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RADIO'S ROYALTY

Bob Grant gets National Hall of Fame nod

BY MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY • CORRESPONDENT • APRIL 27, 2008

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On author Arianna Huffington's Huffington Post Web publication, bloggers had a field day when WABC (770 AM) re-hired conservative talk-show host Bob Grant in September.

"WABC has wheeled the Grand Kleagle of hate radio, Bob Grant, out of a rest home for vitriolic, retrograde talk show hosts," wrote Huffington's "Off the Bus" blogger, Ken Bank. "After retiring last year from a rival station, Grant joins the network in a line-up that also includes wingnut stalwarts Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity."

Imagine what they'll say now that Grant's been nominated for the National Radio Hall of Fame.

Grant, formerly of Manalapan and Woodbridge, is up for the award in the "Local or Regional" category:

controversial radio, has been on the air for over 40 years, currently on WABC/New York," reads the nomination.

Balloting, which is open to the public via Internet at www.radiohof.org, begins on May 1 and runs until midnight July 15. The steering committee of the National Radio Hall of Fame will tabulate the results and announce the winner on July 21.

Grant is rather circumspect about the possibility of winning.

"I've been nominated twice before," he explains.

But he's been in good company, and was passed over in 2007 in favor of Jerry Coleman, the "Voice of the San Diego Padres."

"They can nominate all they want," says Grant. "It's getting elected that means something."

And what would it mean to the King of Conservative Talk Radio?

"What would it mean to me? Well, if my mother were still living, she'd be very proud."

Grant's typical irate critic is "a very matronly woman," he says.

"She will say, 'Mr. Grant, I'm going to see to it that you are removed from the airwaves.' I'll say, 'Ma'am, why do you want to do that?' 'I think you are a disgrace: rude, crude, and you have absolutely no manners. And I know because I listen every day.'

"Well, thank you very much, ma'am," I say. With people like you, I don't have to worry about going to work for a living.' They get very irate and hang up on me. And, guess what? I love it!"

Still, Grant bristles at some of the monikers laid on him, like the King of Hate Radio.

"Who's doing the hating, the people listening?" he challenges. "Anybody who listens to something they hate is a masochist, so why bother listening to something you hate? Is it the host? If the host is voicing the concerns of the audience, then who is the so-called hater?"



Radio personality Bob Grant says he misses his former haunt, the REO Diner in Woodbridge, since moving to the Jersey Shore in the 1990s. File photo

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And, Grant is practical about media barbs.

"I know one time The New York Post had me on the front page, back in 1992, with a host from WLIB. They tried to make the point that both of us worked for hate radio. But that's just a good way to get circulation."

shuns labels

Although such right-wing heavies as Hannity, Limbaugh and Curtis Sliwa attribute their success to Grant's help, Grant shuns the right-wing label.

"I don't follow a doctrinaire line. I have views that I don't believe can be categorized any one way. For example, I'm not supposed to be pro-choice (as a conservative), but I am as a result of a practical point of view. Do I actually encourage abortion? Who am I to encourage it or discourage it? Who am I? I believe that should be a private matter. Because I take that approach, some of my more conservative brethren disapprove."

I'm reminded of Grant's sign-off: "Your influence counts! Use it!"

Grant's independent positions haven't hurt his leadership. He is close to the hosts he has mentored, as a "fraternity," he says, noting the "chauvinistic" choice of words he has thrown down like a gauntlet.

At Grant's first big station, WBBM, a CBS affiliate in Chicago, the 78-year-old host says, "Back then there were only about 75 recognized telephone talk show hosts who were paid to give their opinions. Now everyone and his brother — and his sister, for that matter — are radio talk show hosts. I bet you're a radio talk show host, too." (He had me there.)

He finds this irritating and jokingly suggests there should be a test or licensing system for talk show hosts. Asked what the criteria might be, Grant surrenders: "If the public is entertained and the public listens, then he's successful."

Grant said he misses the REO Diner, since moving from Woodbridge to Manalapan in 1994. He now lives in Toms River.

While Grant has mentored others, his greatest influence was Jack Paar. Opening a fan letter from "my biggest idol — that he would be a listener and a fan of mine," Grant invited Paar to his studio, where Paar took photos. "That was one of the biggest thrills of my career."

Grant is getting called to prep for his 8 to 10 p.m. show, which will air as though he's at WABC in New York City, even though he's actually talking to me from WDBO's studios in Orlando, Fla., not far from his second home in Kissimmee.

I quickly ask how he handles the commute from his home in Toms River every night.

"Sitting in the back seat of a nice limousine reading all the papers I can so I am as informed as possible," he responds.

Those newspapers include The New York Times, the Daily News, the Star-Ledger and his favorite, the Asbury Park Press.

"I'm not saying that just to be nice," insists Grant. "When it comes to regional coverage, I don't think the Asbury Park Press can be surpassed."

And, on that note, we say goodbye.

Maureen Nevin Duffy created and hosted "Asbury Radio - The Radio Voice of Asbury Park," a weekly public affairs talk show at the City's WYGG, 88.1FM station, for more than six years. Please send your comments and suggestions regarding Radio Somewhere to AsburyRadio@aol.com or 3 Deal Lake Court, Asbury Park, N.J. 07712.

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