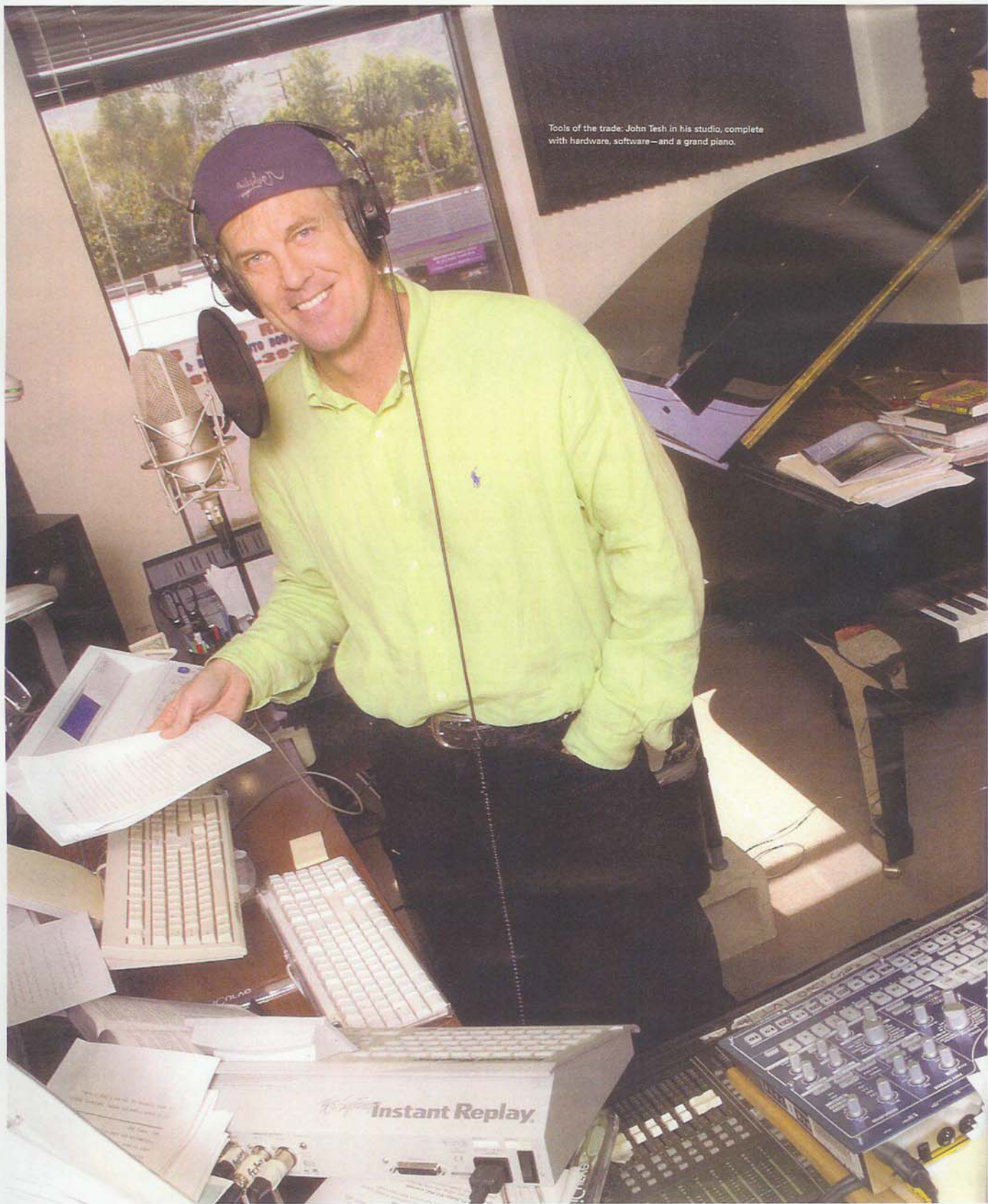


Tools of the trade: John Tesh in his studio, complete with hardware, software—and a grand piano.



TAPPING INTO TESH

SMASH RADIO SHOW TAKES 'INTELLIGENCE' TO THE MASSES

JOHN TESH LIKES TO THINK OF his syndicated radio show as a clearinghouse for all the information people would like to know to lead better lives, but never find time to dig through.

"Imagine standing in front of the largest newsstand in the world and having someone find the best from every magazine that's out there," he says. Well, almost. "Maybe not Guns & Ammo."

The theme behind "The John Tesh Radio Show" is "intelligence for your life," which blends music from staple AC artists with news, studies, suggestions and tidbits about health and well-being, longevity, parenting issues, simplifying life, romance, motivation and positive thinking.

Add to that the host's assurance that "if a 9-year-old can't listen to it, you won't hear it on this radio station," and you've got the ingredients of one of the fastest-growing syndicated radio shows in America. Since launching in April 2003, Tesh has reeled in 140 affiliates—nearly double the number from a year ago. This is in addition to the 150 outlets already airing the weekend edition of the program, which began in 2000.

IT'S TESH TIME SOMEWHERE

More remarkable is that Tesh's five-hour show is on the air somewhere in the United States during every daypart—and on six different formats. The buzzword here: versatility.

"I'm not as surprised at the number of stations as I am the ratings," Tesh admits. The former "Entertainment Tonight" host explains, "In television, if you get a 0.2 increase, you open the champagne. We've got radio stations jumping from a 1.2 to a 15 share. That's been amazing."

The majority of affiliates air the show on weeknights, but thanks to voice-tracking, there are outlets—of all different musical flavors—that broadcast Tesh in other dayparts, some even inserting their own music mix between segments. For example, modern AC WHCN Hartford, Conn.; adult R&B CIQX Calgary, Alberta; and oldies KTSO Tulsa, Okla., air the show in evenings. AC WJDC Norfolk, Va., and smooth jazz KSMJ Bakersfield, Calif., run it in a.m. drive. Contemporary Christian AC WIJY Indianapolis airs it in middays, and soft AC KSA Redding, Calif., uses it for overnights.

"People listening to morning radio are the same as those listening in afternoons or overnights; they just happen to have different schedules," Tesh says. "What holds true for all of them is that there isn't enough time to get information they need to live longer, set goals and make their relationships better."

Equally diverse is the scope of Tesh's audience. While the show targets adult women, plenty of feedback comes by way of e-mail and phone messages from all ends of the spectrum: "We've heard from truck drivers who say they've pulled over because

they don't want to lose the listening area, who want to make sure they hear the tip about how to divorce-proof their marriage."

Then there's the message an 8-year-old left for Tesh: "John Tesh [sic], my mom said you used to be somebody, but I love your show and you put me to sleep every night." Tesh quips: "I'm here to help."

The host employs a staff of seven just for research, which gathers info from every conceivable magazine, newsletter and book publisher that might provide insight for listeners.

Tesh says the inspiration for the show's concept was his wife, Connie Sellecca.

"She has her own business, she's the mother of two, an actress, and she has to deal with me," he says. "She walked by a newsstand and thought, 'Oh gosh, I need to read Time, Newsweek, Prevention, Parenting,' but of course there's never enough time. So we decided to do a newsletter on the air. We really fell into something. One of our catchphrases is 'home improvement for the brain.'"

SMARTEST PERSON IN THE ROOM

Tesh says, "I get to act as the concertmaster—I have one of those voices that people recognize and remember, so it's comfortable to listen to—but this isn't about me. The concept is so strong: We like to say we offer 'all the information you need to live your life a whole lot better—or just impress your friends at the water cooler on Monday.' Give us 20 minutes and we'll make you the smartest person in the room."

It was a major goal from the beginning to distinguish the show from relationship-focused competitors. Tesh explains, "We want to be useful. We don't want to listen to the crying and whining, where you do nothing about it. We want to help people solve their problems, to give a purpose in their lives and then to live that out. Go home, get a Sharpie and write on your mirror three goals and make your life better."

The information bits that Tesh delivers are nestled between familiar AC hits. One recent hour included the Corrs, Dan Fogelberg, Jewel, Edwin McCain, Christina Aguilera, Rod Stewart, Sheryl Crow, Marc Anthony, Genesis and Faith Hill. Ten to 12 songs per hour is the norm.

As for the family-friendly aspect, Tesh's reputation by trade hints that you're not going to be dealing with stripper segments and recipes for the perfect martini. His Christian faith is well-acknowledged, and his new age, instrumental and Christian musical ventures are ubiquitous. Accolades include three gold albums, two Grammy Award nominations, several No. 1 radio hits and sold-out tours.

But, Tesh stresses, "Christian faith is not an ingredient on the

radio show. If you're trying to set goals, I might say that it takes hard work and risk and you should support that with prayer. We have people that are Christians and those that aren't. People know who my wife and I are and how we choose to live our lives—so that is the template."

Even so, listeners can count on a brand that stays true to itself: "Parents are able to listen to the show, and they get it: There's no potty humor, no meanness and no whining. Let us connect you to the information you need to make life changes. People will figure it out."

Tesh's brand strength has become so entrenched, in fact, that in April, he is sponsoring the first Intelligence for Your Life conference for some 1,500 delegates in Las Vegas, which will include inspirational authors, music and symposiums for inspiration, all based on the signature of his radio show.

"We're at a point where we've registered the trademark; this has become a strong brand," Tesh says.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Public service is also an increasingly important part of the show, with a number of links and information for listeners at Tesh's Web site, tesh.com. In fact, Tesh hosted a representative of the faith-based Operation Blessing on his show following the Dec. 26 tsunami in Southeast Asia. That spurred him, his wife and two children—23-year-old Gib and 10-year-old Prima—to embark on their own journey to the ravaged region with the organization to see how they could help out.

"We ended up in a fishing town, raising awareness for non-governmental agencies and to share with listeners how important an issue was facing the world," he says. "But we ended up providing therapy for kids who were having horrible nightmares."

Recognizing the need for the children in the relief camps to express their feelings, the crew provided them with paper and crayons to draw what they witnessed when the tsunami struck. The result is a book, "Shades of Blue," that features original art and photographs created to financially benefit the people in the villages of the Ampara district of Sri Lanka.

"Our hope is to raise between a quarter of a million and a million dollars to help these kids help themselves," Tesh says. "It's like a kid's lemonade stand; we told them we're going to sell these drawings and bring the money back into the community."

Tesh says that in his years of covering local news, including earthquakes, floods and hurricanes (he worked for CBS News in New York before his "Entertainment Tonight" gig), he has never seen anything like the devastation the disaster caused.

"When you're standing there and you have that 3-1 experience, you wonder how anything like this could happen," he says. "Then you come back to the U.S., and it's infuriating that this is not the top news story anymore. Michael Jackson is."

Tesh balances his life with a continuing dedication to his music career, though instead of embarking on major tours, he now works a three-day weekend once a month or so. He also recently taped a new special for PBS (his fourth), which he will support with live dates.

"Music and the radio show are neck and neck," Tesh explains. "Fortunately, I can do the radio show from the road."

He appreciates this stage of his career, calling it "a time in my life where anything I do I want to be useful."

"You know, in 10 years at 'Entertainment Tonight,' I maybe got three letters a week from people wanting me to get them Phil Collins' autograph," Tesh recalls. "With the show, I'm getting 125 e-mails and 50 phone calls a day, with people telling me how they use the show—whether they're finding a book to save their marriage, impressing their teacher with some bit of knowledge or getting their pet to walk properly again. It feels great." ■■■