McLendon

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KILT/Monterey, KTSK/San Antonio, WAKY/Louisville, KEEL/Shreveport, KABLAM & FM/San Francisco, WWWW/DeKalb, WNYB (later WNUS)/Chicago, WYSL/Buffalo, KADS/Los Angeles (now KOST), and KELF-AM & TV/EI Pase.

Many Firsts

During his many years in broadcasting, McLendon was recognized for accomplishing many firsts. He was one of the original pirate radio broadcasters, setting up Radio Norde off the coast of Sweden. He brought Top 40 to KLIF in 1957; put on the first Good Music station to become number one in a market (KABL); and developed the first all-news presentation at 50kW/Seattle/Tijeras-San Diego, targeted to the Los Angeles market. McLendon also did an all-ad format at KADS.

Perhaps the earliest example of McLendon's imagination and programming ability was the Liberty Network. Founded in 1947, Liberty amassed almost 500 affiliates until it was suddenly disbanded in 1962—making it the largest radio network up to that time.

Calling himself "The Old Scotsman," McLendon broadcast live recreations of baseball, football, and basketball play-by-play for the network, using sound effects blended with stats provided by a sports wire. The Liberty Network also grabbed the rights to Louisiana State and Miami University games, and McLendon's imagination was being heard the events live as they happened.

Developing Top 40

The net's theater-of-the-mind programming ended when the major league clubs, who were being paid, withdrew Liberty's rights on the contention that the broadcasts were interfering with minor league attendance. Losing baseball was too much of a financial burden, and the network closed.

McLendon was not credited with starting Top 40 (that's attributed to Todd Storrs at KOWH/Omaha). But in R&R's 1977 "The Top 40 Story," it's said, "I guess if I take any credit at all for Top 40, it would not be originating it but having developed it into a modern day version." Sadly, Storrs did not live long enough to see the full fruits of his format blossom across the nation.

Bart McLendon, managing partner of the McLendon Companies, talked with R&R about his father. "I ran the (radio) chain for several years, but Dad never did get out of the day-to-day operations. He could no more let go of his grip of things than he could pick up the Sears building with two hands. He loved it too much."

A Programmer First

"He was a businessman, but a programmer first and foremost, as he possessed a marvelous feel for people and what turned them on," the younger McLendon continued. "He was a hard taskmaster, and yet no one ever worked harder than Gordon McLendon. He'd save it all up, fly into KLIF, call up the PD, and they'd spend the next 12 hours talking about programming—with the PD crawling out of the room on his hands and knees. No one ever forgot that he owned those stations."

Bart went on to recall some personal facts about his father: "The most enjoyable times of his life were spent behind the mike as a sportscaster. He was considering a return to air sportscasting as recently as April 1986. "There are so many things I'd say, but most of all I feel proud to have been his son. He was a fabulous father, even though he was hard to deal with. There was never a question at any time in my life that he loved me and cared for me, and that there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for me."

Idea Man

Chuck Blore of Biere & Richman worked with Gordon at KLIF, KTSF, and KELF. "It was his idea to go local, marry the music ideas of Todd Storrs, which brought Top 40 into being," Blore remembered. "Gordon had a policy book, and everyone had to read it. He was a collection of memos, thoughts, and rules. It was all based on the idea of competing with TV, which was taking all of the bright radio people."

"I became enamored with him and his ideas about radio, as he was not only an incredible writer but a communicator," Blore added. "I used those ideas as my foundation when I left to program KFWB/Los Angeles in 1958. Anyone who is in radio today is doing what they are doing only because of Gordon McLendon's genius."

Shamrock Radio Division President Bill Clark recalled, "When Gordon and I worked together for five or six years at KARL, I was either a GSM or a GM, so we didn't have the kind of camaraderie that we had in programming. He gave us great facilities and wonderful ideas."

Clark continued, "Gordon's greatest contribution to radio was his injection of a tremendous amount of life and spirit into a medium many had turned their backs on. Both he and Todd were like magnets, drawing talent which got the attention of listeners, advertisers, and the entire industry. Gordon was a showman and innovator. He gave many good people a chance to learn and develop. Many went on to own their own stations. Gordon did an impressive service to radio and to budding talent when both needed it so badly."

Ken Dowe worked with McLendon for five years. They started at KLIF as a jock, became PD, and then progressed to National Radio PD and cross paths all over. Many went on to own their own stations. Gordon did an impressive service to radio and to budding talent when both needed it so badly.

Jordan

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reports to President Monica Kycek, as documented. "We've been looking for someone who fully understands what Tommy Boy is and what it is not, but hadn't we preconceptions about how the job should be done. Jazzy has the right stuff."

Jordan left KAR. "My programming experience can only help, since I understand the problems that radio has to go through and how hard it is to maintain ratings. That's obviously going to influence our outlook in promoting Tommy Boy releases to radio."

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