

DJ CELEBRATES 50 YEARS ON THE AIR

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Bob Martz likes to tell a story about a famous jazz musician who once listened to saxophonist Ornette Coleman and said, "I don't know what it is, man, but it ain't jazz."

That's kind of how he feels about the state of radio today.

"I don't know what it is, but it ain't radio," says the 75-year-old veteran of radio and advertising.

A lot has changed since Mr. Martz made his Toledo debut in the business 50 years ago, but one thing remains the same: the city still has his zany humor echoing across its airwaves. After stints at a variety of area stations, he's developed a loyal audience in recent years on WCWA-AM (1230) playing Frank Sinatra and Big Band music.



Toledo radio mainstay Bob Martz. (AMY E. VOIGT/THE BLADE)

To celebrate Mr. Martz's professional longevity, an hour-long tribute program will be broadcast on WCWA at 11 a.m. tomorrow and March 29. "Bob Martz, A Sentimental Journey" will feature some of his award-winning comedy commercials and interviews with a number of other Toledo radio icons. Following the broadcasts, free copies of the program will be available at www.bobmartzradio.com.

Host Michael Drew Shaw will review Mr. Martz's career in the Glass City, which began in 1958 at WSPD-AM. Over the years, the popular DJ, program director, and general manager also spent time at places like WTOD-AM and WOHO-AM.

AUDIO

[Listen to some of Bob Martz's zany commercials](#)

The East Toledo native brought country music and R&B to Toledo radio when he changed the format at local stations, and he became famous for his two-voice comedy commercials, some of which were heard as far away as Hawaii.

"Some commercials became so popular that people just kind of requested them," said Bob Kelly, the current co-host of the morning show on WRQN-FM whom Mr. Martz brought to the Toledo market in 1965. "Toledo has never had a more clever individual."

Mr. Martz set the bar for commercial-writing in the city, according to Mr. Shaw, who first worked with him in the 1960s when the two were at WTOD. You could sit down and write an ad that sounded great, only to hear it on the radio later next to one of Mr. Martz's.

"His was always better, always funnier," Mr. Shaw said. "He just inspired us all to be more creative."

Mr. Martz's type of wacky humor is the sort you don't hear anymore on the airwaves.

"He's one of the last of the breed," said his current on-air partner, "Ragtime Rick" Grafig. "His sense of humor is incredible. His timing and delivery is right up there with the people from the golden days of radio."

Mr. Grafig first got to know Mr. Martz as an advertiser on his program who would join him for some corny routines.

"He's a brilliant comedy mind, and he's really knowledgeable about the music, so he's got all the bases covered," Mr. Grafig said. "He will take a situation that's pretty common and exaggerate it to the point that it's ridiculous. There's a real genius in him."

For his part, Mr. Martz, whose career began two years before he came to Toledo, said that being goofy is a lot better than the alternative.

"I don't understand people who don't have a sense of humor," he said. "Must be a terribly boring life."

Unfortunately, he senses that this aspect of radio seems to be changing.

"I don't even know what they're doing these days, but it's not radio the way I know radio," he said. "First of all, everybody seems to be angry about something. I always went ... to work and I was happy to work."

And he still is.

These days, Mr. Martz, who at one point ran his own advertising company, is busy running his show from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays and working as a consultant in production and writing for the station's owner, Clear Channel.

"Why I keep doing it is because I love to do it," he said.

Mr. Martz, who now lives in Sylvania, was inducted into the Radio/Television Broadcasters Hall of Fame of Ohio in 2004. He said he intends to stay in the radio studio as long as he is able, comparing himself to a warrior who refuses to leave the battlefield.

"They're going to have to carry me out on my shield," he said.

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