



From **INSIDERADIO.COM** - March 29, 2004

*Personalities Inside Radio*

## **The Mike Kinosian Interview**

### **Tesh: Towering Titan**

Indecency.

Seemingly everything else in our business has taken a back seat to that one dreaded and indicting word. Especially since Super Bowl Sunday, fines, firings, suspensions and music editing have become the order of the day.

#### **Multi-Talented Performer**

The opposite of “indecent” -- simply “decent” -- somehow hardly seems a fitting description of a person who embodies the true antithesis of broadcasting indecency.

It’s virtually impossible to pigeonhole the multi-faceted John Tesh, who, in more ways than one, stands head and shoulders above the word “decent.”

While many instantly associate the gentle giant with his trademark smile and booming voice to “Entertainment Tonight,” Tesh’s longtime sports connection, unfortunately, is frequently forgotten.

The genial and gracious Tesh inked a sports deal with CBS-TV in 1981. Five years later, he was behind a desk co-anchoring the glitzy entertainment magazine show “ET” with Mary Hart.

At the same time, the fun-loving Tesh was actively pursuing his musical career.

#### **Power From His Passion**

It’s proven to be significantly more than an idle hobby, as the gifted composer/musician has gone on to notch three gold albums; secure several Grammy nominations (“Power Of Love” competed for 2003’s Best Pop Instrumental Album award); host multiple music-oriented PBS specials; and do several stints for NBC-TV as an Olympic announcer/composer.

At last count, the number of CD releases from the onetime investigative reporter stood at an eye-popping 37.

His passion for music led him to do what many felt was unthinkable – leave the “ET” set, after 10 high profile and high-paying years.

That gutsy decision, however, crystallized this highly principled individual, who, for the past several years, has hosted a weekend radio show bearing his name that stresses “Intelligence For Your Life.”

#### **They’re Out Of Control**

The entrepreneurial-minded Tesh distributes “The John Tesh Radio Show” through his TeshMedia Group. The weekend program became so popular that, on April 28, 2003, it expanded to a Monday-Friday offering.

Timing for the daily show has proven to be fortuitous, because as Tesh comments, “These ‘shock jocks’ have gotten out of control. Everybody’s concentrating on more family-oriented programming and we feel like we’ve found a niche. We’re trying not to cry and whine or do ‘woe is me’ radio.”

Instead, he focuses on feeding his audience tidbits and interesting information that they can use in their everyday existence. “There are a lot of people who don’t want to listen to nonsense anymore,” he remarks. “It’s people just being disgusting.”

## Line Of Scrimmage Audible

The five-hour, weekday show was originally geared to Adult Contemporary stations for nighttime play. But in the past year, it's morphed into a multi-format program that stations use in various dayparts. "We just signed a station [Clear Channel Soft AC WJCD-FM/Norfolk] that's airing the show in morning drive," Tesh reports. "We're a bunch of very creative people. If there's not an Adult Contemporary station [in a particular market] that wants to run this show, we'll go [somewhere else]. They can just take the family-friendly stuff and surround it with their own music."

## Mastering The Right Voice

Among the first non-ACs to pick up Tesh's show were Provident Contemporary Christian WVFJ-FM/Atlanta and Pilgrim Contemporary Christian WIJY-FM/Indianapolis; the latter slots the show weekdays from 10am-3pm. An unanticipated challenge facing Tesh is trying to figure out the voice to use for a show that could be airing on different formats and in varying dayparts. "The lowest common denominator now would be the morning show," he notes. "So I'm thinking that I'm on in morning drive and try to keep my energy there. But it's not the old [affected, deep-voiced FM style]."

## Prima Priority

It's also become considerably more daunting of a task than he originally expected. "I think that happens a lot when people underestimate not only the power of radio, but also the workload," he opines. "The good thing for me is that I wanted to take myself off the road. [My daughter Prima] is now nine years old and I wanted to be more involved with her life and this has allowed me to do that."

Capable of doing the show from either a recording studio in his Sherman Oaks, CA office or comparable home office facility, Tesh says, "These days, I'm doing more shows from the office. I turn around and there's a piano right there. I can write and mix and do anything. In many respects, I've really simplified my life. I do my radio show and I'm a dad; that's it."

## Staying Sharp

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

In addition to his domestic responsibilities and radio shows, he'll also wind up touring at least 10 days a year (he'll be in Cheyenne, WY on April 30th) and is the face behind The TeshMedia Group.

The very spiritual and deeply religious Tesh can also be found playing music in church every Sunday. "I have a two-hour rehearsal and a two-hour worship service, so that keeps me sharp, playing wise," he explains. What I'm trying to do is one big television concert a year. I just finished a Red Rocks concert and next year, I'll be at Carnegie Hall. We're just sort of planning ahead."

The tour coincides with the release of Tesh's next CD – both slated at the end of August.

There's also the matter of visiting "Tesh Show" affiliates and, while he's curtailed that too, he remarks, "We try to do something when I'm on tour. We'll always fold it into something wherever a station is involved. But really - I guarantee that my life is so much simpler than anyone else you talk with. When you take the touring out of it, it's a whole different world."

## Protecting The Franchise

As the weekday show approaches its first-year birthday, Tesh has no plans to scuttle the weekend show that airs on some 165 affiliates. "I'll never leave that show, because that's what started everything and it reaches a lot of people," he emphasizes. "We were on for a couple of years and Westwood One cancelled it, because they said they couldn't get [any more stations] interested in it. So we decided to [distribute it ourselves]. I'm essentially doing 30 hours of radio a week, so that little three-hour weekend show is like a lay-up. I could shoot it with my eyes closed."

## Life With An Italian Wife

It should be properly noted – if not completely and enviously remembered that – for the past 12 years, Tesh has been happily married to the absolutely fetching actress Connie Sellecca. "My wife let me know loud and clear that being away from home 60 dates a year [was out of the question]," he says in all seriousness. "It's actually great having an Italian wife, because she's very demanding. She demands that you be part of your family, but at the same time, she'll make you three meals a day. I go to work everyday with a 'SpongeBob SquarePants' lunch box that's filled with Italian food. She'll be right there with you shoulder to

shoulder, but you can't cross her."

On the surface, Tesh appears to be a model of consistency, but he admits, "I've been out of balance many times. What's happened with this radio show is that it really enables me to stay in balance. Plus it's a blast. I love radio – it's just so much better than doing television."

### Home Alone

In conversation after conversation, in fact, Tesh expresses a true unadulterated love for radio.

As others now measure and re-think each and every word they utter on the air, Tesh goes about his business as he always has and with high esteem for the medium. "I was listening to Howard Stern the other morning and he was moaning about First Amendment rights," Tesh notes. "But this isn't really about the First Amendment -- it's about children. Mom and dad have let the kids do whatever they want. They've gone out of town and the house is a mess. Stern knows that he shouldn't have gone that far. It's his fault, because he knows better and it's the FCC's fault, because they let things get out of hand. Sometimes what Howard puts on the air is brilliant, but 98% of the time, it's dangerous. Howard Stern has become lazy."

Few people, however, have been as entertaining and compelling as Stern and the same terminology also applies to Westwood One's Tom Leykis. "When [Leykis] isn't talking about signing women's breasts, he's a smart guy," Tesh concedes. "But when he starts objectifying women, I have to turn him off."

### Trinity: Mancow, Pornographer & Tesh

Extremely familiar with WKQX/Chicago (and syndicated) morning man Mancow, Tesh comments, "He's a Christian and a very smart guy. When I was on his show around Christmas time, he had a pornographer on with me; it was wonderful radio. There wasn't one horrible, excremental reference. It was just a fabulous conversation about the abuse of freedom of speech. I told [Mancow] that this is the type of stuff that he could do and that he should use his brain."

While it shows no signs of quieting down, some say the indecency flap will fade away. But Tesh states, "I really wish that it wouldn't. We have control over terrestrial radio. This isn't about the First Amendment. It's about what's safe for our family and the FCC is supposed to protect us from that."

### Welcome Back

Several years have passed since Tesh left "Entertainment Tonight." Last year around the holidays, he made his first return to the "ET" stage. "As I was driving up Gower Boulevard [in Hollywood], I actually started becoming nervous -- it was like I was starting to get hives," he candidly admits. "I did that show for 10 years and wondered what it was going to be like to go back. I definitely felt a lot of love from those guys. They've always been incredible to me."

Although it was great catching up with his old friends and cohorts, Tesh says today's "ET" is a different show from the one he once did. "We were watching a tape the other day from 1987 where I was introducing a piece that Connie was doing. It was before we'd met and it was something Prima could watch. But she can't watch that show or 'Access Hollywood' now, because those shows are all T & A. They asked if I'd ever come back and do something with 'ET.' I told the guys that – because of where I am now – I couldn't. I don't think any of them really get it."

Incredibly pleased that he's no longer in the medium that was once home, he declares, "Television is a real pressure cooker. There are a lot of people deciding your fate. One thing that I love about my radio show is that I'm not worried about my job every five minutes. Because of that, I sound a lot more relaxed on the air."

### No More Kicks For Rick

WKIX-AM/Raleigh was the site of Tesh's first radio break. The then-collegian (circa 1971) was a newsreader for "The Giant Of The South."

Another bright young newcomer at the time – Rick Dees – was WKIX's morning personality. Commenting on the way his former colleague recently departed Clear Channel CHR/Pop KIIS-FM/Los Angeles, Tesh said simply, "It was horrible. I don't know exactly what happened, but it sounded like the Walter Cronkite-Dan Rather thing."

By way of quick review, the venerable and avuncular Cronkite had another 18 months left on his contract; Rather was the heir apparent. "Another network contacted Rather to be their anchor," Tesh notes. "His agent went to CBS and said if Rather didn't get the anchor job, Rather would leave the network. So CBS went to Walter and told him to retire. In sort of a roundabout way, that may have happened with Rick. They knew they wanted [Ryan Seacrest], because he was their future. But whenever talent

goes up against the big company, talent always ends up losing. You get this feeling that you can do anything and no one can stop you. But you're just wrong. I'm very sorry that Rick had to sort of manufacture his going away speech."

Perhaps for that and other reasons, Tesh doesn't envision himself working for a standalone radio station anytime soon. Hosting his own syndicated shows and doing guest spots are much more enjoyable. "I don't know if I could take being in the building with the people who [would critique me]," he says breaking into laughter. "I can take [criticism] from certain [outside people I respect], but I really hate having someone look over my shoulder. If you put me on the air live without someone to help me, I couldn't do it. This is really a scripted show, although I do like live radio. If Howard wouldn't go after my wife so horribly, I'd love to go back on his show. But he knows where my buttons are, so I can't do that."

### Team Of Personal Trainers

Not only does his name prominently front the show, Tesh takes to heart many items he mentions during the course of the broadcasts. "Do you honestly think that I'd be eating fennel for breakfast or mixing peanut butter with cottage cheese if I weren't doing this radio show?," he playfully asks. "I've discovered that the scent of peppermint makes you smarter and pouring Coca Cola in your toilet is the best way of cleaning it. It's almost like hiring a personal trainer. I've hired a personal trainer to improve my life. It happens to be six or seven people working on the show, who just keep handing me the latest facts."

Men comprise a portion of the audience, but Tesh's show tends to perform better among females – especially women 25-54. "Students also listen and take notes," he remarks. "People love lists, so we give the top five ways people can live to be 100, 10 ways to divorce-proof a marriage, how to flirt, how to exercise and how to be a better parent."

### Teasing Tesh

No one spends more time on teases than the sports-savvy Tesh. "I grew up with the tease," he explains. During the Olympic games, you'd hear the master utter such gems in hushed and one-breathed tones as, "Coming up, [gold medal gymnast] Svetlana Boginskaya has a 9.2. If she gets a 9.7 or better, she'll be our winner. You'll see it all next." As he comments, "That's the stuff that I love to do. I learned that from the sports guys and from 'ET.' It drives my wife crazy. She wants to hear it right now. But that's why [our show's TSL is so incredibly long]. There's always something 'coming up.'"

Certain programming techniques have come in handy in yet another of Tesh's roles. "I teach band at my daughter's school at 3pm each Friday; we have a little orchestra there," he points out. "The show has taught me how to communicate with kids. I say things like, 'I'm going to tell you the one thing that you need to do to play your instrument that's going to make you the most popular kid in this school, but first ...' I've also learned that when you want people to agree with you, put the thing that you really want them to agree with third – wacky stuff like that."

### Only Thing To Fear Is Fear Itself

Other shows may inform and entertain, but Tesh's programs strive to change people's lives. "It's an amazing feeling," he says with humility. "You might be surprised at this, but the one thing that people want to hear is 'don't be afraid.'"

Using that piece of advice in his own life, he remarks, "Fear is so huge out there right now. I'm not talking about fear of terrorism – just fear about doing anything. We're all so frozen in our tracks. We're afraid of being successful, because of what people will think. We're also afraid of failure; getting into and out of relationships; and we're mostly afraid to take risks. That's the message that we keep telling people on the air. You need to find your purpose, write it down and focus on it. You're going to end up dying and there won't be anything in that dash between your birth and ending date. That's something that I've learned from the show. You can be a jerk or you can be positive. Move forward and be absent of your fears."

### Mirroring Heloise

Much like we illustrated last Thursday (www.InsideRadio, 3-25-2004) with Liberty Broadcasting's "Heloise", Tesh is serious about writing down career goals. "I have goals for the year and – much to Connie's chagrin - I'll write them in magic marker on my bathroom mirror," he reveals. "We talk about writing things down on the radio show. It's important to have your goal right in front of you. I'm seeing it and praying about it. Many career coaches will tell you that you can't just have something in your head – you have to write it down."

As noted, Tesh's Monday-Friday show can be heard in various dayparts on a variety of formats. For the most part, however, the vast majority of stations airing it are ACs that tend to slot it at night.

That, of course, can set the stage for head-to-head battles with AC nighttime icon Delilah.

One goal etched on Tesh's bathroom mirror is that he wants to have the No. 1 syndicated radio show within two years. "It's not about Delilah – it's about anything in the path," asserts the North Carolina State University alum. "The emails we get make me feel [confident] and I believe that I've been given a franchise. People are telling me that they want more of what we're doing."

## Second And Goal

There are actually five goals he wishes to achieve between now and the end of the year. "I want the radio show to have 100 affiliates," he declares.

With last Thursday's (3-25-2004) signing of Sandusky Soft AC KRWM-FM/Seattle, the count stands at 80. The ambition of wanting "to run a six-minute mile" would require shaving off slightly more than one minute. Red Rocks releases in August and Tesh's aim is to make it a Gold record. "That's not going to be too easy," he acknowledges with a bit of dejection. "I went to Red Rocks 10 years ago and did a live worship concert there. I'm mixing it right now and it's a pretty [forceful] worship and praise special."

## Dateline: Hollywood

The final goal involves his loving soul mate who – to note his 50th birthday - treated her husband to a vacation in his favorite place.

The contemplative scene saw the two sitting on a raft in Italy when Sellecca asked what Tesh wanted for the next 50 years of his life. "We seldom have these kind of deep conversations, but I said the main thing I wanted was to be useful. Whether it's something you write or say, you want to make a difference."

How positively fitting, therefore, that the content of Tesh's other 2004 goal so perfectly summarizes this self-admitted highly emotional man. "I want to add back a date night with my wife."

**WHO: John Tesh**

**WHAT: "The John Tesh Radio Show"**

**WHERE: TeshMedia**

**WHEN: Primarily Monday-Friday 7pm-12 Midnight. A separate weekend show also runs at various times**

**HOW MANY AFFILIATES: Weekday show – 80; weekend show – approximately 165**

**HOW LONG: Weekday show began April 28, 2003**