

Heavy Metal

By LYNNE AMES

New York Times (1923-Current file); Apr 29, 1984;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010) with Index (1851-1993)

pg. WC2

ABOUT WESTCHESTER Heavy Metal

By LYNNE AMES

NEW ROCHELLE

OCCASIONALLY I get calls from wackos," Matt O'Shaughnessy said one recent Saturday. "Like last week, someone called in and requested Frank Sinatra."

Matthew is a 16-year-old disk jockey and radio producer. His show Vox Rox is broadcast Saturdays from 12:30 P.M. through 7 P.M. on WVOX, which reaches most of the county. Those who tune their AM dials to 1460 usually hear community bulletins, talk shows featuring local residents and middle-of-the-road pop music. During Matt's hours, though, the station puts out not just rock, but the specific rock the young disk jockey loves most: that amalgam of ear-rending noise and outrageous theatricality known as heavy metal.

"I think of the typical VOX listener as a nice lady in bathrobe and slippers, seeing her husband off to work in the morning," he said. "My listeners are age 12 to 25, real 'head bangers' — heavy metal freaks. Some might wear stuff like the bands do — leather, metal studs, real long hair. Others dress more normal, but they're definitely into the music."

Matt is unquestionably in the normal category. The album covers on the records he plays depict men who look like Hell's Angels or Atilla the Hun, but he is classically clean-cut, with blue eyes, square jaw and straight white teeth. On a recent Saturday, as he manned the station on Fifth Avenue here, he was wearing jeans, sneakers and a WVOX T-shirt. Drinking Coke, eating chocolate-chip cookies, he spun on his turntables the cacophonies, ominous-sounding recordings of bands with names like Black Sabbath, Mötley Crüe, and the Scorpions.

In the next studio, one could hear tapes of Tony Bennett singing about leaving his heart in San Francisco, and Errol Garner teasing "Misty" from his piano keys. Matt O'Shaughnessy is the son of Bill O'Shaughnessy, the stylish, prematurely silver-haired president of WRTN-FM, which broadcasts jazz, show tunes and ballads from the same building WVOX uses. Mr. O, as he is known to his friends, is also

president of WVOX, and he is the first to admit to just a bit of nepotism.

"When he was 15, Matt said he wanted to do a show of his own," he recalled. "I stalled, I finessed, I dissembled. Still, he kept hanging around the station, till finally he insinuated himself onto the payroll — he now gets \$35 a week — and onto the air. I'm most proud of his entrepreneurial flare. He gets the records from the record companies, he suggests sponsors to our ad salesmen — he's not just a host, he's a producer.

"As for the music," he went on, "Well, I think it's God-awful . . ."

"Dad," his son interrupted, "you hear one of these songs, it picks you up. It's like a natural drug."

" . . . I think it's God-awful. But I'm

to have bitten off the head of a live bird during a concert.

But, insists Matt, the vast majority of the groups is more concerned with showmanship than sadism: In their days of wearing mask-like face makeup, members of Kiss, probably the most popular heavy metal group ever, resembled comic book superheroes. "Kiss has done some nice love songs," Matt explained. "And even those groups that people think of as satanic — often, they're not that way at all. Listen" — he put phonograph needle to vinyl — "this song's by Mötley Crüe, and it's about fighting whatever seems evil: 'In seasons of winter, we'll stand and deliver, be strong and laugh and shout. Shout, shout, shout at the devil.'"

'You hear one of these songs, it picks you up. It's like a natural drug.'

perfectly willing to admit that teenagers hear something in it that escapes me. Maybe there's a primal scream in it somewhere."

It is more like a primal roar. Heavy metal is, above all else, loud. It is also generally not what one would choose to dance to — Matt describes it as rock-and-roll without the roll. Waves of electronic sounds — and not much rhythm — are characteristic.

Imagery straight out of some fantasy of the Dark Ages — warriors clad in fur and breastplates, drawn swords, dismembered limbs — grace many a heavy metal album cover. Others show men with hair to their waists, as in the late 60's, wearing black leather, metal studs and sullen expressions. Some of the musicians have been banned from certain cities and radio stations for demonic references in their songs and bizarre behavior on stage. A British performer named Ozzy Osbourne is said

Lyrics are not all that Matt knows. Like a jazz buff who can name every sideman in every big band, he can reel off the cast of characters of dozens of heavy metal groups. One of the features of his show is the Metal Trivia Album Giveaway, in which callers try to answer correctly questions he has devised:

"This is Matt O'Shaughnessy coming to you on the AM dial — I like to think of AM as all metal — and now we're going to ask you a trivia question," he intoned in a youthful, enthusiastic voice. "Former Chilliwack member Brian McLeod formed n.a. Vancouver-based group, the Headpins, in 1980. Who was Brian McLeod's original drummer for the Headpins?" A few minutes later, the phone rang, and Matt turned away from his huge control board to find out if the call had zeroed in on this esoteric bit of information. "Yes,

you're right, you've got it — Matt Frenette, now with Loverboy."

Other features include concert information, a call-in request line, and Metal Maniac of the Month. This lucky person wins an hour or more in the studio with Matt, gets to choose the records he wants to hear, even gets to act as D.J. — for turning out the most effective letter.

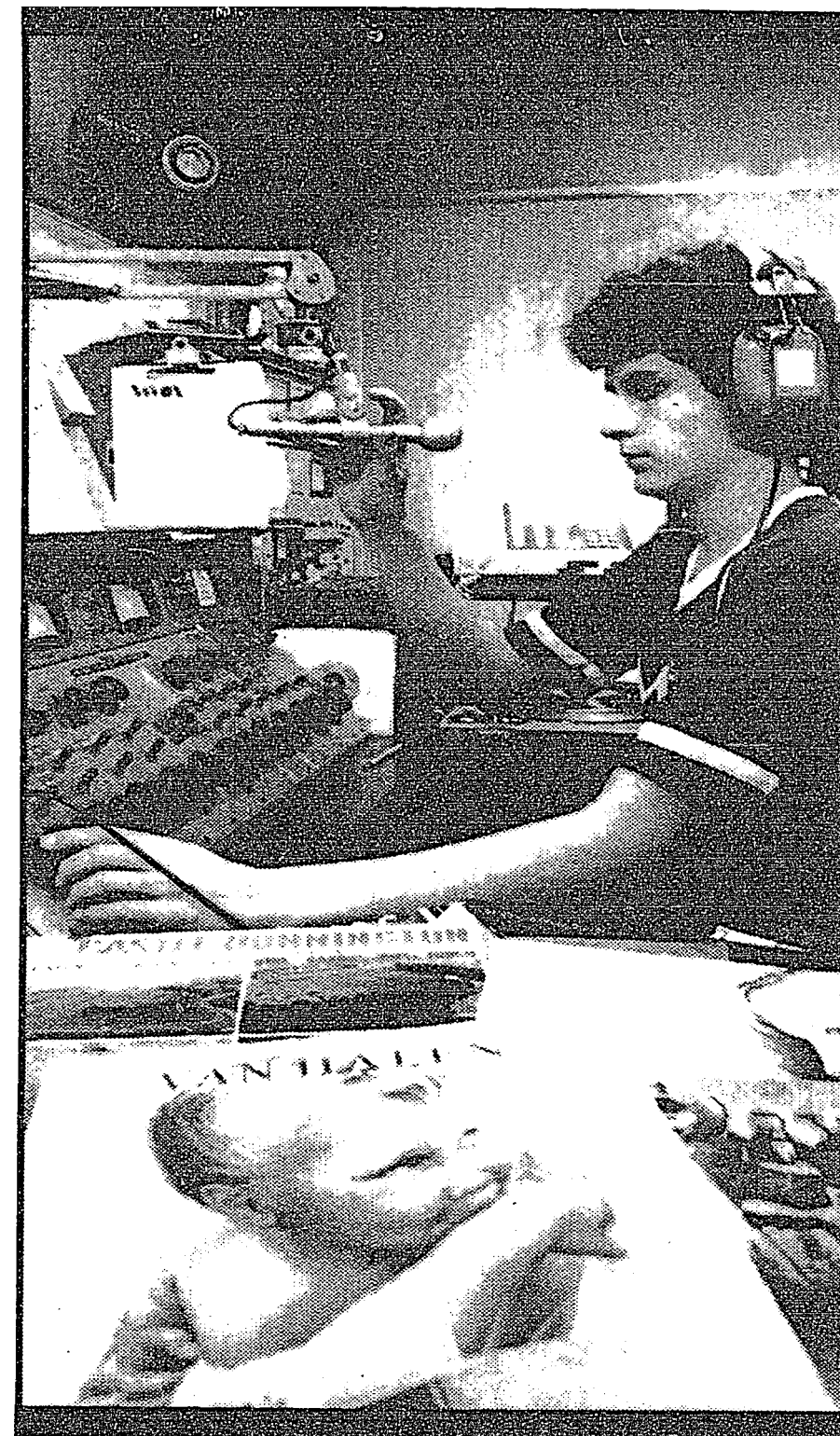
The winner this week? A 17-year-old Roosevelt High School student who wrote: "I'm writing to you because I want to crank out some massive metal tunes on the station that dares to play AM (All Metal) on AM . . . I have experience as a metal merchant D.J., as I used to melt the turntables at WDMC, a cable station in Yonkers, with the likes of Kiss, Crüe, Ozzy, Iron Maiden and Sabbath. I have seen all the merchants mentioned above on the great stage. I like my music loud and Vox Rox is the only station which supplies it to my liking. I hope I am picked to win this adventurous metal bonanza. Thank you, Adam Nieremberg, headbanger extraordinaire."

In person, Adam does not quite fit the stereotype of a rock fanatic. His favorite class in school is law, and he would like to be a lawyer, with a specialty in music copyright. Once asked who were the three people he would most like to have lunch with, he named Beethoven, Mozart and F. Lee Bailey. He adores Kiss — "To me, they are real heroes" — but his biggest hero is his father.

"My father has a lot of class," he said, while two of his friends who accompanied him to the station, Mike Esposito and Phil Yovaonopoulos, looked on, smiling. "He's really brave, and he really has a lot of class. The only thing we disagree about is music.

"I like the ominous songs, the ones that come barreling forward. You really hear those drums pounding away. I really love Kiss. Everyone said Kiss means Knights in Satin's Service, but it doesn't. If you listen to the lyrics, they're just about freedom, love. And look at the bass player, Gene Simmons — he's a schoolteacher." He paused, introducing one of his idols' songs, "Not for the Innocent."

"I like being a guest D.J. on WVOX. I really like it. In fact, my mother got a 120-minute tape, so she could hear me and record me doing it."



The New York Times / Dith Pran

Matthew O'Shaughnessy broadcasting his heavy metal format from WVOX in New Rochelle