

INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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NIGHT SHIFT IS SUPER-DUPER

by Mike Kinosian, Special Features Editor

Imagine having a job where, for three hours each night, you do nothing but talk with and about celebrities and laugh with a group of listeners who you come to know as family.

Oversimplified perhaps but it's still a fairly good representation for what an extremely bubbly and highly personable talent with a distinctive name has been doing on a syndicated basis for nearly three years (July 2006).

Random Act Of Kindness

Radio as a vocation wasn't at all on New York-born [Cooper Lawrence](#)'s radar when she was growing up, although she did listen to Big Apple stations such as WPLJ and the former “99 X” - WXLO. “Cooper’ is my mother’s maiden name,” points out Lawrence, whose 7-10pm Dial Global program airs on approximately a half-dozen stations. “My joke is it is very southern to give your daughter your maiden name and we’re from the south of Brooklyn.”

Once she got settled at the University of Maryland, Lawrence concentrated on psychology as her field of study. “I was the one my friends always came to for advice,” she remarks. “If anyone had a problem, I was the sage - that’s who I was with my group.”

Several of her friends however were in the medium and one day in 1995 one of them blurted out that Lawrence should pursue radio. “I made a tape and sent it to [Long Island’s] WLIR,” she recalls. “It accidentally landed in [Music Director] Lynda Lopez’s hands and she loved it. She threw it down on Program Director Jeff Levine’s desk and said, ‘hire her.’ He did. If it weren’t for [Jennifer Lopez’s younger sister] Lynda, I don’t think I’d have a career. New York is very competitive in every aspect with women. It was the first time a woman showed me utter benevolence and compassion. She absolutely saved my life.”

Identity Crisis

Up until then, Lawrence worked for/with entertainment celebrities. “My very first job out of college was as Shelley Winters’ personal assistant,” she points out. “I wasn’t ‘anybody’

[though] – I was someone’s assistant.”

Intrigued by the notion of doing radio, Lawrence moved to Long Island, where she worked 75 hours a week at WLIR for \$18,000 a year and was thrilled to do it. “I loved every second of it,” she declares. “The PD had just come from WBAB. One [female staffer] there was his ‘go-to’ person for everything. She did commercial production, drove the van and made appearances. I told him I wanted [to do the same thing at WLIR].”

No one else was in the building when Lawrence did the station’s overnight shift. “You’d think a young girl would be very scared to be alone like that but there was something nice and peaceful about it,” she reflects. “I fell in love with radio and got to do it on my own terms. I was there at the perfect time and, early on, befriended people who taught me the ropes. My entrée into radio wasn’t to do a job – I was part of something.”

Philosophical Proposal

This particular education process was happening in music radio as Lawrence bonded with listeners who called to make requests. “They might have been lonely, bored or didn’t have anyone to talk to,” she reasons. “It’s the first time I needed to connect with other people. That’s when I thought to myself [radio] was the greatest thing in the world and I wanted to do it the rest of my life.”

Two years into her WLIR tenure, Lawrence was contacted by a familiar voice - Lynda Lopez - then doing traffic at NYC’s WKTU. “Once again, she was my savior,” Lawrence asserts. “She called to say I was ‘done’ at WLIR and I should come back to New York and work for Metro Networks [which] David Saperstein was running at the time. I knew everybody in the world of celebrity. I was dating [one] and my best friends were working actors. I told David I could get great interviews and do [terrific on-air] entertainment stuff.”

Combining the passion she had for both the entertainment business and radio specifically, Lawrence began Metro Source’s entertainment section. “I’d do traffic on [New York City CHR WHTZ] ‘Z100’ and then go to Metro Source and interview cool

Gen X people who were hot at the time like Janeane Garofalo. It was exciting to bring that to radio.”

From there Lawrence segued to WOR/New York where she continued to do traffic reports but also produced Joan Rivers’ radio show.

The Buckley Talk station’s then Program Director David Bernstein indicated he’d give Lawrence her own program if she obtained a Ph.D. “The reason I applied to graduate school was to further my radio career,” she states. “Whatever the next incarnation of Talk radio was going to be, I felt I wanted to be on that train. I went to Fordham, passed the Ph.D. exam in 2005 and waited for my dissertation to be approved.”

Perpetual Preparation

At the outset, she met with the former Jones Radio Networks; however as Lawrence notes, “It didn’t fund its own shows. Jones was looking for sponsors but it was hard to find them for an untried [radio program]. I went to [Dial Global’s] Kirk [Stirland whom] I knew from WOR. Dial Global does fund its own shows and he thought I had a great idea.”

Original plans called for her to be on Charlotte’s “Link” (Talk WLNK, then owned by Lincoln Financial – now Greater Media) for a year. “We’d see how it did ratings wise and then take it [into syndication],” recounts Lawrence who does the 7-10pm program from a New York City studio. “In a very short time though, stations began coming to us. Regardless how good your station is, you’re dead at 7pm. If you’re playing the same songs you were at Noon – nobody really cares. You have to give [listeners] a reason to come back to radio. We started picking up stations very quickly and syndicated the show sooner than we planned.”

Self-admitted non-morning person Lawrence is generally up “at the crack of noon.”

It’s not uncommon to see her spending days scurrying to cable news programs and entertainment magazine shows. “My whole life is preparation,” she remarks. “I have a 3:30pm meeting

with my producer [Anthony Michaels]. We scour papers and the internet for anything we can find and then decide our topics and discussion. The show isn’t a round peg that fits into a round hole.”

Sports, politics or cars are not topics she typically addresses. “We talk about real-life stuff that women are thinking about,” Lawrence notes. “After doing a three-hour show, you wake up the next day and have no idea what you [discussed on-air] the night before.”

Hammer Time

Women were primarily expected to be the show’s target. Nightly on-air conversations do generally skew that way although Lawrence jests, “Our audience now is anyone with a radio. Men call; truck drivers call; and grandmothers call. What are men who aren’t interested in sports or politics going to listen to? It’s a funny, entertaining comedy-based show. In many ways, it’s storytelling radio. Everyone has a whacky story about [something that happened in their normal routine and] I’m just there to facilitate them to tell their [tales]. My listeners come to play. They can’t wait to call and talk about this stuff.”

The atmosphere is similar to a group of friends who come to hang out every night. “Sometimes I talk – sometimes they do,” Lawrence simply comments. “[Showbiz Tonight’s] A.J. Hammer is one of our regular guests [but] there will be weeks we don’t have guests at all. We either talk to - or about - celebrities or something that’s going to help a person’s life. We [also] talk about boobs and poop a lot.”

Clearly not driven by the day’s hard news headlines, Lawrence freely concedes, “You wouldn’t know anything was going on in the world by listening to my show. I don’t know if my audience is even aware that I know the name ‘Obama.’ We steer clear of all that stuff. Every once in a while, we might get something from a website about recession-proof jobs or ways to save money you haven’t heard before. I am interested in a hot tip that someone can use in their daily life.”

Someone she’s lost touch with though is Lynda Lopez. “She’s

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gorgeous so she gave television a try and found some success at it. I don't know if she's [aware] of the impact she had on my life - I don't know if I [properly] told her. It's a shame some organized groups for women in radio are very exclusionary. They don't make women feel wanted. It behooves every individual female in radio to find whoever it is they admire. It has to be on an individual basis. It's so important because females are the listening audience. Male [air personalities] didn't matter to me when I was a listener [because] they weren't ever talking to me. It's so important for women to promote other women on the radio."

The Write Stuff

Columns longtime writer Lawrence penned since the inception of "Cosmo Girl" were turned into a book and she's now working on her fifth publication. "To be honest, it's been disjointed," she confides. "I know exactly what I'm doing with radio; I know exactly why I'm on television; but I've never been an author. Every publishing house wanted to do a book deal with me. I took the one that offered me the most money because, as far as I was concerned, that's what being an author was. A writer is someone who's wanted to do it their entire life. It's in their blood. They think about life in profound and prolific ways."

On the other hand Lawrence maintains nearly anyone can seemingly be an author. "Look at how many books are out there. I know someone who is ghost-writing a book for a celebrity, so is the celebrity an author?"

Dating and relationships are the thrust of Lawrence's books. "It's fun to do the research about that," she declares. "My Ph.D. is in [research-based] developmental psychology - not clinical. I talk to 100 women once, rather than one woman 100 times. I also do that on my radio show. I always have been interested in hearing someone's story in a radio - as well as in a scientific - context. That's the through-line of everything I've ever done."

Talk radio and music radio are obviously two different animals. Having done both, Lawrence opines, "It's almost like I'm not in the same industry. We've developed a nice community and our listeners will help each other. We know each other very well; can say anything to each other; and have become very good friends. I don't think you get that with music radio. You only have 90 seconds and can't tell your life story on music radio. We do a really great, entertaining show every single night. We work our butts off to make it funny. We spend a lot of time getting clips and [Anthony Michaels] is producing like crazy when we're on the air. We want the show to be [in] every [market] in the country."

Christmas vacation proved to be excruciating for her because she wasn't on the air. "I'd be doing the radio show even if I weren't being paid," Lawrence insists. "I should have hobbies

but I don't. My life has been such a blast. I do yoga to Zen out - only because my doctor told me to - but it hurts."

Bankable Broadcaster

Spotted on a "Tyra Banks" appearance, camera-friendly Lawrence was approached to contribute as the celebrity psychology expert for VH1's eight-part, Scott Baio-hosted "Confessions Of A Teen Idol" series.

Subjects were The Blue Lagoon's Christopher Atkins; David Chokachi and Jeremy Jackson from "Baywatch"; Fame's Billy Hufsey; Eric Nies of "The Real World"; Beverly Hills 90210's Jamie Walters; and Adrian Zmed of "TJ Hooker" fame. "I don't know that much about television [but] it was an amazing experience," Lawrence comments. "It was very interesting to see the inner-workings of a day-to-day television show. What I usually do [for television] is show up at a studio; have my hair and makeup done; and do a quick sound bite in a flash cam. You're usually there for about 20 minutes. The people I worked with were lovely and I really learned a lot. If that's how television is, I can see why people like doing it."

Despite the positive experience and accompanying paycheck from the VH1 reality show which ran through February, Lawrence nevertheless stresses she only does television to promote her radio show. "When it's time for me to keel over and die, I want it to be in front of a microphone. I'm hooked - [radio] is my drug. I'll be interested in doing it the rest of my life. It's not only what I do but it's also who I am. I'm fine if the television and books go away. I can't imagine anything that would give me as much pleasure or joy as doing a radio show which has my name on it. It's the most important thing to me."



WHO: Cooper Lawrence

WHAT: "The Cooper Lawrence Show"

WHERE: Dial Global

WHEN: Monday-Friday, 7-10pm (ET)

HOW LONG: Since July 2006

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