

Hippie Hippie Shakes

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Long-running Radio Program "The Ol' Hippie Bluegrass Show" Still Shakes Up the Scene by Hipping Kids to Dig the Sound

by Stephen Pitalo

If you talk to "The Ol' Hippie Bluegrass Show" program host Jerry Eicher, you may refer to him as Mountain Ike.

"Before radio, I was a re-enactor of pre-1840 times," explained Eicher. "Mountain Ike was my mountain-man alias, and Ike was what my Dad was called in school, short for Eicher, of course. We sat up a tipi and played old-time music – that was our gig. My wife was said to be part Cherokee and she dressed as my Indian maiden and played fiddle. A bass player and his wife dressed as pioneers and camped with us."

Years later, Eicher and Randy Shaffer would begin hosting "The Ol' Hippie Bluegrass Show" on local radio, becoming overnight sensations and local celebrity, just for playing music they love on the air.

A few years before their radio show started in 2008, Shaffer had regional success as a performer and songwriter, having written the

Moe Bandy ditty "She's Not Really Cheatin', She's Just Getting Even" and a few more after moving to Nashville; Shaffer then moved back to Ohio for family and health reasons. Meanwhile, a bluegrass radio show in Toledo, Ohio, entitled "The Sunday Ramble Show" was sponsoring a local band Christmas album, and the show's hosts were using Eicher's Indian Ridge Recording Studio in Delta, Ohio.

“Randy came in to do one of his songs,” Eicher recalled. “Randy and I hit it off well and started playing music together. Early in the summer of 2008, we stopped at an ice cream stand in White House, Ohio after playing a gig with my band, Hand Hewn String Band. We were discussing it and a couple of names came to mind – I said ‘Hillbilly Bluegrass Show,’ but Randy thought that was too common, I guess, and said, ‘How about The Ol’ Hippie Bluegrass Show?’ We both thought that was pretty funny and cool since we grew up in that era of hippies and rock n roll.”



Eicher was worried it might be negatively received because of the hippie connotation but then received an enthusiastic thumbs-up to the title from former "Sunday Ramble" hosts (and

good friends) Jim Van Deilen and JJ O'Shea. Eicher and Shaffer settled on the name and took their idea to Adrian, Michigan's 5000-watt station WQTE 95.3 FM, known locally as Q95.

"I lived west of Toledo about 30 miles, closer to Adrian. I had a fascination with having a late-night bluegrass radio show and we wanted to go on at midnight. They called a couple of days later and said we go on in two weeks, asking 'can you have a show together?' I scrambled to get my small collection of bluegrass music organized, and we started recording.

Their creation, "The Ol' Hippy Bluegrass Show," hit the airwaves on June 14th, 2008 at midnight on Saturday night – or is that Sunday morning?

"That was our thing: Is it Saturday night or Sunday morning? We played it up!" laughed Eicher.

The founder noted that it's hard to say why the show had a dramatic and immediate following, but Eicher believes that a void for Northwest Ohio bluegrass on the air was left when 'The Sunday Ramble Show' shut down.

"In southeast Michigan, 'The Arkansas Traveler Show' in Detroit had also ended so that left another void," Eicher said. "We could cover a lot of that area on Q95 out of Adrian, Michigan, being located between all of that. We were getting a great response from all the listeners.

"After a few months, the biggest complaint was we were on too late, so eventually after a year or so we moved up to 11 pm with the one-hour show, then 10 pm," Eicher laughed. "Now we're on for two hours at 8 pm locally."

Eicher said he doesn't have a favorite band, but his listeners sure do: The Steeldrivers.

"They have been a hit on the show since the beginning and still are today," Eicher said. "With our station being a

northern country station, I thought the people would like the blues-grass sound, now I know they do. The

Steeldrivers sell-out shows around here, too, but there are more favorites of listeners, like Russell Moore, Steve Dilling, Becky Buller, Edgar Loudermilk, Old Crow Medicine Show. We even throw in Johnny Cash sometimes still – in the beginning, we played one of his songs every week! Being on a country station in the north I think it broke the bluegrass sound up so folks could get used to it. Also, Mountain Heart was a big one for us in the beginning.”

WQTE did not stream their shows early on, but Eicher and Shaffer and wanted a broader audience, so Eicher built a website in 2010.

“It has gone through a couple of revampings now, so the early shows are not on the website anymore,” he said, “but a lot of shows archived there still. Eventually, when I met up with the folks at the Bluegrass Museum in Kentucky, they were playing some bluegrass shows on their site and they picked us up. That was my first syndication. At that point, I was glad we recorded the shows at my studio instead of going in at midnight and doing them live on the air, which we could have done.”

<https://youtu.be/fxBetoTgzKo>



Eicher said the secret of the shows' longevity – more than 600

shows as of October 2020 – is the local love of bluegrass music, for starters.

“And then, you meet people in the city that recognize your voice at the cash registers of businesses, and they say things like, ‘Aren’t you Jerry Eicher? Don’t ever stop playing that music! We love it!’ The involvement of the bluegrass artists with their willingness to do interviews and promo liners helps a lot! The record companies jumping on board to keep me supplied with the latest music that the artists are coming out with keeps me on the cutting edge of the music too.”

And even during the COVID era, Eicher said their ol’ hippie mentality is helping calm the masses from their little corner of the bluegrass world.

“It brings happiness to a lot of listeners – and me too!” Eicher said. “I think we need to keep some normality in the world and keep the peoples’ music on the airwaves.”

THE BREWSKI BOMBERS – A Tale of Ol’ Hippie Bluegrass Show Fans

“Early on, we had some listeners that had a place called ‘Camp Wanna Be North’ in the woods, referencing their want to live in the wilderness of the UP of Michigan. They would start partying on Saturday night at about 7 pm and listen to the show at midnight. There had been some problems at the station and on some nights the show would not come on at all because of being recorded and loaded in to play automatically – a programming problem. So, these guys got tired of it! They had been drinking all night and called the station drunk and left a nasty drunk message about bombing the place if they didn’t get it right! When the morning came, they realized what they had done and called the station back and retracted their statements, saying it was just drunk talk, they wouldn’t really do it. Henceforth, they were known as the Brewski Bombers! That following week when I went into the station, the programming director exclaimed, “You sure do have some

interesting listeners!" and explained what had happened. Luckily, she didn't take it too seriously and we laughed about it. Those two guys turned out to become disc jockeys on the show after Randy Shaffer and Brad Long did their time: two guys named Slick Rick and Uncle Elmo. Rest in peace, Slick Rick (Rick Gillespie), who passed away this spring."