

## A BROKEN RECORD

*By Fred Hobbs*

When someone asked if I play a musical instrument, I used to reply: “Yes, I play the phonograph.” Well, now you can’t use the joke. It doesn’t work with today’s devices to hear music called iTunes or MP3s and such. But, my answer is the equivalent because I can’t carry a tune and certainly don’t know how to play an instrument. But I do love music of many varieties. And, I had a role in the breaking of a musical record.

Consider me fortunate because for many of my earlier years, I had a large record library at my disposal as I worked as a radio disc jockey. I was exposed to a full range of music. Hosting a classical music program in which I learned it’s not pronounced “Prokofeef”, but Prokofiev; a country music show learning the sad tales of divorce, infidelity, prison life and untimely death in the songs performed by the likes of Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff and later Loretta Lynn and Johnny Cash. I also announced shows devoted strictly to waltzes, marches, Broadway and Hollywood show tunes, hymns, folk music, jazz and even polkas.

Most of my exposure to music, however, centered on the MOR (middle of the road) style of popular melodies. This was just before the advent of Top 40 formats which flourished in the rock and roll era and which morphed into whatever you may call today’s offerings so foreign to my aging ears.

This was the music of the so-called “Vanilla Generation”, the 1950s, the era when radio became such a pervasive influence on America’s taste in popular music only to be accentuated when rock and roll became king. It became especially important in the mid-50s to play the most popular tunes of the day on radio stations. The days of polkas and marches largely disappeared on the radio dial.

MOR highlighted vocalists...Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, Tony Bennett, Rosemary Clooney and groups which often came in the form of quartets...such as the Four Aces, the Brothers Four, the Ames Brothers, the Four Freshmen, the Chordettes and a couple of singing sister trios...the McGuires and Fontanes.

Another musical thread running through that period and acceptable in most MOR formats was a sprinkling of novelty tunes. As a child, long before being before the mike, I was crazy about crazy recordings. I had a full set of Spike Jones selections from “Cocktails for Two” to “All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth.” I may have been the only person on earth to have a recording by a group called the Hoosier Hot Shots of a ditty titled: “From the Indies to the Andes in His Undies.”

So, I managed to sneak some of those rib-tickling gems into my daily MOR show at the Boulder radio station where I worked. A fellow DJ at the station and I decided to see if we could make one of those novelties a top ten hit in the Boulder market. We chose “Water Can’t Quench the Fire of Love” a corny duet by normally sane songstresses Helen O’Connell and Giselle

McKenzie. We vowed to keep playing it until it became a hit. So, everyday we featured the tune on our respective shows. We started getting requests from listeners, especially teens and pre-teens.

A decidedly non-teenager, our 50-something radio station owner, also had heard the song...over and over. One day he came into the control room after I had just played the would-be hit and said simply: "Give me that record."

I knew what record and promptly handed it over.

Sadly or maybe not, as radio and show biz types like to say, it never hit the charts. But, a record was broken. That record. Into a million pieces scattered on the radio station floor!