



Radio Days

WRSU, the radio station of the Rutgers–New Brunswick Campus, celebrates its 60th birthday. Its illustrious alumni remember the heady times spinning discs.

In 1948, Harry S. Truman upset Thomas Dewey for president, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, and WRSU—the student-created and -operated radio station at 88.7 FM at Rutgers–New Brunswick—began transmitting its first programs from the basement of a dormitory. The maiden broadcast took place on April 26, featuring Charles Brookwell’s interview with Rutgers president Robert C. Clothier. It was the beginning of a following among students, many of whom still identify their fondest recollections of Rutgers with the songs played by WRSU, 60 years old this spring. And the lone perch inside the sound booth has been the auditioning stage for aspiring broadcasters, lured by the freedom to explore the fringes of the ever-expanding pop culture. It’s a tradition among burgeoning disc jockeys that continues to this day.

“The idea was to create a station that could sell ads to businesses and make a few bucks,” says the 86-year-old Brookwell RC’49, the station’s founder and first general manager. The next year, a classmate’s father, who was a music executive, donated 7,000 records to the station. WRSU was on its way, offering a programming mix of music, sports, news, and public affairs that now is underwritten by the university and other donors while being noncommercial. But, it’s the music that still stands out in the memories of listeners and disc jockeys alike. Six deejays spanning six decades of music, some having since enjoyed illustrious professional careers, remember their college radio days. — Bill Glovin

Harvey Hauptman: The 1950s

In 1948, still the golden age of radio, Harvey Hauptman RC’51 applied to be a salesman at WRSU but was talked into auditioning as an announcer. “Before I knew it,” he says, “I was on the air and had the broadcasting bug.”

WRSU—which broadcast until 1971 from the third floor of today’s Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life before moving to its current home within the Rutgers Student Center—recruited theater students to present live drama. Michael Shaara RC’51, who authored the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Killer Angels*, hosted a comedy program. “Announcers worked in a room the size of a closet,” says Hauptman. “We had no central radio tower. The signal was transmitted by placing 10-watt transmitters in fraternity houses and Rutgers buildings.”

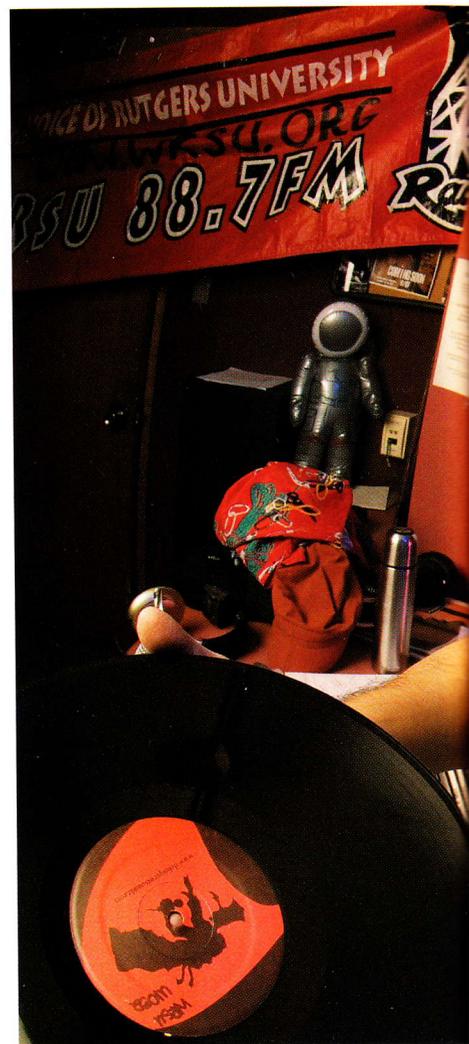
Hauptman played the popular swing

and big band orchestras and vocalists such as Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Frank Sinatra. “It was the beginning of the bebop era, too; giants like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were just starting,” says Hauptman, for 33 years a radio announcer at WCBS in New York. “I still listen to them.”

Ron Miskoff: The 1960s

During his sophomore year, deejay Ron Miskoff RC’69 won a WOR-FM contest to attend a showcase of new bands performing in New York City. “I saw the Doors, who were then unknown,” says Miskoff. “They were great, and I started playing their songs. It felt like I discovered them.”

Miskoff recalls that advertising revenue created a budget surplus that allowed members of the student news team to travel all over the country to cover elections—a rare indulgence.



Miskoff, while visiting Pittsburgh to cover the Pennsylvania gubernatorial race, came to like the city so much that he went to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh.

The mid- to late-’60s was an exhilarating time. Deejays had license to play the new music of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Who, and of newcomers like Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin. “I was spinning Steve Lawrence and Vikki Carr records but also Bob Dylan and all the new music,” says Miskoff, a longtime journalist, formerly at the *Home News Tribune*. “It was a strange, interesting mix.”

Mark Chernoff: The 1970s

If you told Mark Chernoff RC’74 RBS’76 in 1975 that he would become



Ed Wong: The 2000s

"I have been doing my radio show longer than I haven't," says 43-year-old Ed Wong ENG'89, SCILS'89, GSNB'93. Known as "El Hombre Solo," he has hosted an eclectic WRSU music program on Saturday mornings since 1985, when he was a sophomore at Rutgers.

one of the most influential people in radio over the next 30 years, he would have laughed. Despite spending more time at WRSU than in class, it took him two years to find a job in radio, at WNNJ-AM in Newton, while studying for an M.B.A. at Rutgers–Newark. Several radio jobs later, he became music director at WNEW-FM and program director at K-Rock during the reign of shock jock Howard Stern. Today, he has big roles as vice president of sports programming at CBS Radio and operations manager at WFAN-AM.

"I joined the sports department at WRSU, but what I really wanted was to spin records," says Chernoff. "Eventually I got to do that. I was the first one on the air when the station moved to FM in 1974. I played 'Roundabout' by Yes."

WRSU required that Chernoff and all deejays follow a format, but they had some artistic wiggle room. "The early- to mid-1970s were exciting times: Vietnam was winding down; the civil rights movement was still growing; the music scene was exploding. I knew then that radio was what I wanted to do."

Matt Pinfield: The 1980s

Matt Pinfield just wouldn't go away. In the late 1970s, when WRSU was conducting a pledge drive, Pinfield, all of 16, and a friend gave money, which allowed them on the air to spin records. "The station liked me, and I kept doing shows—until they realized I was a high school kid from East Brunswick," he says.

Not to be denied, Pinfield entered Rutgers in 1981 and soon had a show.

Later, as music director, he produced records for New Jersey bands and was a well-known deejay working New Brunswick clubs. "It was a great time," he says. "New wave and punk were becoming big, and we played whatever we wanted." The New Brunswick Campus was also a regular stop for bands, and Pinfield interviewed top musicians: Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead, Henry Rollins of Black Flag, and Billy Idol.

In 1984, Pinfield left Rutgers and became music and program director of WHTG-FM in Eatontown, a popular rock station. In 1993, he went to MTV as an on-air host and music programming manager. He took an executive role at Columbia Records in 2001. But now he's also back to his first love: hosting shows on commercial and satellite radio. And the 46-year-old music junkie knows he owes Rutgers, big time: "Without WRSU, I would never have had my career."

Ned Norland: The 1990s

"Becoming a deejay today really isn't a career if you are really passionate about radio," says Ned Norland RC'01, who, from 1996 to 2002, spent hundreds of hours on the air and served as music director at WRSU. Commercial radio is so formatted that most deejays are little more than robots, believes Norland, who now works at the University of North Carolina and volunteers at the Duke University radio station.

"A group of us would meet every week at WRSU and create a playlist of a few hundred CDs," he says. "During broadcasts, deejays had to play half that list and were free to pick their own music for the other half. I became more into turning listeners onto music they might enjoy hearing, rather than just playing cuts I liked."

Having been inspired to work in college radio after listening to WPRB-FM in Princeton while in high school, Norland had indie rock, jazz, and classical music shows at WRSU, which doubled as a great place to do homework. "I wrote many papers while on the air," he says. ■