, Hot 97, and Ed Lover and Dr. Dre, who run the show at Power 105.1 (WWPR).

Scott Shannon is still very much on the scene, at WPLJ, and Scott Muni, along with free-form veteran Vin Scelsa, can be heard on WAXQ (Q 104.3). But those stations are being outpointed by WCBS-FM, which plays oldies and whose DJs' names, and voices have a familiar ring to them: Cousin Bruce, Dan Ingram, Harry Harrison and Dan Daniel.

Morrow is on only twice a week. But it's enough that he still feels a buzz, fueled by rock and roll and by New York City. As he puts it: "It's 43 years later. The ON AIR light goes on. The electricity has increased. The energy is there, and I know they're still listening. What a combination. Who needs Con Ed?" ☺

*Ben Bong-Torres, former senior editor at Rolling Stone magazine, is the author of The Hits Just Keep On Coming: The History of Top 40 Radio (Backbeat Books).*