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Making waves: Radio morning shows serve up laughter, music (video)



Morning show hosts Andre Kane, left, and Jack Hammer strike a pose during a recent visit to the Freeman. (Freeman photo by Tania Barricklo)

By Paula Ann Mitchell

Posted: 05/22/10, 3:43 PM EDT | Updated: on 05/22/2010

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Morning show hosts Andre Kane, left, and Jack Hammer strike a pose during a recent visit to the Freeman. (Freeman photo by Tania Barricklo)

If you're a fan of local morning radio, you've probably realized by now that John Tobin has flown the coop on WPDH-FM's long-running "Coop and Tobin Show."

For years, the legendary pair has entertained audiences from Albany to Harriman.

They'd discuss everything from the latest scandals to political intrigue. They'd have heart-felt chats about sex, sports and religion and invite listeners to call in to share their views.

Every now and then, they'd throw in the obligatory Led Zeppelin or Pink Floyd song and give you the day's forecast.

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Now, the wheezy-voiced Mark Cooper is left holding the microphone at the Pendell Road studio by himself. A female sidekick, "Cricket," chirps in a few words from time to time.

It has become "The Coop Show," at least for the moment.

"Coop's not going anywhere, and he's hosting on his own strictly as a stop-gap measure until his co-host is officially announced," said WPDH Program Director Gary Cee.

"John simply couldn't come to terms with Cumulus Broadcasting on a new contract. He was made a handsome offer, which he declined, and submitted his resignation," Cee said.

Almost without fail, "The Coop and Tobin Show" on 101.5 WPDH has consistently ranked at the top of the morning radio offerings.

The station reaches the entire region -- Ulster, Dutchess, Columbia, Orange, Putnam and northern Westchester counties as well as parts of Greene County. The 106.1 signal covers Sullivan County into Pennsylvania.

"The Home of Rock 'n' Roll," as it's known to its listeners, is popular among 25- to 54-year-olds and with adolescents.

"We've been playing rock 'n' roll since 1976 without a format change, a rarity in the radio business," said Cee, who serves as the WPDH afternoon host.

"We've weathered changes in the morning show plenty of times before. Cooper has been here for many years as has Robyn Taylor, our mid-day host and dean of the air staff. They're both local treasures with huge followings. Whomever Cooper's replacement, we'll be fine," Cee said.

Meanwhile, another pair of bad boys in morning radio, Jack Hammer and Andre Kane, keeps plugging ahead with "The Electric Morning Show" on 92.9 WBPM-FM.

They did take a moment to salute their one-time competitor Tobin as an "incredible talent and a very funny guy," but they're staying focused on their own gig: Entertaining a sleep-eyed audience just getting out of bed.

Wild and wacky, Hammer and Kane clearly have fun exchanging off-the-cuff jokes and doing character impersonations like the obnoxious "Batel the magician" and the acidic newsman "Tom Broke-jaw."

Heck, they even throw in tons of prizes like movie tickets, DVDs and even "free food, baby!"

Hammer and Kane, who've been working together on WBPM for three years, believe their on-air chemistry, like Cooper and Tobin's, separates them from the rest of the Mid-Hudson Valley radio pack.

"That's one thing that seems to be lacking," Hammer said. "People are thrown into a room and told, 'Play nice together and while you're at it, make good ratings.' You can't do that. Chemistry is nothing that can be taught in a communications class."

That, and they pride themselves on being an alternative to all the other morning chatter.

The two talk and joke frequently, but they also throw in a healthy dose of classic rock and feature the famed "nine in a row" each hour.

No doubt that WPDH reaches a bigger audience, but The Electric Morning Show still does well in Arbitron radio ratings, reaching about 50,000 people every quarter hour and even more when online listeners are factored in.

WBPM has studios in Beacon and Kingston, with the majority of the broadcasting being done at the Beacon location.

One of the things that makes Hammer and Kane so appealing is that they're willing to take chances, and they sometimes get a little racy. That includes the light-hearted mockery they infuse into the show.

Hammer does a masterful impersonation of Tim Gunn from "Project Runway." Gunn is openly gay, and Hammer gets tickled pink imitating him.

"Gay can be funny," he said. "If you do gay tastefully, you're not insulting or demeaning to anyone."

As a matter of fact, no one or no group is off limits to the morning pranksters.

"Italian is funny. Irish is funny. Jewish is funny. They're all funny if they're done the right way," Kane added.

Making fun of the boss is one of their favorite types of humor because, they said, it's something most people can relate to.

"We say what other people only think," Hammer said in a burst of laughter.

Even though they poke a lot of poor souls during their four-hour show, they insist they're not "shock jocks" in the vein of Howard Stern or Don Imus.

"You can't paint a group of people with one swift stroke of the brush. That's insane. That's radio suicide," Hammer said. "If Don Imus was not Don Imus, he would not be working in radio again. He'd be flipping burgers in Hoboken."

Hammer and Kane write a lot of their own material (like Batel's jokes), but a good deal of their work is completely spontaneous.

"Talent is the ability to think on one's feet," Hammer said. "If you have the ability to come up with something in a second--unscripted--you're talented. That's life. It's unscripted."

And they like to keep their act real. When they meet their listeners in public, they treat them with warmth and respect.

"Our listeners have names like Jerry the Paper Guy and Catskill Mitch. When we see these guys, we ask them about their lives. We care about them," Hammer said.

Kane agreed.

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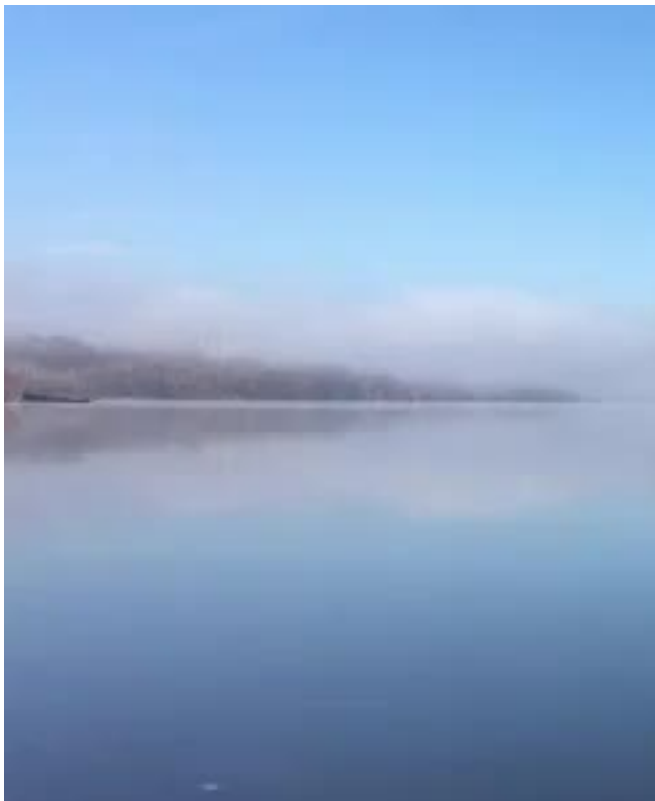
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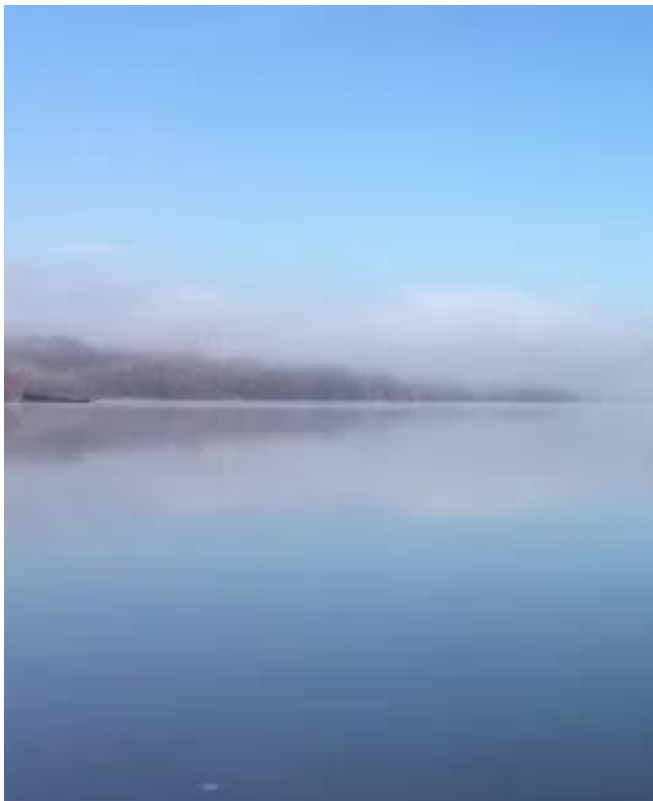
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