

Bluegrass Planet Radio Spans the Globe

by Kara Bachman

When she was just a little girl, Dawn Mac used to be intrigued by how her father's voice would float out across space and be heard in faraway lands.

He was a ham operator.

"It fascinated me that he'd get on the airwaves and talk to people across the world," she said about her dad, who she called her "inspiration."

At just eight or nine years old, she'd "play DJ." She loved music and when combined with the idea of having her voice heard across large distances, it was clear where her adult passions would lay.

"It was something that was in my blood from the very beginning," Mac said.

As president and founder of Bluegrass Planet Radio, it's no surprise that watching her dad talk into a microphone set her on the career path that's led to a successful 24/7 internet radio station that people across the globe listen to.



Mac's first radio show wasn't fancy. Heck, it wasn't even commercial; it was just a hobby she did for fun. She decided to host an internet radio show back in 2006 on one of the earlier versions of web-based radio, BlogTalk Radio. She decided to focus on music and interviews with indie artists who didn't have access to traditional radio formats. From there, her passion continued to grow.

"At one time, I was running five different podcasts for five different genres," she said. "As it started to get some traction and recognition, I had folks say, 'why don't you start a radio station?'"

What they meant was something more than she'd been doing. They didn't mean podcast-style radio broadcasts. They didn't mean individual shows. They were suggesting she start a full-fledged 24/7 station. She'd been doing the bluegrass podcast since 2011, and thought the genre was perfect for expanding.

"I thought, maybe this is the time," she reminisced. "You can never have enough stations promoting all the great bluegrass music."

Today, Bluegrass Planet Radio is heard around the clock and is easily accessed via a free mobile app available from iTunes

and Google Play Store. Not only does Mac play music by a broad range of today's bluegrass acts, but she also has affiliate programming that spans a wide range of interests. The station is truly comprehensive, and some might even say "eclectic."

For instance, listeners can tune in for the shows they'd expect, such as the Bluegrass Gospel Hour or Steve Martin's Unreal Bluegrass. But there's also a little variety that reaches into other genres. For instance, Mac airs a program called "It's Folk," which she describes as "folk, yet it's got an edge to it."

"People look at the roster and say, 'wow, you've got a little of everything,'" Mac said. "It's not all just Flatt and Scruggs any more...I wanted to create a station that was going to do more than what people would expect."

Mac said her personal taste isn't traditionalist.

"I'm more progressive, new grass, contemporary," she explained.

Although her own tastes might slightly affect the choices in affiliate broadcasts, she said she still tries to focus Bluegrass Planet Radio programming on meeting the needs of the listeners themselves. It's not so much about her own taste as it is about making a great station that others will enjoy.

"I try to give equal billing to all the bluegrass labels," she explained. "As a broadcaster, we get in advance what albums are coming out, what singles are gonna be released. Just about everything that comes out new goes on the station."

Bluegrass Planet Radio has a broad listenership, and they come from places where most people would never suspect. Mac said she pulls in fans from all sorts of places.

"There are tons and tons of international listeners that obviously dig bluegrass music in all its forms," Mac said. She

added that some of her highest listener peaks result from fans tuning in from very far away. She sees activity from Japan, Germany, France, the UK, and many more countries where one would be surprised to find people interested in bluegrass, Americana, and the other folk genres Mac features.

As a prominent bluegrass internet radio broadcaster, what advice does Mac have for record labels who want to have their music heard? What's the number one thing record labels should do to get radio programmers – DJs and others who are the music gatekeepers – on their side?

“The best thing labels can do is sign artists that are marketable,” she said. As a close number two, she said labels need to promote. And when they think they've promoted enough, they need to promote some more. “They really have to believe in the product they're producing,” she said.

If a record label truly believes in its artist, it seems that's a surefire way to get Mac interested as well. As she in part walks in her father's footsteps, she's glad to help the great performers of bluegrass get their music heard.

Bluegrass Planet Radio