

About “The History of Rock and Roll” on Radio

Excerpted from Woody Goulart’s book

KHJ, Los Angeles: Boss Radio Forever: 1960s Rock and Roll Radio History Kindle Edition

<https://www.amazon.com/KHJ-Los-Angeles-Radio-Forever-ebook/dp/B0063SL3JU/>

Rockumentary: The History of Rock and Roll

RON JACOBS: When we finished the last 24 hours of “The History of Rock and Roll” in 1969, it was insane. Pete Johnson was crawling on the floor, Robert W. Morgan was about to pass out, Bill Mouzis let me run the board. I’m freaking out because I know [some major event such as] Harry Truman is doing to die within four minutes of when it’s supposed to go on. A guy had stolen my radio that I had planned to listen to it on. And then it was over. My phone didn’t ring. And I thought we had laid the biggest egg in the history of radio. Now you had a blast going on in your house or something when it was on?

BILL DRAKE: Probably. I don’t remember.

RON JACOBS: OK, but what was your feeling? Because you guys had come down—. Someone at KHJ had asked for a sales demo when we had about 4 hours together. We squeezed it together and the first time you and Gene Chenault came down, we just smashed together 3 or so hours.

BILL DRAKE: The main problem that I remember that we had to deal with was: I wanted to go what—at that time it was 48 hours I think and later it was 52 hours. But in doing that, I remember in designing it, we had to plan so that the weaker stuff showed up like in the all-night show. And we found out later people were sitting up all night listening and taping the thing.

RON JACOBS: Yeah, and also what was the weaker stuff from a standard top 40 standpoint allowed me, in the only time I was there, and the only time that I was able to do it, and you didn't hassle me, I was able to do my far-out things. Like interview Phil Spector, which was a classic, for 15 minutes, which he would never do. Steve Allen comes in and he reads the lyrics to songs. We had the Bob Dylan stuff, you know. We had these things in the middle of the night that we called prime sweep and stuff like that, that now people—that was like ten, twenty years ahead of its time. But what I'm trying to figure out as you were hearing it—like when I heard it—it was like you paint the Golden Gate bridge and you go back from where you started. When you were hearing it, when you heard it, when I heard it, it was like I was hearing shit that I couldn't even remember because we had produced it 2 months before. When you were hearing it, you were hearing it more like watching a movie for the first time. So, did it just blow you away, just keep coming at you or what?

BILL DRAKE: Oh yeah, but you have to realize, I was pretty well up on things anyhow. I knew what to expect. And as far as the design and so forth, the layout of what we had to have. And here again, it was just so different at the time. It wasn't brain surgery; it was a lot of work.

RON JACOBS: Did you stay up and hear any of the offbeat stuff?

BILL DRAKE: I don't remember.

RON JACOBS: But I think that I had heard that when it was over, which was at noon, that you had some people there and you had an idea it was a pretty big deal. I got nothing until—. I thought we had bombed. No phone calls. And then I go in the next day and there's people with telegrams saying, "I was on my way to New York and I got sucked in and I stayed overnight at a motel listening to it," and Dick Clark is sending in all this stuff and all the yadda that happened after it. And it went on to become what it went on to become.

BILL DRAKE: Well, it was the first of those things that was ever done.

RON JACOBS: Rockumentary.

Don't Know Much About History

That famous radio documentary in 1969 that originally was produced for broadcast in Los Angeles on KHJ remained a core source of anger for Jacobs directed towards the Drake-Chenault team. But I never saw any evidence whatsoever that Jacobs held onto anger specifically or personally against Drake about what happened concerning “The History of Rock and Roll.”

During the 1970s, the Drake-Chenault radio programming and syndication company crafted a derivative and updated 52-hour adaptation of the original 1969 documentary that was distributed on tape on a syndicated basis to other radio stations. Nobody should mistake that syndicated Drake-Chenault version with the first and original version from 1969 created by Jacobs and narrated by Robert W. Morgan for broadcast on KHJ.

There is one crucial account about “The History of Rock and Roll” that I share with you here in this book: Ellen Pelissero was employed at KHJ in the mid-1960s. She worked on the first and original version that was broadcast on KHJ in 1969. She of all people certainly would know the honest truth about what happened. What she has to say clears away many decades of doubt over who did what, when and where. In her own words that were first posted on www.bossradioforever.com, here is how Ellen Pelissero remembers the creation and production of that original radio documentary:

While Bill Mouzis and I busted *okole* on the syndicated version of The History of Rock and Roll (HRR)—for which he received \$500 and I was offered a \$5 a week raise—the origination of the idea for HRR came from a KHJ sales presentation film (which became an RKO radio sales film)

that I wrote and produced (in its entirety) as a sort of “mini history of rock and roll” with the purpose of acquainting then middle-aged women media buyers with the vitality of the AM rock ‘n’ roll radio station market. It was called “The Beat Goes On.”

With me on that project were Bill Mouzis engineering and directing and Bob Morgan lending his incredible voice and talent to the mix. (My main “extra” in the film—the man in the couple enjoying this KHJ music—was, incidentally my then next-door neighbor, Don Imus.)

With a guy in the sales staff (whose name escapes me now, but he was blond) and Ed DelaPeña from engineering, I flew up to San Francisco for the KHJ/RKO sales presentation. Bill Drake was at that sales presentation and actually spoke to me about it, complimenting me on the work. As I said, from there it went on to be the RKO Radio chain’s sales presentation (I still have the audio track but not the film itself. I think Bill Mouzis had a copy.

Now clearly our work wasn’t the entire kernel for HRR, but it was certainly a part of it, because shortly after that sales film Ron hired me out of the traffic/sales department to work with him, Pete Johnson, Bill Mouzis and Bob Morgan and Sandy (Mandelbaum) Gibson on the project. And in the 13 or so weeks of production, the ONLY other persons at KHJ, RKO or Drake/Chenault that had anything whatsoever to do with the production were our music director and Shelley (Gordon) Morgan who spent a lot of time holding us together—especially in the last weeks of production when we weren’t even stopping to eat.

And our leader and coach and push-meister and inspiration and through every second of that production was the incredibly talented—albeit sometimes rough to be around—Ron Jacobs.

After a careful reading of Pelissero’s explanation, there can be no doubt whatsoever in anyone’s mind that Jacobs was the one who made “The History of Rock and Roll” happen in 1969. Later on, derivative versions of the documentary were produced without Jacobs by Drake-Chenault personnel and those were syndicated for broadcast on many radio stations spanning many years. If you browse the many, extensive online commentaries by Jacobs on the subject of his work at KHJ, you will find a great and enduring pride in what he accomplished in Los

Angeles so long ago with this game-changing radio documentary broadcast on KHJ. You will also easily find many clear expressions of his anger following what he perceived as “getting screwed” by the Drake-Chenault company.

The Unanticipated Costs of Success

Ron Jacobs was hired to be the KHJ program director starting in 1965. He resigned in 1969 and moved on to other successful projects such as Watermark, which is best known for creating “American Top 40” hosted by Casey Kasem (1932 – 2014) until Ryan Seacrest (born in 1974) became the host in 2004. I consider the fact that Jacobs left KHJ to be one of several unanticipated costs of the radio programming success of the Drake-Chenault team.

Over many decades, Jacobs expressed his unhappiness with the way things turned out for him as program director at KHJ. Jacobs explained why he left KHJ after only four years in that role. This one statement stands as the most succinct explanation Jacobs could ever give about his experiences with Boss Radio KHJ: “I left KHJ when my contract ran out in June 1969 after what I considered getting screwed in the aftermath of ‘The History of Rock and Roll,’ There were a lot of broken promises.”

One can only imagine how different things might have been for the Drake-Chenault team had Jacobs remained. I wonder if Jacob’s exit could have been prevented. Like many others, I personally have worked for organizations in the 21st century that spelled out in writing the reality that the ownership of an individual employee’s work and intellectual rights belong to the organization, not to the individual. Signing over to the organization one’s individual claim to ownership of a work or intellectual rights is very common, and it usually is spelled out in writing in advance so nobody can claim later that they are surprised or have hurt feelings.

The absence of particular compensation terms or ownership rights that could have been spelled out in a written contract for Jacobs (and others) as KHJ became success is one crystal clear symptom of the Drake-Chenault team's group dynamics. My evaluation is that there was a classic collective mentality within the group (now commonly known as "groupthink") that held and emphasized a strong preference for trusting verbal assurances as proof of one's loyalty to, and faith in, the group. You learn to demonstrate your deep trust in the group by going along with what the group wanted. If you don't go along, you risk being kicked to the curb. In effect, you give yourself away willingly and completely until it is too late to reclaim what you feel was yours in the first place.

.....

Read more about the rock and roll radio history of station KHJ, Los Angeles:

<https://drwoodyg.com/boss-radio-forever/>

<https://www.amazon.com/KHJ-Los-Angeles-Radio-Forever-ebook/dp/B0063SL3JU/>