

It's Only Rock 'n' Roll, but He Likes It

Matt Pinfield, a former deejay at WRSU, has had an illustrious radio career, most recently at WRXP, where his passion for music remains undiminished.

Spend a few hours with Matt Pinfield, and his stories about hanging out with rock music royalty—Paul McCartney, David Bowie, Bono, Pete Townsend, Bruce Springsteen, Les Paul—spill out. But just as telling are the less-glamorous anecdotes, about musicians who never got recognized and the people who worked behind the scenes. “They’re just as important to me as the stars,” says Pinfield, formerly an MTV veejay and vice president of artist development at Columbia Records who is today the weekday morning cohost at 101.9 WRXP in New York City. “When I meet someone who says, ‘Man, you turned me on to so much music and helped mold my musical tastes,’ that means everything.”

Growing up in East Brunswick, Pinfield listened to WRSU, Rutgers’ student radio station in New Brunswick. His father, a physics teacher who also ran the audiovisual department at East Brunswick High School, built a radio transmitter for Pinfield. “Instead of playing sports, my friends and I played radio station,” he says. His lifelong love affair with rock ‘n’ roll began at a Queen concert at the Beacon Theater when he was 14.

Pinfield was a mainstay on WRSU soon after arriving at Rutgers in 1981, discovering he had a knack for bringing bands such as the Smithereens to wider attention and expressing his passion for rock ‘n’ roll over the airwaves. He sang with two bands, spun records at The Melody nightclub, and helped build a music scene in New Brunswick, convincing record labels to have their artists appear on the air with him.

His passion and encyclopedic knowledge reveal themselves every morning during RXP’s “Spin Matt Pinfield’s iPod,” a segment in which listeners compete to be the ninth caller to win concert



Matt Pinfield (left) onstage with Steven Van Zandt, of Bruce Springsteen’s E Street Band, one of the many rock ‘n’ roll celebrities whom he has befriended during his career.

tickets by selecting a number between one and 23,950, any one of which will correspond with a song on Pinfield’s iPod. More often than not, the song has rarely been, if ever, heard on commercial radio. Pinfield, who attended Rutgers until 1984, speaks eloquently about the band or artist, revealing recording minutiae and explaining the song’s importance to him.

The show’s buzz turned to concern in May when Pinfield announced that he was checking himself into a rehabilitation center. “I’ve got two great daughters who need me,” he says. “I’ve been honored at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, picked by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to interview all the Rolling Stones together for the first time in 35 years, chosen to induct Marconi into the New Jersey Hall of Fame, been parodied, animated, and even clay-mated.

“I’ve been very lucky. I know that so many great things could be ahead of me.”

— Bill Glovin

For a full-length interview with Pinfield, visit ur.rutgers.edu/magazine.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK ROMANENKO; GETTY IMAGES

A Theatrical Education

Living with AIDS. Accepting drinks from strangers. Coming out. Interracial dating. These are among the themes tackled in skits performed by Unity Theatre, a health-education group based at Rutgers–Newark that offers course credit to 15 to 20 students as they help guide classmates through difficult social situations while promoting tolerance and health awareness. The students and Rutgers–Newark Health Services professionals meet Friday evenings during the academic year to discuss and write short skits; they stage them at Bradley Hall Theater at the end of the fall and spring semesters. Following each performance, the students remain in character to answer questions and explain the reasoning behind their actions depicted onstage, whether it was failing to practice safe sex or engaging in binge-drinking. “We want to reach as many people as possible and teach them what we know,” says Janelle Zapata, a junior at Rutgers–Newark.

— Michelle Soriano SCILS’09