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FM: The Rise And Fall Of Rock Radio



Synopsis

"It was all so honest, before the end of our collective innocence. Top Forty jocks screamed and yelled and sounded mightier than God on millions of transistor radios. But on FM radio it was all spun out for only you. On a golden web by a master weaver driven by fifty thousand magical watts of crystal clear power . . . before the days of trashy, hedonistic dumbspeak and disposable three-minute ditties . . . in the days where rock lived at many addresses in many cities."â€”from FMAs a young man, Richard Neer dreamed of landing a job at WNEW in New Yorkâ€”one of the revolutionary FM stations across the country that were changing the face of radio by rejecting strict formatting and letting disc jockeys play whatever they wanted. He felt that when he got there, heâ€™d have made the big time. Little did he know heâ€™d have shaped rock history as well. FM: The Rise and Fall of Rock Radio chronicles the birth, growth, and death of free-form rock-and-roll radio through the stories of the movementâ€™s flagship stations. In the late sixties and early seventiesâ€”at stations like KSAN in San Francisco, WBCN in Boston, WMMR in Philadelphia, KMET in Los Angeles, WNEW, and othersâ€”disc jockeys became the gatekeepers, critics, and gurus of new music. Jocks like Scott Muni, Vin Scelsa, Jonathan Schwartz, and Neer developed loyal followings and had incredible influence on their listeners and on the early careers of artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Genesis, the Cars, and many others. Full of fascinating firsthand stories, FM documents the commodification of an iconoclastic phenomenon, revealing how counterculture was coopted and consumed by the mainstream. Richard Neer was an eyewitness to, and participant in, this history. FM is the tale of his exhilarating ride.

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Customer Reviews

From the hours of 6:00-10:00 a.m. on Saturdays, the tumult and the shouting pauses on New York City's sports talk station WFAN. Host Richard Neer, known to his regular callers as "The Voice of Reason," is presiding, and sanity reigns, if only for a short while. Of course, New Yorkers have been getting up with Mr. Neer for a long time. Before his present gig as a sports talk host, the author was affiliated with the legendary aor FM station, WNEW, and it's that station's story he tells here, in his usual understated fashion. Neer was music director, program director, overnight jock, and did two stints as the morning man in his 28 years with the station (he stayed to turn out the lights) and in that time he knew and tells us about, such legendary jocks as Jonathan Schwartz, Bill (Rosko) Mercer, Scott Muni (who he seems to admire the most), and Alison Steele ("The Nightbird"). He also knows Bruce Springsteen and devotes a chapter to him, and another to the night John Lennon died. But the heart of the book deals with dumb station managers and dumber consultants. And it deals with them better than they probably deserve: As gracious on his pages as he is on the air, Neer deals fairly even with the people who've treated him poorly. If you've been wondering why your favorite music station doesn't seem to sound quite the same as it did the week before, you may be quite sure it's changed program directors and/or general managers. Again. And Neer tells you how and why that keeps happening. (You won't be surprised to learn that ratings and profits something to do with the constant flux.

Richard Neer's book *FM: The Rise and Fall of Rock Radio* is a book I would recommend to anyone who has an interest in New York City's WNEW-FM and Progressive Rock Radio in general. It's a big picture story, not a discussion of minutia. If you're looking for a compendium of who worked when at WNEW-FM then this isn't the place to find it. Instead, Neer's purpose is to paint a picture of what he believes built WNEW-FM, what sustained it and what ultimately destroyed it. It is a book about the forest, not a book about the trees in it. It basically has three parts. In the first, Neer talks about getting his first job in commercial radio at WLIR on Long Island, how he became lifelong friends with Michael Harrison (now of Talkers Magazine) and

how he fell in love with WNEW-FM just by listening to it. He describes the station's genesis from the remains of WOR-FM's foray into Progressive Radio and how people like Scott Muni, Bill ĩ Rosko ĩ Mercer, and Allison Steele were visionaries in creating this new format. He acknowledges listening to Top 40 radio as a young child but claims the seed for its destruction was clear by 1965. He admires people like Dan Ingram and Cousin Brucie but they're not his heroes. People like Scott Muni are. Neer very accurately describes the musical artistry of Progressive Radio as well as the circumstances that allowed that artistry to prosper. Stations like WNEW-FM came to be in an era of political unrest (the Vietnam War) where young people were looking for an alternative to anything ĩ establishment ĩ and the decidedly leftward politics of most everyone doing Progressive Radio further endeared it to its audience.

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