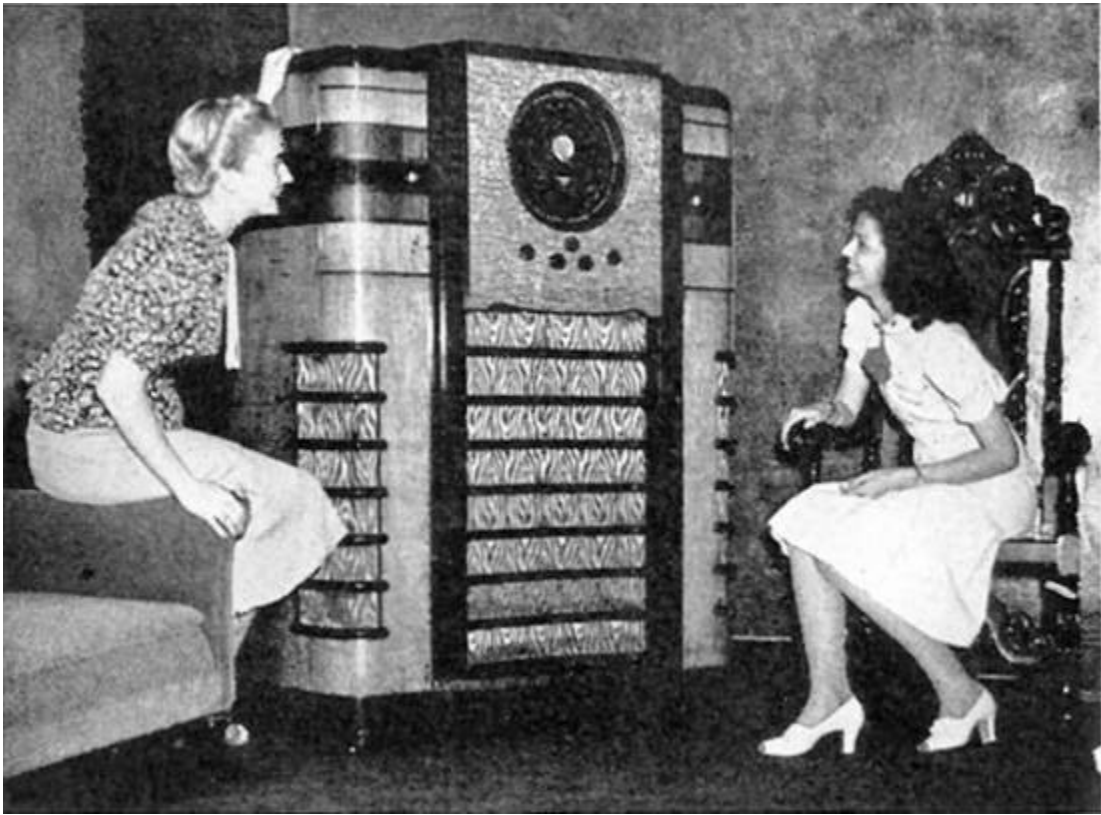


WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM TEACHING RADIO



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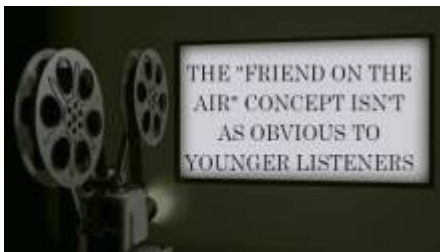
“Fighting to stay free”

#178...October 2013

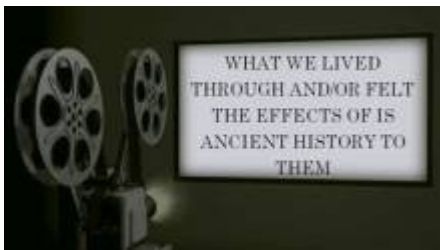
And now, ladies and gentlemen...

...I know I'm not the first person to say teaching is a learning experience. I don't mean that just literally – as in I had to learn a lot about the subject matter before presenting it confidently to a roomful of students whose parents' money went to send them to school, and to classes like mine – although that would still be true.

What I do mean – and what I imagine other first-time teachers mean when they've said that – is that we learn from delving deeper into the subject matter, from the experience of teaching, and from the students themselves. While it's been only eight weeks since I began adjunct-professor-ing “Introduction to Radio” at a local college, I feel as if it may as well have been my introduction to the medium, so I thought I'd share a few things I've learned during these first two months in academia. Cue the projector!



I get the sense kids listen to radio today either for music they know or music they don't know. I've seen just one example of listening for a particular host, and that host was on the BBC, so then also music-driven. I've played a few air checks of 'personality jocks' on music stations, but I can't tell whether they've made any impression. For the short paper I assigned profiling anyone in radio's history, the only pre-Stern personality written about was Wolfman Jack, whose 'shock' ties to Stern were referenced in that student's paper.



This should be obvious, but it's easy to forget while you're up there talking about WABC, Drake, payola, FM rock or the beginnings of radio formats taken for granted now, that all this happened on our watches. It's not that it makes one feels old so much as it challenges a professor to look at every radio milestone from the point of view of kids who were born after Nirvana, Garth and gangsta rap. And who were in diapers when the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was passed.



This should be regarded as good news. At least kids who want to learn about radio don't believe it's dead or dying. But they do believe radio takes whatever form they want it to, whether that means it's live top 40, shock talk or jockless Internet. This suggests there's room for all players, and everything in between.



Another 'stand back and survey the room' moment. When the great Pat St. John came in to guest-lecture, and we reviewed the legacy of album-based rock formats (and of Pat, for that matter), that's when it hit me that we really were teaching history, as in something the era of which has passed. The current-based rock formats that exist today sound (and owe) next to nothing to KMPX or WNEW-FM.



When I asked students to tell the class about their short paper subjects, I was amazed as how few chose on-air personalities, opting instead for the guys in the back like Marconi, Tesla, FM pioneer Edwin Armstrong and even Alexander Graham Bell. I couldn't help thinking who the 19-year-old me would have gone with (probably Imus or Ingram, both of whom were at the top of their games when I was a freshman in college). Wondering whether this reflects the decline in influence of the radio host - and at the same time the revenge of the nerd, given the power of the Internet and all it's produced - among a generation who haven't lived a day without a computer in the house.

It's all very interesting, but let's remember, I'm only at the halfway mark in "Intro to Radio." I've got a whole lot more to learn.

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