

ALUMNI PROFILE

Where has life taken you since you left WSDP and PCEP?

When I graduated from Plymouth Salem, I took three years of broadcasting experience at WSDP with me. Because of this, I was able to begin working immediately at WMHW-FM upon my arrival on the campus of Central Michigan University. I tried to pick up as many airshifts as possible. In the process, I became exposed to a tremendous range of music - so much different than that afforded by large market, commercial radio.

My sophomore year, I worked as assistant music director at WMHW and was working weekends



JEFF ROBINSON

SALEM 1983

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on the air at WLHT-FM in Grand Rapids by the time I was a junior. A fellow staffer at WSDP essentially recommended me for the gig. I found this kind of support at all of the successful stations I worked at. Going to work at a commercial station was exciting and at times - with the hotline ringing (the Program Director's direct line into the control room) a little stressful.

In the early fall of 1986 I sent a tape and resume to WKQZ-FM in Saginaw. They were an excellent album rock station that served the Tri-City area and I was hired immediately. I worked weekends and had occasional fill-in shifts during the week. I continued working at WMHW at CMU as well. Within a year I became the 7pm - 12Midnight discjockey and music director at WKQZ. Balancing schoolwork and also working full-time was challenging! That music directorship gave me essential experience with regard to record promotion and I established many major label contacts.

I moved back to Detroit after graduation. Utilizing a contact I had at Warner Brothers Records, I moved into a management position at an all-compact disc retail outlet called “Just CD’s”. I sent an aircheck tape to WJXQ-FM in Lansing in December of 1988. I was hired immediately and began filling in weekend shifts.

I moved full-time into the afternoon drive slot when the PM drive girl left. Quite quickly I found that the drive slot was much more performance oriented in the style of Howard Stern or Phil Hendrie. With an incredibly tight playlist and before the first signs of an Arbitron ratings book - I found myself doing some soul searching. Having a brother already residing in Southern California, I quit and made the move to Los Angeles.

Within a few months of moving to LA, I landed a runner/assistant engineer/personal assistant position at Secret Sound. It was a home recording studio owned by songwriter/producer Chas Sandford. I was able to get hands on experience immediately. Production abilities that I learned at radio along with 4 and 8 track recording experience learned at college provided a solid foundation for the professional multi-track environment at Secret Sound.

I began working there during a Def Leppard project that was to be their follow-up to “Hysteria.” John Waite’s band, Bad English came into work shortly thereafter and I was able to work with a British producer named Chris Tsangarides. Chris produced several Thin Lizzy albums in the early 80’s and I had always been a huge fan of that band. Eventually I earned my first assistant engineer credit on a Dan Hill CD called “Dance of Love.”

By 1993 I was a house engineer at Master Control in Burbank. Scottish Producer Gavin MacKillop was a regular client and I became his engineer. I worked with him on over 20 projects including several discs by Toad the Wet Sprocket, two discs by the Rembrandts

- including the single "I'll be There For You" (The Friends Theme) and a host of others. I earned my first Platinum record for my work on Toad the Wet Sprocket's "Dulcinea."

By the late 1990's I had produced several albums for many independent artists and took that experience with my knowledge of radio and parlayed it into my own independent record label. March of 2001 saw the first release on Third Monk Records with a disc from Las Vegas recording artist Matthew Harrison. I produced, recorded, and mixed the CD and licensed it to my own label.

Taking the disc to commercial radio proved to be an eye opening experience. After only a few months of promoting the Matthew Harrison CD to commercial Alternative and Adult Album Alternative format radio it became very clear that records didn't get played these days unless corporate ownership got paid for their broadcast.

In May 2001 I began dialogue with Chuck Phillips and Jeff Leeds - both writers at the Los Angeles Times and they agreed to present an exclusive article about Third Monk Records in the face of the corporate payola problem at commercial radio. In August 2001 I took the story to ABC News 20/20. By September 16, the Third Monk/Matthew Harrison article ran in the Los Angeles Times, but the timing was less than stellar because of the sad events earlier that week. The 20/20 segment came together by late March of 2002 and aired at the end of ratings sweeps on May 24.

Initially several industry peers thought it very likely that I would be blacklisted for speaking out against payola. Significant artist friends of mine were afraid to speak publicly on their experiences with the issue for fear of permanently harming their careers. As it turned out, Third Monk Records served as a catalyst for change. Groups such as the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, the American Federation of Radio and Television Actors, The Recording Industry Association of America, the Artists Coalition and the Future of Music Coalition issued a joint statement to Congress.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

With the advent of digital home recording on a Mac, I invariably find myself mixing on Pro Tools when I should be taking a break! I have a penchant for fine beer. Coupled with a few rounds of cricket with steel tip darts, it's always a nice way to relax. Reading some great books like - "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins, "The Founder" by Gunter Grass or "Setting Free the Bears" by John Irving is always fun. I can see remaining intrigued by all stringed instruments as I grow older too.

What is your favorite memory of WSDP?

Miss Allen (just kidding?!). The absolute never ending, positive, enabling support of people like Jeff Cardinal, John Seidelman, and Andy Melin. Also the tremendous camaraderie of the subset of people that worked closely together in the context of WSDP - but were also part of the larger student body. We not only graduated from high school, but also from a terrific trade school - learning valuable career skills in an educational environment. I also remember accidentally discovering slapback echo at half speed in the analog 1/4

inch tape domain. That production room provided many hours of learning and entertainment. It's also probably the one single aspect that led me to pursue a career in record production/ engineering. Another memory I have is the day the news came over the UPI wire about John Lennon being shot in Manhattan. The arrangements in support of melody and the songcraft of the Beatles remains unsurpassed to this day.

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Why was being involved with WSDP important for you?

It offered the possibility for me to get a jump-start on a career in radio. Knowing that WSDP is now serviced with records from major and independent record labels alike and also reports it's playlist to trade publications points to how much the radio/record industry acknowledges the power of even the smallest FM stations. I was involved with WSDP before it had reached that level of sophistication (recognition), but it still had all the workings of a major radio station. WSDP offered excellent exposure to many of the fundamentals of the radio broadcast medium and I was able to get my 3rd Class broadcasters license in the process.

What advice would you give to a current WSDP staff member?

Try to work in every capacity at the station at least once, but find what you enjoy doing most. Attempt to find where your natural talent is - it's usually the thing you spend the most time doing that doesn't feel like work. Find your inner voice and spiritual language and search for "perfect self expression." Train your replacement and you'll always have a healthier workplace. Ignore the statement "be reasonable" and those who make it. Remember, "risk takers get ahead." Also, remember that coaching is better than leading.

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