

# Morning madness rocks Eugene

Decibels, DJ's swell  
KZEL's share of  
rock 'n' roll audience

**L**ights flash — needles rebound on audio-level dials... Dan Clark frantically adjusts knobs, cues a record on one of the pair of turntables, and flips on a microphone as the sound of the Marshall Tucker Band fades.

In rushes a spindly gray-haired Granny who knocks dozing Dave Kanner upside the head with her beaded black purse. Kanner cringes under the onslaught.

Meanwhile, Hardly Worthit circles Eugene in a helicopter, announcing his amazement at all the cars down there, and gunning for the competition's eye in the sky.

And somewhere on this planet intrepid newsman Joe Mama is interviewing a wino who at one time was married to the sister of Alexander Haig's sixth grade English teacher.

Sounds like psychodrama — or at best a play that could only be titled "Drive-time FM Rock Radio as Performed by the Inmates of the Oregon State Mental Hospital for the Chronically Strange."

This is a fairly typical morning show for Clark and Dave Kanner on Eugene's *nonpareil* KZEL-FM.

Kanner is the news director for KZEL and KBDF-AM, KZEL's sister station. Kanner has been at KZEL since August 1980, when the station management noted his "obvious talent" and hired him. Born and raised in New York City, a 1976 graduate of Carnegie Mellon Institute with a communications degree, Kanner has mostly derisive memories of his past radio experience.

He broke into radio at a station in Bel Aire, Ohio and "burned-out" after stints in Charlottesville and "Fayette-Nam," N.C., which Kanner says he hated.

Clark is new to Eugene and KZEL, having arrived from KREM in Spokane, Wash. five months ago. Clark has had the difficult job of replacing Johnny Young, a longtime KZEL fixture who went to KZAP in Sacramento, Calif.

But in the five weeks Clark has been on the air, listeners have come to accept his particular weirdness. Recent ratings show KZEL's morning share and cumulative ratings of the Eugene audience significantly up.



Kanner and Clark file another day's tape.



Dave Kanner (left), KZEL's news director, and Dan Clark prepare for a newscast and, below, relax in the station's record library.

**T**he characters Granny Whipswitch, Hardly Worthit, and Joe Mama, the Megaphone Newsreel, Punt Counterpunch, and a rather fractured Horoscope reading are features that have made Clark and Kanner's morning show "Breakfast with the Beatles" a local hit.

Kanner does many of the voices of the characters and has a particular fondness for some. "I guess you can say Joe Mama represents my alter-ego," he says.

Characters such as Whipswitch are thought out in advance, but developed on the air. Clark and Kanner write the entire show a day in advance. Clark writes much of the material at night.

"But the most important thing is the music," Clark says. "Nobody wants to hear us yak."

The telephone line lights up and a slurry-voiced caller says, "Hey man, could you play AC/DC's *For Those About to Rock?*"

"We'll try," Clark replies.

"Hey, later on man," the caller says.

KZEL relies on a play list of the top groups and albums compiled by a service in Atlanta, Georgia. They use the Abrams format which maintains a list of some 300 tracks to be aired. KZEL, as older listeners recall, used to be more "free form" FM rock, with a more spontaneous musical selection.

The Abrams format is an attempt to structure, Clark says. The free-form style is "not homogenous throughout the day."

Clark slips on headphones and Kanner disappears into an adjacent studio as the Byrds' "Eight Miles High" ends.

"Classic Byrds — Eight Miles High, that's pretty high. It's 9:17 and if you want to know your horoscope for today give us a call," Clark says.

He plugs in two commercials as the phone lines light up.

"KZEL," Clark answers. "You want to know your horoscope? What's your name? Tina. Hold on, Tina, until the commercials are over."

While the commercials are running Clark is leaping up to the rows of records, shelving those already played, selecting another bunch. "Are you still there, Tina?" he calls to the speaker-phone. She answers yes, shyly. Clark settles back on his stool and cues an album track and the morning featured artist — Van Halen.

"Okay... we have Tina on the line and she wants to hear her horoscope. When's your birthday?" Tina's a Gemini.

"Once in a lifetime planetary influences mean you shouldn't kiss anything with lockjaw," Clark reads from a script.

There's a moment of silence — then Tina laughs. "I don't have any trouble writing material," Clark says off the air. "I'm pretty weird sometimes."

Kanner wears a button that illustrates the way both feel about the morning show.

"I am the person your mother warned you about."



"Hey man, could you play AC/DC's 'For Those About To Rock?'"



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