

HOLLYWOOD NITE SHIFT

PHIL AUSTIN: In the late seventies and early eighties, a guy named Frazer Smith kept contacting me. He had made friends with **Phil Proctor** in Detroit and so got my address and he said he hoped to come to Los Angeles and be on the radio with me and, unaccountably, Terry Garr, the actress. (As far as I knew, he never told Terry this, if indeed he ever talked to her. I see her every once in a while and I've never thought to ask her either.) Frazer assured me that he was a big fan of "**Roller Maidens from Outer Space**" and insisted that he held me in the highest of high regards.

He moved to LA and we made a deal to the effect if he could get us on the air somewhere, I'd show up. He didn't mention Terry anymore. When he actually talked KROQ in Pasadena into taking us, I then talked my friend Michael C. Gwynne - an actor who had spent many many years as an R&B disc jockey - into doing the show with us, because I very much wanted to explore the world that Michael brought to my life. At that time, I was tired of writing for the **Firesign Theatre** and dealing with its Byzantine politics. I decided that I would not prepare material for this new show, but would only improvise. This resolve suited Michael as well and while Frazer was never entirely comfortable with it, he had to go along with us. We were much older and more experienced than Fraze and as well, my reputation as being part of the **Firesign Theatre** was the only real reason we were on the air. He had no choice, in other words.

I saw Fraze last week at E, the Entertainment Something, where he sat in dark glasses under a huge picture of Howard Stern. We are friends, it has turned out, although you wouldn't have known it if you were backstage around the **Niteshift** in its days on the air. All was not smooth, to say the least. We were volatile and voluble, all of us, not just the on-air guys. It was a creative experience that was intense and highly productive. It got me writing again, that's for sure.

Michael and I were very close friends at that time, although we have since drifted a continent apart. His girlfriend at that time was Oona's best friend Deb Kurtz and while the two of them would stay home at Willow Glen and tune us in on the radio, Michael and I would drive every Sunday to KROQ in Pasadena, never talking one bit about what we were going to do on the show that night.

Frazer had higher aspirations. He would usually have at least one or two short pieces of material written, often for the three of us to read, and sometimes for himself alone. We would launch into the show, (we followed Shadoc Stevens) with Michael doing the engineering as well, he having been schooled in the days when men were men - or at least Canadians - and a DJ ran his own board. He alone chose the music - and his tastes were mine exactly - and so we played the Meters and Al Green and the OJs and created a dark, nighttime world with restaurants called Victor's House of Barbecued Bats and Wet Stockings and Fish. It was a tremendously odd world, a kind of model of an imaginary Hollywood that had more in common with Toronto or Detroit or Toledo than it did with the world we actually lived in. Frazer, after all, was from Detroit and Michael was from Toronto. As far as they were concerned, I was the Hollywood hometowner, although I wasn't. I'm from Fresno.

We eventually even did two live shows at a night club in Hermosa Beach and we broadcast the Rose Bowl Parade nationally at least once. (**David Ossman** joined us as a guest commentator for that one.) Laura Quinn (who appears in the video of "**Eat or Be Eaten**" by **Firesign Theatre**) was our announcer and Kevin McKeown was our producer. Al Ramirez was our technical director and appeared often on the show.

Dan Reed and Bruce Litz, Pasadena artists and friends of Al Ramirez', became our art and stage staff and when Dan got a research job at the South Pole, he became our correspondent there. Michael's and my dear friend Mel Lawrence appeared when he was in town as Mrs. Bodfish and King Kohn, Chevy Chase showed up now and again and we got at least one beautiful piece of writing in the Post-Dispatch from the author Don Carpenter. We had a stunningly loyal bunch of fans and we were, after all in a major radio market, even if it was just on Sunday nights. Michael as Johnny Hunkmaster, me as The Duck, Frazer as mostly The Frazee ("Shecky, get the jet!") and a dark, seamy world of latenight and searching for babes in white convertibles. It was the **Niteshift**. It was a world unto itself. You shoulda been there. The Molar and Lobster Sizzling Lounge out on the old Nitesoil Hiway; The train ride to Hell; Ring of Fire Markets; the Mother's March on Multiple Sadness hosted by Daffy Duck; The Seventh Day Opportunists; Middle Class Wine; the list goes on.

As part of it, Bruce Litz and I created the Post-Dispatch Intelligencer, a newspaper that debuted just as we were fired from KROQ - one of several firings and hirings for the show. Bruce and I have come to

collaborate many times since then, right up to the present. He is the cover artist for "**Tales of the Old Detective and Other Big Fat Lies**". He did the covers for Rhino's "**Nick Danger and the Three Faces of AI**" and "**Anythynge You Want To**". He was as well the staff artist for the demos of "**Danger in Dreamland**". He did the subcode graphics on "**Eat or Be Eaten**" as well as the Mercury album cover and has illustrated numerous other **Firesign Theatre** works.

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