

The Buzzard rocks on in Gorman's memoir

By BARRY GOODRICH

When John Gorman first came to Cleveland to work for a new radio station, he noticed a dead pigeon on the windowsill outside of his room at the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel.

Little did he know that a bird of a different feather would dominate his life for the next 13 years.

Virtually unknown in 1973, WMMS would go on to become one of the most famous FM radio stations in America. And Gorman was at the center of it all, securing exclusive music, top on-air talent and a listening audience which would become legendary.

In his new memoir "The Buzzard," published by Cleveland's Gray & Co., Gorman takes us on a nostalgic, narcotic ride through the history of a station that broke some of music's top groups while leaving local competitors in the dust.

Long before Cleveland was named as the site for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, WMMS dubbed the city the Rock and Roll Capital. Gorman himself came up with the concept for the World Series of Rock concerts which drew as many as 86,000 people to Cleveland Municipal Stadium.

Those who grew up during The Buzzard years can recall the station, its disc jockeys and promotions as if it were yesterday.

Gorman's book takes us back to those glory days while providing an insider's look at what really went on behind the music.

Gorman's love of radio began in 1963, when he operated a radio station out of his family's South Boston home. A decade later, he was in a decidedly less hip city searching for some kind of identity.

A music director, program director and eventually operations manager of WMMS and sister station WHK, Gorman caught lightning in a bottle, turning an obscure FM (Find Me) station into a local (as well as national) treasure.

During its heyday, The Buzzard dominated all key demographic age groups in Cleveland radio. The Buzzard logo was the station's link to its listeners. Gorman paid local artist David Helton \$20 to come up with the original design and the rest is rock and roll history.

Gorman instinctively knew his on-air talent would have to be the best. Those of us in a certain age group remember Denny Sanders, Kid Leo, Matt the Cat, Len Goldberg, Betty Korvan, Jeff and Flash and Murray Saul as if they were cherished classmates.

Sanders was the laid-back guy with whom you could listen to music. Kid Leo was the street-smart hustler. Goldberg sounded like the voice of God, had He been



John Gorman takes us back to the glory days of Cleveland radio in his new memoir "The Buzzard," published by Cleveland's Gray & Co.

wearing earphones at the time.

And who could forget Saul, the mutton-chopped goofy uncle-type who intoned his "GOTTA GET DOWN" rants to start off each weekend.

The Buzzard was directly responsible for breaking many major acts such as Roxy Music, Southside Johnny, David Bowie, Ian Hunter, The Pretenders and Fleetwood Mac, not to mention a guy named Springsteen. WMMS and Bruce Springsteen became synonymous with The Boss making more Cleveland stops than the Lawson's Big-O. Springsteen and the E Street Band's classic Agora concert celebrating the station's 10th anniversary remains a classic to this day.

Gorman recalls Led Zeppelin (staying at Swingos) calling Korvan at the station to request some obscure songs. No problem. WMMS' extensive library covered all bases with rare live versions and imports.

If you were famous and making a visit to Cleveland, you probably ended up in the Buzzard studios to tape the station's signature station IDs. Celebrities as diverse as Lillian Carter, Don Pardo and Rodney Dangerfield let us all know that when they were in town, they listened to WMMS.

Gorman's book takes us back to our cars and the bars, to a time when music meant everything and The Buzzard never let us down.

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