

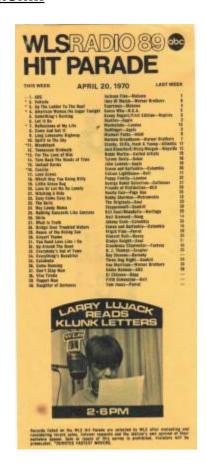
...is coming.



"Get your clothes off and get in the tub!"

#180...January 2014

And now, ladies and gentlemen...



...a little more than just "Superjock" died last week. I'd argue that Larry Lujack was top 40's last iconoclast on a grand scale.

In mornings for sure but afternoons especially - whether on Chicago's "Musicradio" WLS or "The Voice of Labor" WCFL - Lar' played by his own rules. Never mind "Superjock": Lujack was the "anti-jock." While it's tough enough today to find out if an air personality even likes a particular song, Lujack made no secret of what music he loved or despised on-air. Making fun of commercials, in fact, just talking extraneously between them, the way Larry did? Just try that now. And sparring with listeners, airing calls between lots of songs, making fun of listener correspondence on "The Klunk Letter of the Day"? Not likely these days, but it wouldn't have been Lujack's show without that.

While most listeners took to the kinder gentler "Uncle Lar" who read "Animal Stories" and ruled mornings during his second go-round at the Big 89, real fans surely loved him best when it sounded as if he was doing top 40 with boxing gloves on. You can hear that even as he transitioned WCFL to easy listening on an afternoon in 1976 http://youtu.be/c PEjXMp54M, recommending those still wanting the hits to turn to "KHJ Los Angeles" and, over the ocean waves sound effect that ended CFL's top 40 era, suggesting everyone else "get [their] clothes off and get in the tub." So why is it that as Lujack's unusual nature may have opened the door for the FM rock 'shock jocks' that came after, it also eventually closed it for top 40 hosts? How did the format get it so wrong?

Whether it was the increased meddling of consultants and researchers, or the heightened focus on music as top 40's most important product, there's been a clear move from jocks whose personalities don't necessarily fit the 'isn't this a great day, let me read you something funny' mold and toward a lineup where every live (and not live) host's intent is simply to serve as companion to the hits. In most cases, this has resulted in a lack of something I call 'talent variance': the idea that from one DJ to the next, you don't necessarily know what to expect day in day out. It's as if the more careful the format's become not to lose listeners, the less likely it is to be a good fit not only for anyone along the lines of Dan Ingram, Don Steele or Lujack – larger-than-life personalities who made top 40 the powerhouse it became in the first place – but for anyone even a little different.

It's worth noting that radio's rebels aren't completely gone from the airwaves. For that you can thank hip-hop-based stations, where tell-it-like-it-is format jocks who are encouraged to be themselves are alive and well. While at the same time I understand why there's been a conscious shift away from talent variance (read: ratings, advertisers, job security in a riskier-than-ever business) at mainstream and adult-oriented top 40, it's done the listener a disservice when there isn't a place for the next "Superjock."

Farewell, Mr. Lujack. That big top 40 station up there – without all those rules - just got a whole lot better.

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