

INSIDE RADIO

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Loyal Armenian

by Mike Kinosian, Personality Editor

Loyalty is a cornerstone trait that can be easily ascribed to Bob Kevoian.

It applies to such diverse things as the relationship he enjoys with his on-air partner of more than 20 years; the baseball team he rooted for when he was a kid; and to his family and heritage.

The Premiere Radio Networks' morning drive (6-10am) "Bob (Kevoian) & Tom (Griswold) Show" crossed the 150 affiliate threshold several months ago.

Nationally syndicated since 1995, the Indianapolis-based program has scored four Marconi Awards. A Bob & Tom sponsored monster truck debuted at the U.S. Hot Rod Monster Jam (1-29-2005) at Indianapolis' RCA Dome and won the racing event.

Complete Accident

Eventual numerous accolades and considerable national success notwithstanding, Southern California native Kevoian never envisioned a radio career. "It was a total fluke," he succinctly states. "My brother and sister were both members of The Young Americans. When my sister was in the group, I was asked to help them out with their sound. I'd built a little recording studio in my house and knew how to run equipment."

A Young Americans' show at the famed Beverly Hilton Hotel would be the last for the group's retiring sound engineer. "I watched what he did and the next thing I knew I was running sound for all their shows," Kevoian notes. "I toured with them for three years and have been in every state except Alaska and Hawaii."

The group did summer theater in Petoskey, a small community in the Northwest section of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. "It's such a far cry from the maddening crowds of Los Angeles," remarks Kevoian. "People in Los Angeles and Manhattan sometimes don't realize that other places exist in the United States. I fell in love with the area and decided to stay there."

Absence Of Lofty Aspirations

That being the case, the next logical step was ascertaining

how to get work and – somewhat curiously - Kevoian's first stop was a radio station. "I wanted to see if they needed someone to spin records for their on-air [personalities]," he recalls. "That's how [little] I knew about radio. The [GM] told me they did it themselves and asked me if I wanted to be [an air talent]. He gave me some AP copy, had me record it in the production room and hired me the next day."

That was in 1979 and the immediately likeable Angelino hasn't taken any detours.

But 25 years ago, even Kevoian would admit he was just a young man behind a microphone. "The only thing I had was a little direction from my then PD, Tom Chorley," he remarks. "He was the first person who showed me what radio was all about. I never heard people like Don Imus or Dick Purtan [please see InsideRadio.com, 12-4-2003]. I heard of them, but was more familiar with the Boss Jocks I grew up with [on 93 – KHJ/Los Angeles] and Casey Kasem on [Los Angeles' KRLA]."

Quite clearly, the last thing this radio novice would try to do would be to imitate other air talents, because as Kevoian jests, "I was just trying to pronounce cities correctly. I had no aspirations of becoming anybody. I thought it was kind of cool to be able to do a radio program."

Beautiful Downtown Petoskey

That first industry job at Beautiful Music WMBN/Petoskey – the calls stood for "Michigan's Beautiful North" – lasted until 1982, when Kevoian joined cross-town WJML. "That's where Bob & Tom teamed up as a regular morning show. "We were there for 12-18 months," Kevoian recalls. "Someone heard a tape of ours. We went to [WFBQ/Indianapolis] and have been there ever since. For the most part, I've only worked in two cities in my radio career, which is pretty incredible."

The pairing of one of syndicated radio's most successful morning shows came when radio personality-by-day Kevoian moonlighted as a bartender at Harbor Springs, MI's Bar Harbor. "In small town radio, you needed to supplement your income by doing anything," the Long Beach State University alum states. "Tom came in after a J. Geils concert at Castle Farms in [nearby] Charlevoix and ordered a drink. At the end of the bar was another guy who worked in Country radio."

The two radio talents were talking about the inferior nature of their respective stations' cart machines. "Tom overheard us and asked if we worked in radio and I told him I was doing middays," Kevoian remembers. "Tom said he did a

year of radio in Florida, but was out of work and wanted to visit the station and look at the trades. Two days later, he was hired as my PD; it was pretty wild."

Still Friendly

Whether the stories are apocryphal or not, some of the better known "Golden Era" radio and comedy teams virtually despised each other. But Kevoian maintains, "Tom and I need each other to sustain a career. Having a friendship is just as important and we actually happen to like each other. He's been my pal for a long time and we've never had an argument in all this time."

One thing Kevoian readily admits is that it's considerably easier for him to work with a partner than doing things solo. "When you tell a joke, you get an immediate response," he remarks. "Having someone in the [studio] is a lot more enjoyable. We've really been pretty fortunate and have outlasted a lot of our friends' marriages. We just get along and make each other laugh in the morning."

If there's a decision to be made over certain things, it's pretty rare that this long-running duo will disagree. "It's either both of us saying something is a great idea or we'll both think something sounds stupid," Kevoian points out. "It's pretty incredible that two guys who come from two different areas of the country and who were raised in two totally different backgrounds can think alike and have very similar points of view. I think it was just fate that we were supposed to be together. I don't know why it happened, but it did."

Staying Current

In the time Bob & Tom have been at WFBQ/Indianapolis, the Clear Channel Classic Rocker has had, by Kevoian's estimation, about a dozen different owners and even more PDs. "It's pretty amazing that we've outlasted all these people," he declares. Bob & Tom's approximately three-dozen comedy/song parody CDs have generated over five million dollars for a variety of national charities. "We started syndicating the morning show when Frank Wood owned the station. It was when Clear Channel bought [WFBQ that Clear Channel-owned] Premiere became involved and they've been wonderful to us."

There's not been a lot of difference between the wakeup show's local origin and what can be heard in the various locales. "Most of the stuff we talked about when we did the show prior to syndication was national news and stuff that everyone knew about," Kevoian maintains. "We'd pick up USA Today and make fun of whatever was in the headlines, and we do the same thing now."

The show's 18 minutes-an-hour of break-time consists of 12 minutes of commercials - the rest is local content. "We talk about things like how the [NFL's Indianapolis Colts and NBA's Indianapolis Pacers] are playing," says the mustachioed Kevoian, who does most of his show prep in late afternoon. "I watch as much news as I can. I read all the magazines like Newsweek, Time and Entertainment Weekly just to try to keep abreast of what's happening in the world. That's all I need for prep. A friend of mine and I write bits and songs, while Tom writes with someone else."

Maintaining The Element Of Surprise

It's actually a rare occurrence when Kevoian and Columbia University grad Griswold collaborate together. "We write separately because, when we air it, we can surprise each other and get a genuine laugh," maintains Kevoian, who usually puts in three preparation hours each day. "Tom and I both love being surprised by comedy. That's probably one thing that's made our relationship so good. We don't work with each other eight-ten hours a day. If I'm recording in a studio, I make sure Tom doesn't come in so he doesn't hear anything [and vice versa]. A lot of our prep time is never done together."

Keeping things fresh even after so many years is easy, Kevoian opines, because, "There's so much that goes on every day. It's enjoyable to go in, have a cup of coffee and talk with the gang in the [studio]. I can't think of a more enjoyable way to make a living."

Offered jobs on numerous occasions in larger cities than their Indianapolis base, Kevoian talks up the virtues of David Letterman's hometown. "It's a great city - the only things we're lacking are the ocean and Disney World. Everything else is here."



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Numerous Offers

The first night Bob & Tom came to Indianapolis from Petoskey, they were sitting in a rotating restaurant on top of the Hyatt Regency Hotel. "We were slowly spinning around as we saw the entire area of Indianapolis and thought the city was huge," Kevoian declares. "At that time, Tom didn't realize we were in a rotating restaurant and thought it was an earthquake. He grabbed the table and hung on. We were [apprehensive] about moving there, but when we became No. 1 in Indianapolis, I realized we'd made it and were as good as we thought we were. But I never expected that we'd go into syndication. This has been just a total surprise to me."

Not long after they signed a contract many years ago, Bob & Tom were approached by ABC Radio's KLOS/Los Angeles to do morning drive. It was a job they declined and Mark & Brian accepted. "Tom and I always honor our contracts," Kevoian explains. "It seems we get the offers after we've signed our contracts. We just tell the people that we appreciate the call, but are committed to where we are. Each time a new contract rolls around, we always remind ourselves that bigger isn't always better. I can't see us moving now. All our roots are pretty firmly planted here. We have families and it's hard to pick them up and move someplace else. I enjoy living here and don't see any reason to take off."

It's obviously impossible for the duo to visit each Premiere affiliate, but Kevoian notes, "We take our band out and play our silly songs to entertain as many people as we can. It's difficult to get out to the West coast, but I'd love to [visit] Fresno, where we have a great affiliate [Mondosphere Broadcasting Classic Rock KJFX - 'The Fox']. We might be able to travel every weekend, but would die of exhaustion."

Real Family Values

The reason Kevoian singles out Fresno in particular has to do with his heritage.

Fiercely proud of his Armenian roots and un-swayed by attempts to change his on-air moniker, Kevoian kept his family name and is instantly recognizable because of that in Fresno, one of the largest pockets for Armenian-Americans. "Believe it or not, many people think my last name is 'and Tom,'" Kevoian jokes. "I'm very proud of my heritage and my family. The last thing I was going to do was change my name. My brother's an actor and he, too, holds the Kevoian name. We're very proud of it."

A Tip Of The Cap

Many within the industry are aware of Bob & Tom by sight, but it's not always known which is which.

The easiest way to end any confusion is to simply note that Bob is the one who always wears the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball cap. The joke is the "L.A." stands for "Local Armenian."

But wearing the hat symbolizes more than identifying with the baseball team of his youth. It's an on-going connection with his father, who worked for the Dodgers for 25 years. "He started in 1958 when the team moved from Brooklyn," explains Kevoian. "Over the years, he eventually was promoted [from part-time usher] to being in charge of stadium employees."

The younger Kevoian fulfilled a dream held by so many other kids his age by spending the bulk of his childhood at the ballpark. "I started at [the Los Angeles Coliseum] when I was eight or nine years old and would take care of [Dodger outfielder] Wally Moon's uncle," he recalls. "His uncle was confined to a wheelchair and I'd roll him around the stadium to get him to the lavatory or get him a snack. I've always been a Dodgers fan and it was a great way to grow up. On billboards, some stations put us in their local teams' hat; I don't have a problem with that."

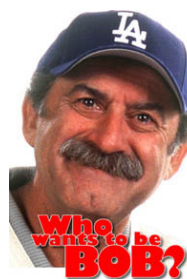
Award Winning Performance

The two longtime partners were again selected to co-host the NAB's Marconi Award presentations at the NAB Radio Show/San Diego in October 2004 and Kevoian confides that it was fun and he enjoyed it very much but, "I was scared to death. The entire National Association of Broadcasters is staring and expecting us to make them laugh. We had a couple of moments of silence that weren't for prayer, but I think we did all right. We wanted to [host] again because we had so much fun the first time and it was also a nice way to get a free meal."

It took the Premiere morning talents several weeks to work on their material. "The last thing you want to do is go up there and [ad-lib] the whole thing," Kevoian comments. "That would bore everybody watching you to tears."

More Fun Expected

A much better than average cook (especially when preparing ethnic delicacies), Kevoian foresees himself continuing his morning drive duties. "I'll be married [next month - April 2005] and things will move on from there," he points out. "I have no plans to look to do anything else. I see myself right here doing the same thing I'm doing now and enjoying every bit of it."



WHO: Bob Kevoian
WHAT: "Bob & Tom"
WHERE: Premiere Radio Networks
WHEN: Monday – Friday, 6-10am
HOW MANY AFFILIATES: Over 150

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