

Le Show: Year One

I had been working in radio as part of a daily satirical news series called *The Credibility Gap* when I got the opportunity to do a show of my own, mainly music, on a so-called underground FM station. That project ended when a newly-installed general manager with great flair fired the entire staff, seeing me off with a mock-sincere “I envy you your freedom.”

That freedom was returned to me on Dec. 4, 1983, when a friend who had a show on Santa Monica’s public radio station succeeded in convincing the general manager that I deserved a program on her station. That involved convincing her (and her music director) that my musical taste was sufficiently “eclectic.”

Such was the loosely-affixed brand of KCRW’s music policy. The fact I had previously been fired from a rock station for playing a Mel Tormé song wasn’t, apparently, sufficient proof of my eclecticism, but ultimately I was granted my golden E and got a two-hour timeslot on Sunday mornings.

With that much time to fill, music was naturally a big part of the show's content. I had by that point amassed a serious collection of LPs, and I was soon added to the "send this schmuck free records" lists of most of the labels. I called the show *The Voice of America*, because a) It sounded pompous and imposing, and b) I had a pretty good idea the U.S. government, which used the name for a shortwave radio service limited to overseas listeners, wouldn't sue.

Central to each show were one or more comedy sketches, primarily parodies of shows and commercials I thought were particularly stupid or vile. I had by this point figured out a unique (AFAIK) method of recording multi-character sketches in which I performed all of the characters. Without divulging it in detail to you (although conversations about certain sums of money changing hands are always possible), the essence of the technique is simple.

Normally, then and now, when one person records multiple parts, they do so one character at a time; there follows a lot of editing to arrange the lines in order, to make it sound like dialogue.

I wanted my sketches to sound like acting, in which each character is reacting to a line he/she has just heard. The scenes sound more “real” that way. Then and now.

Among hundreds of other concepts, this technique enabled my version of life in the Reagan White House. Based on the widespread premise that the President was fond of interrupting policy meetings to tell stories of life on the Warners lot, “Hellcats of the White House” premised that Ron and Nancy experienced world power as a series of B movies.

Six months in, I had found my groove and ... I was in receipt of two job offers, either of which would take me far from Santa Monica. One was to become the first host of a public-radio morning news program; the second was to join the cast and writing staff of *Saturday Night Live*. Finally, I faced the fact that I wasn’t a serious person.

By the next summer, satirical tail between my legs, I returned to radio, one hour slimmer. And the program, after a fitful little competition, had a new name: a friend, who knew of my collection of photos of businesses which prefaced their names with the Frenchifying “Le” (*Le Club, Le*

Hot Club, Le Hot Tub Club—all real), suggested *Le Show*, and it stuck.

– Harry Shearer

Next: *Le Show*: Decade Two