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America's Favorite Radio Station: WKRP In Cincinnati



Synopsis

Although it became one of the most successful programs in syndicated television history, WKRP in Cincinnati faced an uphill struggle trying to obtain prime-time success. Kassel chronicles the decisions and problems that affected WKRP's primetime success, and explores the reasons why it went on to become a classic.

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Customer Reviews

Like a lot of people, I first truly discovered one of the best sitcoms in television history a year or two after it was cancelled. Every night, at 6:30 pm, I'd turn the TV over to channel 21 and catch reruns of WKRP in Cincinnati and I'd find myself enthralled by everything from the sleaziness of Herb Tarlek, the well-meaning insanity of Les Nessman, the drug-addled flashbacks of Johnny Fever, and the likeable foolishness of Art Carlson. (And even though Loni Anderson's Jennifer may have been the officially recognized sex symbol, my crush was reserved for the much more quiet Bailey Quarters who proved that intelligence is the ultimate aphrodisiac.) As a child, I often wished that I could be a character on that show and even today, I often find myself thinking how much more fun I'd have at work if I'd moved up to Ohio and gotten a job at that low-rated radio station. Much like the later Newsradio, WKRP In Cincinnati was distinguished by a mixture of character-driven plots and surreal humor. And much like Newsradio, WKRP was treated like a redheaded stepchild by its parent network and ended up getting canned without a proper chance to build up an audience. Even today, WKRP is overshadowed by other, increasingly dated '70s sitcoms (basically anything produced by Norman Lear). With all that in mind, I was delighted when, recently, I came across a

copy of Mike Kassel's entertaining behind-the-scenes history of WKRP in Cincinnati. Along with the prerequisite episode guide (which was very nicely detailed without getting overly obtuse as seems to happen with so many fan guides), Kassel provides some wonderful anecdotes and gives some nice insights into the cast. It was strangely heartwarming to discover that, behind-the-scenes, the show was apparently as enjoyable to work on as to watch.

"America's Favorite Radio Station" by Michael B. Kassel is an account of the creation, making, rise, and fall of the wonderful television comedy "WKRP in Cincinnati". The book is relatively short, but is printed in very small font, so it takes a bit longer to read than you might at first suspect. Kassel spends a lot of time discussing the origins of "WKRP" which requires a lot of time spent with Hugh Wilson, the executive producer of this gem. The background information with Wilson is insightful and justifies reading the book by itself. Kassel also discusses all of the characters in depth, and interviewed many of the actors that had major roles in the show. Another useful feature is the listing and description of all ninety shows in the series. Less useful, however, is Kassel's attempts at cultural justification for the rise and fall of the show. A theme that Kassel approaches from several different directions is that the rise of Reagan conservatism was indirectly to blame for the demise of the show, while simultaneously arguing that it was the multiple time slot changes that did the show in. The latter seems more logical since the evidence Kassel has assembled seems to support it; the former seems like a method of working a personal political statement into a book where it otherwise didn't fit. The book also suffers from an overall lack of attention to detail. On page iii, in the list of "WKRP Creative Alumni," Kassel leaves Jan Smithers off the list, despite talking about the importance of the eight key cast members throughout the book. I found that to be a fairly glaring oversight of proofreading, and it didn't set the tone well for the remainder of the book. Typographical and spelling errors also are common in the book.

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