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RADIO WAVES

Ben Fong-Torres

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THE MAGIC TESH: "Stay tuned for John Tesh, next on Star 101!"



What? Has KIOI switched to a New Age format? Is it simulcasting some rerun of "Entertainment Tonight"?

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No and no. Tesh hosts a syndicated show, "Music and Intelligence for Your Life," and KIOI (101.3 FM) has become one of the 160-plus stations carrying the show, airing it twice nightly, in fact, from 7 p.m. to midnight and then again until 5 a.m.

Tesh, 53, is still best known as the tall, blond and ridiculously telegenic co-host of "Entertainment Tonight," from 1986 to 1996, leaving to play soothing piano music in concert, and now to dispense news and advice about health, fitness, parenting, relationships, careers -- "intelligence," he says, "for people who are (a) trying to find their purpose in life and (b) trying to find the deepest desire of their life."

There is, he says, a direct connection from his TV days to his radio evenings. Tesh, who began as a newscaster on a Top 40 station in Raleigh, N.C., says he got "disillusioned" with "ET" He went on tour as a musician, but, with a young daughter at home, his wife (actress Connie Sellecca) told him that he should cut down on his travels and perhaps return to TV. "I wasn't going back to television," he says, "so I started this weekend countdown show, like Casey Kasem's."

Sellecca inspired a new approach for a radio show. "She's an actress, a mother, a businesswoman, and all these newsletters and magazines would stack up: Women's Fitness, Prevention, Oprah (O) -- she was never able to get to it. I thought, 'We're always looking for more intelligence, for cocktail party and dinner party knowledge, little hints on how to live longer and

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better. The metaphor is, imagine yourself in front of the largest newsstand in the world, and suddenly every great article you need jumps into your hands, and someone like me reads it to you."

All well and good. Tesh's show is drawing listeners, primarily female, ranging in age from teens to 50s. But why Tesh as a lifestyle coach?

"Exactly," says Tesh, who accepts that he's always going to be "the guy on ET who's the musician, because there have been so many things, like Conan (O'Brien), making fun of me." But, he says, "I'm just the host. I may say I tried this diet or this method of exercise, but rarely do I give my opinion. It's, 'Here's where I found this item, and let me direct you.' It's like being a quarterback. 'Let me give the ball to this guy over here.' "

Given the conflicting information and advice out there on health and other issues, Tesh and his seven-member research staff are picky.

"We don't pull stuff from Cosmo or Self about what do men want in a woman, " he says. "We try to go with the Harvard Wellness Letter" and similar newsletters from UC Berkeley and Stanford. "You have to be careful about the pop culture fluff. We would never recommend Atkins or high carb or low carb; we regard those as being fad diets. The one diet we subscribe to is just portion control."

So, does his wife listen to the show? Tesh chuckles. "It's not on in L.A. Yet." She does hear the show online, he adds. "But I do drive her crazy. I'm not allowed to speak the words 'intelligence for your life' at the dinner table."

OVER THERE: Ron Barr, founder and host of "Sports Byline," the San Francisco sports-talk network, is taking his show to the Middle East -- "to the combat zone," he says, "in Kuwait, Baghdad and Mosul."

What, is he nuts? Maybe, but he was inspired to go by college basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski. "He told me that one of his former players is Col. Bob Brown, who's leading troops in Mosul. He said his troops would enjoy seeing us in person."

Barr, whose sports-talk package runs eight hours nightly on 500 radio stations worldwide, including the Armed Forces Network, left Tuesday for Iraq, along with comedian Sarge Pickman. The programs from overseas will air Monday through Wednesday this week. (Sports Byline USA has no San Francisco affiliate, but can be heard on Sirius satellite radio on Channel 122.)

"I come from a military family," Barr says. "I respect what all these people are doing there. They're putting their asses on the line." As for the dangers he might face: "I'm not worried about death. I could get hit in the streets of San Francisco. This is too important for me not to do."

KABL SCRAPS: Although KABL may be gone as a Bay Area radio station, Clear Channel, its owner, is trying to keep some form of it around, beyond streaming standards on www.kablradio.com. Check the site for the latest ... Mike Cleary, part of KABL's original air staff in the big-band era, is still playing standards, doing a show from his East Bay home for KIDD in Monterey ... Cleary and Carter B. Smith both logged substantial time on KNBR. Cleary and Frank Dill comprised a strong morning team. "And did you know," Smith asked me, "that Jann Wenner (founder of Rolling Stone magazine) was a gofer for Frank?" As Johnny Carson would've said: "I did not know that. That is weird, wild stuff!" ... Bill Moen, who joined KABL early on, in 1960, recalls John K. Chapel doing the morning news there. "I introduced him four times a day as 'author, world traveler and lecturer.' After two years he bid me farewell by saying, 'I've enjoyed working with you, Bob.' Ah, memories." ... And for the record: Jim Lange signed off for the last time with the song he played the first time he was on the radio, at age 16 in Minneapolis, 57 years ago. It was Glenn Miller's "In the Mood."

THE KING & KIHN: Well, Scot Bruce actually isn't the king of rock 'n' roll, but he looked, sounded and gyrated his hips enough like Elvis Presley to satisfy the sold-out houses for "Idols of the King," which just ended its run at the California Theatre in San Jose. In the play, Bruce and his band performed only a dozen or so Presley numbers, but they let loose during a visit to Greg Kihn's morning show on KUFX ("The Fox," 98.5 FM). Most such visits last 15 minutes, tops, but with rocker Kihn at the controls, Bruce and his rockabilly buddies went on for two hours, jamming, often with Kihn joining in, through not only Elvis songs, but also numbers by the Beatles, the Everly Brothers, Ricky Nelson and pianist Floyd Cramer. After a particularly rousing, bass-slapping "Blue Moon of Kentucky," Kihn screamed, "Oh, God, I think I peed all over myself!"

Bruce, a fan of the Greg Kihn Band, laughed. "He's just a regular, approachable guy," he said. "That's what makes him so endearing to his fans."

While Kihn is a rocker-turned-DJ, Bruce has taken the opposite direction, switching from a stint as a Top 40 DJ in Pullman, Wash., to Elvis tributes and a rockabilly band of his own.

TALK TALK: Peter B. Collins, longtime Bay Area DJ and liberal talk-show host, has taken his act to the Carmel Valley, where he's program manager of KRXA (540 AM), which is introducing a lineup of progressive hosts. Besides Collins (3 to 6 p.m.), they include Bill Press (a frequent sub for Ronn Owens) from Washington, D.C., Stephanie Miller, Thom Hartmann and Ed Schultz ... No Bay Area station has picked up Don Imus, gone from radio since KYCY (1550 AM) became KYOU, with podcasts. But one reader reminds that, for people in the North Bay, it may be possible to get the show from KVON (1440 AM), out of Napa ... And we're wrapping up "Local Music Month." That's what Mayor Gavin Newsom proclaimed August to be, to help hype KFOG's new "Local Scene" CD, which benefits the organization called Music in Schools Today.

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