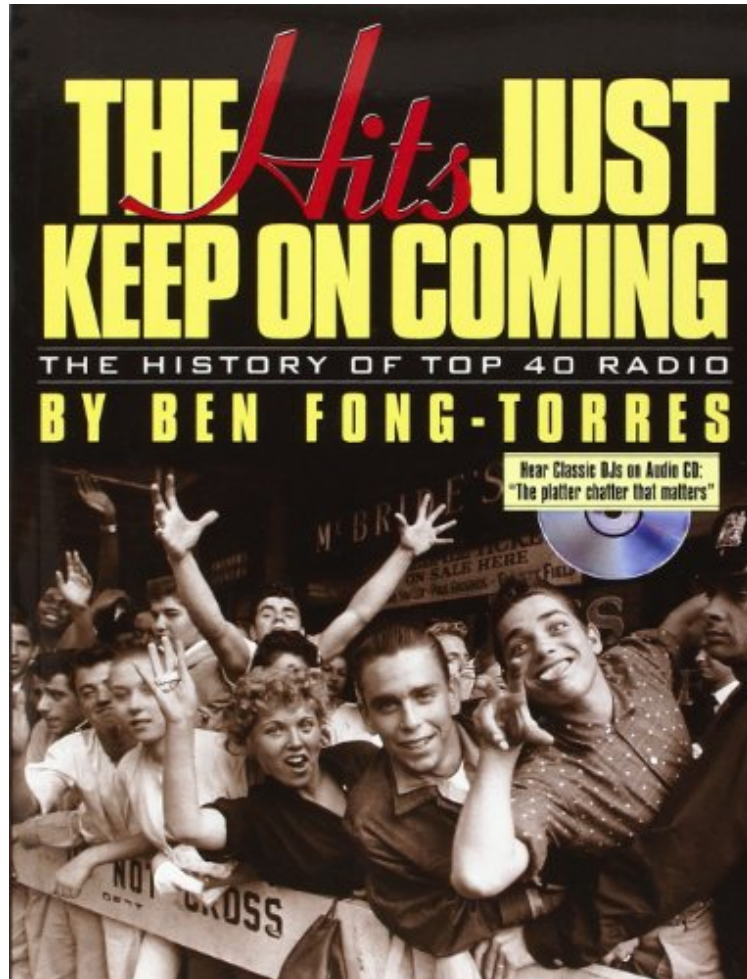


[E-BOOK] The Hits Just Keep on Coming: The History of Top 40 Radio

The Hits Just Keep on Coming: The History of Top 40 Radio

Ben Fong-Torres

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Ben Fong-Torres : The Hits Just Keep on Coming: The History of Top 40 Radio before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hits Just Keep on Coming: The History of Top 40 Radio:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Ben Fong-Torres has his favorite DJ's and almost all of them are from the ...By evan torchAs seems to be true of some other reviewers who were less than thrilled with this book, I too have trouble elaborating on the problems, but here are my primary issues with it:Ben Fong-Torres has his favorite DJ's and almost all of them are from the late '50's and involved with promoting RB. While that's definitely a substantial basis for the eventual wild success of Top 40 playlists. Frankly, while many many singers and groups were black, I lived through that era in the south, picking up WABC or WLS and the songs were NOT RB as would be heard on RB stations, almost never in quantity and quality.However, Ben drones on and on and on about this, perhaps for PC reasons. Even when he doesn't, most of his readers wanted to hear about the DJ's and power-house stations from 1964

to the beginning of the 1980's, NOT occult DJ's who moved between owners featured as innovators. This book is a good effort, just too dry and factual in its interests on station management and the "crazy" DJ's of the mid fifties. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Memories are made of this

By Ricardo Mio

If you grew up in the second half of the 20th century, Top 40 Radio was important to you. It was your friend--intimate, human, entertaining--and a means of connecting with youth culture across the country. And, according to Ben Fong-Torres, the author of "The Hits Just Keep On Coming" it did as much or more to foster racial integration than any legislative act of Congress. Fong-Torres couples exhaustive research with a gift for story-telling. As he tells it, in the 1950s radio was in dire need of an overhaul. All the major radio networks--NBC, CBS and the like--were selling off their stations left and right and moving into the Next Big Thing--television. And all the advertising money and major talent was following their lead. Radio was being relegated to the minor leagues of local broadcasting. In other words, radio was dead. Or was it? While television was sinking its hooks into American culture, something was happening in local radio around the country. In Cleveland, DJ Alan Freed was discovering a generation of white kids who couldn't get enough "race music" (a.k.a. rhythm and blues). In Los Angeles, Hunter Hancock was making the same discovery. Meanwhile, in Omaha, Nebraska, the program director at KOWH named Todd Storz had noticed that people in the local diner kept punching up the same songs on the juke box, over and over again. Even after the dinner crowd cleared out, the waitress punched up the same songs again. When he asked her why, she replied simply: "I like `em." That gave Storz an idea. With the waitress's help, he wrote down the titles of all the records they'd been hearing. Since the less popular records, although available in the box, had received not a single nickel, the list was short. Storz returned to his station, instructed his DJs to dispense with playing country, jazz, and classical, and to play only the songs on his list with special emphasis on repeated playing of the ones at the top of the list. That way, anyone tuning in to KOWH at any time was liable to hear their favorite pop tunes. KOWH, which had been last in the ratings, was soon Omaha's number one station. At the same time, a program director named Gordon McLendon down in Dallas had made the same discovery. He expanded the station's playlist to 40 tunes, added special promotions and jingles which he coupled with less talk and more music, and called the format "Top 40 Radio." Ratings soared, advertising dollars poured in, and before long both Storz and McLendon bought more radio stations and expanded their concept into other cities. More stations jumped on board, and within a few short years Top 40 Radio was a coast to coast phenomenon. With less air time to speak, disc jockeys were forced to talk faster and before long supercharged radio personalities like New York's Murray the K were ruling the airways. At first, Top 40 Radio had little to do with teens. It was simply disc jockeys following a tight playlist. Then, in 1956, Elvis Presley performed on television for the first time. His label, RCA Records, did the unprecedented by releasing five Presley singles all at once, which climbed to the top the charts and crowded out the likes of Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford, Perry Como, and Doris Day. At the same time, the "race music" played by Alan Freed (now in New York City) and Hunter Hancock in Los Angeles (and in cities like Memphis and New Orleans) was finding a national audience among teens and began cracking the Top 40 playlist. Advertisers got the message and began redirecting their pitch to the growing teenage market. Suddenly, radio was Big again. By 1960, the number-one stations in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, and Los Angeles were all Top 40 and local DJs were the new stars of the airway. One of them was Dick Clark, who also hosted a national television show from his home base in Philadelphia. In Los Angeles, meanwhile, Top 40 Radio was undergoing yet another overhaul by a failed DJ-turned program director named Bill Drake. If Top 40 Radio seemed frantic at times, Drake made it more so. In order to play more music, he shortened the playing time of records to around two-minutes and aired fewer advertising spots. When Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys arrived at KHJ "Boss Angeles" one afternoon with his newest single--"Good Vibrations"--the DJ working at the time said he couldn't play it because it was too long. In order to get permission, the DJ called the program director who in turn called Bill Drake (who was out on the golf course somewhere). Finally, back down the chain of command, Drake gave his blessing and the DJ was allowed to debut the Beach Boys' next big single, despite being over three minutes long. Then, like some pied piper, Drake spread "Boss Radio" from station to station around the country, from Los Angeles to San Francisco, to Detroit, Boston, Memphis, and finally to New York City. In every city "Boss Radio" took over the airwaves--except in New York, where WABC and WMCA had the Top 40 market locked up. Why did it fail in New York? WABC's "Cousin Brucie" Morrow offered this explanation. "To me, what's wrong with consultants (like Chuck Blore) is that they're strangers, they're out-of-towners. They may know their area . . . but I don't think they understand New York. Every market has its individual spirit and feeling." With FM radio on the rise, by 1968 Bill Drake had more than New York to worry about. FM was "the Next Big Thing" and mirrored what was happening in the market place. Kids were no longer buying singles but albums, and FM radio was playing them. The industry was changing. FM DJ's weren't frantic ravers but objective voices of reason who played entire album without commercial interruption. With its wider frequencies, FM sounded better and could be heard in stereo. AM had no response, and innovators like Bill Drake knew it. They switched Top 40 from AM to FM but never with the success they had once enjoyed. Radio was still Big, but from 1970 onward, it was no longer ruled by the Top 40 format. Now, some forty years later, Top 40 Radio continues, but like everything else in radio it has become a niche industry, catering to a small but dedicated group of listeners. Fong-Torres concludes: "Top 40 Radio can last forever--especially if people realize, as the format's forefathers did, that teenagers

and young adults want only a few things in life: a sense of belonging, a sense of identity, and, socially, a sense of what's happening . . . and no matter the onslaught of changing technology and the resultant myriad entertainment choices, radio remains unique in its ability to cater to the local community."0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Where The Hits Were Made...And PlayedBy Bill SlocumAn account of U.S. pop radio's heyday from the 1950s to the 1980s, "The Hits Just Keep On Coming" winds up being as personality-fueled as the medium it chronicles - to a fault.For author Ben Fong-Torres, the story of Top 40 radio is best explained with capsule biographies of its most successful disc jockeys, folks like Cousin Brucie, Wolfman Jack, Murray the K, the Real Don Steele, and Casey Kasem, exemplars of the funny one-liner, of reading ad copy like they really believed it, and the art of "hitting the post", which meant a spoken intro that stopped just as the vocals on the record you were spinning kicked in.But of course it wasn't just the jocks that made Top 40 radio. It was the music they played. Top 40 was an amalgam of musical styles, from classic pop of the Sinatra ilk to country to soul to novelty records to disco to rock of various stripes. Here "Hits" falls short. It tells you more about the people spinning the records than the records they were spinning."The greatest DJ is the one who can live within the formula," he quotes Buffalo, NY jock Dick Biondi, also known as The Screamer, "and make it sound not only happy and interesting, but as if he is producing and pulling the music all by himself."Fong-Torres gets a lot of good quotes from his interviews, not only from Biondi but Dick Clark, Howard Clark, Russ Syracuse, Bill Ballance, etc. If I had grown up on the West Coast in the 1960s instead of the East Coast in the 1970s, I would have been in hog heaven. "Cousin" Brucie Morrow does appear, the former WABC jock who reveals himself still holding a ridiculous grudge against Wolfman Jack well after the latter's death.At the core of Fong-Torres book is the tension between two rival styles of Top 40 radio, that of Chuck Blore's "color radio" of the late 1950s and early 1960s, where personality was king, and Bill Drake's "boss radio" format which dominated by the mid-1960s, which put the emphasis on pushing music and radio station call letters. Obviously the jocks for the most part speak more highly of the Blore approach, but Fong-Torres admirably gives both sides their due. The best chapter features a comparison of how an hour of radio time was broken down under both formats.The chapters feel very loosely organized, however. It seems like Fong-Torres couldn't decide whether he wanted a coffee-table book or a more scholarly history, so it ends up being written somewhere in the middle, with sidebars that don't always seem to connect to the chapters. The chronology goes back and forth, with Alan Freed rubbing shoulders with Gary Owens. Fong-Torres "rockist" leanings as a Rolling Stone editor come out a lot, too; he has a hard time concealing his contempt for "middle-of-the-road" music even when that was a median strip for the Top 40 format from its beginning to its end.Ultimately, I missed reading more about the music, how it affected what the DJs were about, and how it changed with the times. Published in 1998, the book also holds out hope that Top 40 radio could make a comeback, which has not turned out to be the case. In that way "Hits" is as much a casualty of the times as its subject.One cool bonus feature is a compact disc with airchecks of 16 Top 40 jocks, including Freed ripping the movie "Blackboard Jungle" for negatively portraying teenagers, Bobby Ocean explaining in the 1970s that Don Henley, Glenn Frey, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr have formed a new band called "The Beagles", and Gary Owens holding you in his "strong Crowell-Collier hairy-like arms" for a goodbye kiss.The best and worst thing to say about this book is it left me wanting more.

(Book). This lively blast from the past peels back the many layers of the Top 40 phenomenon: the DJs, fans, singles, jingles, dedications, contests, requests and more. The book features interviews with such renowned radio personalities and programmers as Casey Kasem, Dick Clark, Wolfman Jack, "Cousin Brucie" Morrow, Gary Owens and many others, and includes an exclusive link to online media with "airchecks" rare recordings from 16 legendary DJs on actual Top 40 broadcasts so that readers can hear the crazed, creative and compelling voices that made Top 40 so memorable. Also includes lots of fantastic black-and-white photos to help readers put faces to the voices they know so well, a bibliography and index, and a special Top of the Pops section featuring the Number One records of Top 40 radio from 1957 through 1997 as calculated by the staff of Gavin.

"A reminder of how good radio used to be, and a heck of a good read." -- Seattle Times, December 6, 1998"Ben Fong-Torres, of Rolling Stone magazine and Gavin Report fame, has managed to capture the essence of the golden age of Top 40 radio, a phenomenon that, as Ben points out, 'has gone through 45 revolutions per minute for 45 years.' It's a fast-paced book, just like the format, rich in historical detail and anecdotes about how the Top 40 format has managed to 'stay forever young.'...You feel like you're in direct contact with the way many of Top 40's philosophical roots were formed (and why they've spilled over into other formats today.)" -- Programmer's Digest, December 1998"Perfect for those interested in radio, rock 'n' roll, and good times." -- The Citizens' Voice, December 12, 1998"Tops the charts as one of the most user-friendly and colorful accounts....Recommended for anyone interested in the history of radio, this is certainly an excellent supplementary volume for courses focusing on broadcast programming and its role in culture." -- Communication Booknotes Quarterly, Spring 1999"You'll listen to radio with new ears and new appreciation when you're done with this one." --"Cosmik Debris" webzine, February 1999About the AuthorBen Fong-Torres, perhaps best-known as a former award-winning reporter and editor at Rolling Stone, was a DJ on the

acclaimed rock station KSAN for nine years. He also wrote and narrated a syndicated radio special, "San Francisco: What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been," which won a Billboard Award for Broadcast Excellence. Former managing editor of Gavin - the first publication to chart Top 40 hits for radio - Fong-Torres has written for dozens of magazines including Esquire and GQ.