

DUSTY STREET!



By Helen Marketti

as though they were personal friends. Day or night, they were there for us to celebrate or console. There was a personality and a song for everything life was dealing out. DJs connected us to what was going on and we knew they listened and cared.

One such DJ who became a friend to the listening airwaves beginning on the West Coast was Dusty Street. (Yes, that *is* her real name!) Dusty was one of the first women DJs to play the airwaves in San Francisco during the late 60s.

"I grew up in San Francisco. I grew up on a steady diet of jazz. I was raised listening to Duke Ellington and all the great jazz artists. I loved listening to it. My parents were divorced so I also spent time in Seattle with my grandparents," Dusty explains. "I knew I had a friend in my grandma after my mom dropped me off at her house. My mom told my grandma not to let me listen to "that rock and roll" which my grandma agreed with until my mom left the house and was on her way back to the airport."

"We went down the basement to bring up jars of jam that my grandma had made when she showed me all of her Elvis Presley

records. She had every one of them. She put one on the record player and we started dancing and singing, "You ain't nothin' but a hound dog!" Elvis fans wore saddle shoes so we were the cool ones. Pat Boone fans wore those white buck shoes and we would step on their feet to get their shoes dirty," Dusty laughs. "I always had a mind of my own."

Attending San Francisco State College in 1964, Dusty had never thought about a career in radio. "By 1965 I was living in the Haight-Ashbury district," said Dusty. "I had decided that I wanted to see my boyfriend so I hitch hiked to Mexico. When I came back home I ran into a friend of mine who said they were hiring female engineers at KMPX (FM radio). This was 1967 so you have to remember that there were no FM radio stations in cars or anything like that."

Dusty continues, "So I went down to the station and spoke with Tom Donahue about the job. I was hired to do the morning show. I really had no clue how to work the equipment so I am pushing buttons and turning knobs-hoping that something will happen. Needless to say it didn't go too well on my first day!"

Dusty spent some time shadowing one of the other DJs for a brief while to learn how to

There once was a time when radio stations were completely connected to the listeners. We could listen to great music played by some of our favorite DJs who had

memorable names such as "Wolfman Jack" or "Matt the Cat" among so many others. We felt a connection to the DJs

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manage the equipment on her own. By the third day, she pretty much had it down as to what to do.

"Tom Donahue is the only other DJ other than Alan Freed to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He is the father of FM radio. He had the vision of putting different jocks together because each one had their own taste in music. He was good at putting people together to create something special on the air," said Dusty.

There were quite a number of notable mentions who passed through the doorway as interns, DJs and so forth. Annie Leibovitz, world-famous

photographer, did her internship at the radio station. Howard Hesseman also worked there for a while. One of his most familiar television roles was playing disc jockey "Dr. Johnny Fever" on the sitcom *WKRP in Cincinnati*. Ben Fong Torres worked at the station as well before continuing his music journey as a staff writer for Rolling Stone Magazine.

Dusty reflects on Abe "Voco" Kesh who was a disc jockey at KSAN radio station in San Francisco where she later worked. "Abe had such a fantastic, eclectic taste in music. He could play Led Zeppelin, then the blues, end with Frank Sinatra and make it all work. I learned a lot from him. He was also a record producer. He discovered guitarist, Harvey Mandel." Abe produced Harvey Mandel's first album.

"It was sex, drugs and rock and roll. You got to smoke pot, play music and get paid for it," laughs Dusty. "We had people coming in and out of the radio station all the time like Cream, The Grateful Dead, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Jefferson Airplane and more--really cool musicians."

Dusty continues, "San Francisco was already a mecca for talent, even before the Summer of Love. Whether it was music or art, people went down any path you happened to show them. They were open to it. That was the time."

Dusty reflects on radio as it was then. "In those days it was free form radio. It was never about being just a jockey. It was all about the music. A good radio show should combine entertainment and education...to connect the dots musically that creates a whole theatre in the mind."

"We were breaking ground in radio back then. We had a real relationship with the artists and their record companies. We never had to pay for concert tickets, buy records or ask for interviews. Everything was brought

to us by the record company. If there happened to be a certain artist we wanted to interview, we would tell the head of promotions and that person was brought to us. We were courted hand and foot," Dusty explains.

"But that all went away by the 1990s, things were taken away from radio. They took away the personality and creativity of a DJ.

Personalities in radio are so important and the presentation of each individual jock. That kind of radio lent itself to the imagination and exposure to music. WMMS was very much that way," said Dusty.

Dusty shares a story about the power of

radio. "I received an email recently from someone who used to listen to my radio show in 1972. He still remembered what I said on the air and the songs I played on the night he was packing his suitcase because he knew the relationship he was in was not the right one for him. He said listening to my show kept him from making the biggest mistake of his life. Listening to my show while he was going through this shows the positive impact of radio. It is really something that he emailed me in 2009 from a show of mine he listened to in 1972."

Fly low and avoid the radar has been the radio mantra for Dusty since her early days on the airwaves. She explains, "The original meaning of that is that is what was told to the fighter pilots during WWII during their recognizance missions was to fly low and avoid the radar. One night a friend of mine and I had gone out and left a party at zero a.m. and before I left he told me to fly low and avoid the radar, meaning so I wouldn't be pulled over. So now it has stuck with me and I like it."

When asked to share some stories Dusty first shares one of her favorites about recovery on the air. "I knew this DJ whose name was Reno Nevada. He played a record

on the air one night at the wrong speed. Without missing a beat he stopped the record, started it again at the regular speed and said, "And now for the long version." (*laughs*) I love that story."

She gives a perfect example of the show must go on. "There was a night that I was really sick with a bad cold. I felt miserable but I went into the station anyway to do my show. I didn't care what I looked like so I went to work with my fuzzy slippers on, pajamas and bathrobe with my hair going every which direction. I heard the doorbell ring at the back door so I went to answer it, flung open the door and shouted, "What the hell do you want?" Here it was Billy Idol. I completely forgot that we had an interview scheduled. He took one look at me and said, "Oh, you were expecting me?" (*laughs*) So we did the interview as planned even though I felt terrible."

Dusty has made Cleveland her home since 2005 when she was asked if she was interested in a radio position to do a Sirius XM Classic Vinyl radio show from the Rock Hall. Dusty accepted the job and moved from sunny California to Cleveland, Ohio. Seeking her thoughts about the winter season she said, "Don't ask...the first couple of years it was novelty but now that I've been here a while I am no longer amused." Many of us can identify with her thoughts about winters in Ohio.

When asked what she felt was the appeal of why classic rock still has stood the test of time Dusty said, "Its nostalgia. People usually like the music they grew up with. I think that most people stop their musical curiosity at a certain point. The music they listened to in high school or college is usually what people stick with. I was always following new music. I have interviewed people from Janis Joplin to Johnny Rotten. I think it's important for people to understand and be shown where the history of music comes from. I think music lyrics would

make a much better history lesson than what you would get from books. The lyrics would be the truest American history of music."

Being at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame every day has been a great experience for Dusty. "I love working at the Rock Hall. I think the people here are stunning. I have

a great Program Director. I actually get to see people as they come through the Rock Hall and talk with them. It is wonderful to talk with people that love music. The Rock Hall keeps the history of music going. It's important to maintain the history of music as well as knowing what is going on now and in the future. If you lose the history then you

are losing something very important."

Sirius XM Classic Vinyl is broadcast from 12:00 noon to 6:00 pm seven days a week. Dusty works on her show Monday through Friday during regular business hours at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Dusty also does voice over work, which has included being an announcer for National Airlines, The Discovery Channel and many others.

For more information about Dusty Street please visit: www.dustystreet.net www.sirius.com www.rockhall.com Remember to fly low and avoid the radar.

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Stephen Stills with Dusty at the Rock Hall, 2007.
Photo Courtesy of Dusty Street.



Dusty (left) and another female engineer at KMPX in San Francisco, 1967. Photo Courtesy of Dusty Street.