

WROV

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did two shows a day in the early 1960s and still pop up once a month as a weekend team, though both are successful advertising men. Frelantz once broadcast continuously for six days from the Towers Shopping Center and Fisher once took a cow to lunch to celebrate National Dairy Week. Their wit today is as sharp as it ever was and their oldies weekends are an event;

● Jim Gearheart was with WROV in the mid-1950s, and later with ABC in Pittsburgh and NBC and CBS in New York. His father was the town manager of Vinton;

● John Cigna, who was with WROV for a while in the early 1960s, has a talk show now with KDKA in Pittsburgh;

● Fred Covington was a WROV DJ in the early 1960s and made a name for himself doubling as a magician. He does national commercial work now and had a small part in "Roots";

● Dan Alexander was popular in the early 1970s as probably the best comedian in the station's history. He works in radio in Norfolk now;

● Barbara Felton had a one-hour rock show against national powerhouse Arthur Godfrey in the late 1950s and she outdrew Godfrey in Roanoke;

● Adam Hill was with the station in 1961. He now does movies and television.

WROV has traditionally drawn the personality because, according to station owner Burt Levine, "Our philosophy is to feature genuine entertainers, professional showmen. We want people who relate to our audience." If a DJ can't entertain an audience, he doesn't stay with WROV.

The current group of personalities fits the bill. O'Brady is a second generation Irishman from Springfield Mass., whose real name is Robert Kennedy. Prater looks and sounds like a Shakespearian actor with a sense of humor. Michaels, who is known as "the Bear," could easily be "the Goose" lately. The basso profundo Michaels, who is 6-foot-1, has lost from 210 pounds to 147 since Labor Day.

O'Brady, who declined to be interviewed for the story, is the least likely disc jockey of the group. His voice is that of an Irishman arguing with a soccer official. It is high and can be shrill and irritating. But there is a warmth about the heavily bearded, short-haired, surprisingly large O'Brady that is affecting.

He is the most highly visible of the group, taking part in, it seems, every charity crusade that lands at Woodrum Field and some that don't. He is seen at junior high sock hops and remote broadcasts throughout the valley.

O'Brady once became progressively drunk on the air to dramatize the danger of drinking and driving during a holiday weekend.

Levine said O'Brady, who is in his early 30s, was hired seven years ago in spite of his voice. "We told him that working here would not be a matter of us liking him or him liking us," said Levine. "It was a matter of whether the audience liked him." It did.

One of the most popular features at WROV is Lunch with Rob, wherein O'Brady takes a group of about six people to lunch each Monday (at a cost of about \$100 to the station and restaurant.) Up to this past January, O'Brady had lunched with about 650 groups. O'Brady's Ladies wear a specific color each day and he tells them early in the day what it is.

Though O'Brady can have fun with the best and can burn with the fast-paced rock 'n' roll dialogue, he is a solid information man who is concise, quick and serious at times.

Michaels is the kid of the group at 29 ("going on 15," he says), having been with the station three years ("the listeners probably think it's longer"). Originally from Martinsville, he didn't enter radio until he was 22, but he has wasted little time since. He has his eye on the big-time: That he was a finalist for the title of national music director of the year last year and disc jockey of the year this year in the prestigious Bobby Poe Pop Music Survey indicates he'll probably get there. A year ago he nearly left, but he decided "why not perfect my craft in one place, then move on, and why shouldn't that place be Roanoke? A lot of DJs move around, but I don't like to move unless it's necessary."

Working at WROV, he said, was a goal since his days "of living in a Hefty trash bag and going to Virginia Western (Community College in Roanoke)."

Michaels' voice is an easy one to like. It is so deep many people think he's an old man. It hasn't always been that way. "When I started," he said, "I had a high voice like Rob's. I put together some tapes a while back, starting when I first got into radio and progressing to now. It was hilarious how the voice got deeper."

Michaels, who is the station's music director, likes his air-time best of all because "It's all mine; it's time I don't have to share." He sounds like a man having a good time on the air and he sits puffing a pack of Salem Lights and drinking glass after glass of grapefruit juice.

Prater is the old pro, the man who started the 1970s for WROV and is still one of the most respected air personalities in the region, if not the nation. He has been in radio 18 years, though he is only 33. He started as the — honest — morning DJ at WOLD (which has absolutely no connection to the Harry Chapin song) in Marion when he was 15. That was about the time he began to lose a great deal of the 280 pounds he weighed in the eighth grade.

Prater has always had an intense interest in electronics and began at WOLD by helping rebuild a station that had burned to the ground. "The owner had a bunch of kids shoveling ashes and I told him I could do more than that. He had me fixing stuff at \$1 an hour. I helped rebuild the transmitter and the control board and got on as an engineer and finally as a DJ."

He started with WROV because of its reputation as the station of the air personality. Though he has had attractive offers, Prater wants to stay in Roanoke. "I'm not a rolling stone," he said. "Maybe I'm too insecure to face the challenge of going to New York and the possibility of not making it. The talent we have here, though, is good enough to compete in any market in the country."

He admits to differences with Levine over the years and that at times "I have hated his guts." The relationship, he said, has been more father-son than employer-employee. "I love the guy, but there are differences. Burt is one of the primary reasons I came here."

Prater, until the recent toning down of style and content at WROV, was a master of walking the tightrope between being titillatingly funny and in bad taste. He is acutely aware of the difference, he said, because he has a 12-year-old son (he has been married 13 years.) "I don't want to say anything on the radio that a child is going to hear and run to his mother asking 'what does that mean?'" he said.