

How 'Pepper' shook things up on airwaves

By DAVID HINCKLEY
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Jim Kerr was 14 when the Beatles released "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" on June 2, 1967, and he says you couldn't miss its immediate impact on radio.

"Here was an album that never had a single," says Kerr, who today is the morning host on WAXQ (104.3 FM). "Yet you heard pretty much every track on top-40 AM radio. That was unheard of. A station

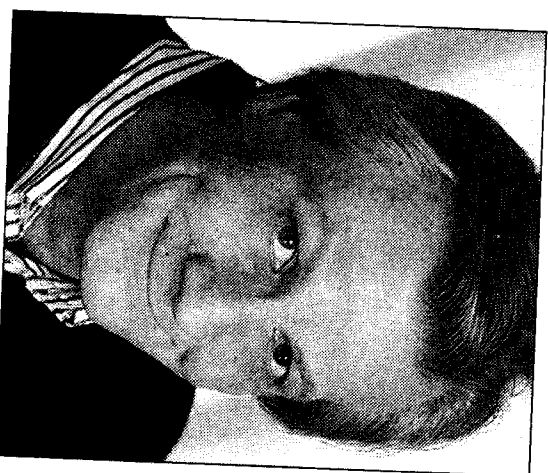
would play 'Sgt. Pepper' right into 'With a Little Help From My Friends,' or Rita into 'Good Morning' into 'A Day in the Life.' Top-40 stations just didn't do that. The Beatles forced their hand."

The Beatles aren't quite so dominant on radio today, when more than half the country is younger than "Pepper." But the album consistently places first on all-time lists compiled by publications like Rolling Stone, and a number of local stations are saluting its anniversary.

Programmers also say rock radio still owes "Pepper" for form and content.

"I was a gofer at a Miami station in 1967 when 'Pepper' came out," says Lee Abrams, longtime radio consultant and chief programming officer for XM Radio. "I was blown away, of course."

"But when I went home and listened to it on my headphones, in stereo, I realized



WAXQ's Jim Kerr, a fan from the start.

that's how it was meant to be heard. That's the moment when I knew AM sound wasn't enough anymore — that FM was the future of music on radio."

FM rock was still embryonic then, but it wouldn't remain so for long, and Abrams says "Pepper" also played a big part in providing the music that helped it along.

"That record made a lot of artists rethink themselves," says Abrams. "The artistic bar was now higher, and very soon you started getting artists who were rising to that challenge, like Led Zeppelin."

Bob Buchmann, program director of WAXQ, says "Pepper" kicked open the doors for records that shaped FM rock.

"Without 'Pepper,' he says, "would there be a 'Dark Side of the Moon' or 'Exit' on Main Street or 'Tommy?'"

No, "Pepper" isn't universally canonized. Al Sussman, an editor at Beatlefan magazine, notes that many fans hold other Beatles albums, including "Revolver" and "Rubber Soul," in higher regard.

"Pepper" has also been called a period piece whose songs, however good, inevitably conjure the summer of '67.

Buchmann doesn't see that: "To me, it doesn't say 1967 any more than it says 1987 or 2007. It's still fresh."

As usual with good music, of course, the first impression will probably always remain the most vivid for many fans.

"I was at a country station then," says Kerr. "But after work I'd go home, and my friends and I played 'Pepper' for hours."

"We sat around talking about it. We analyzed the songs. We tried to figure out what the cover really meant. It was like nothing we'd ever heard before."

Among the stations saluting "Pepper" over the next few days are these:

WAXQ: Maria Milito spins both sides tomorrow on "Friday Beatles" at noon.

WFUV (90.7 FM): "City Folk" celebrates "Pepper" all day tomorrow, with a special 2-4 p.m., during which musicians, writers and fans offer "an honest appraisal." Pete Fornatale features it Saturday, 4-8 p.m.

on "Mixed Bag."

WHPG (90.3 FM): Rob Leonard's "Beatlesongs" tomorrow, 8-11 p.m., plays the mono mix, outtakes and related material.

WNYC (93.9 FM): Critics debate the album's merits today on "Soundcheck," 2-3 p.m.

XM and Sirius: Satellite radio plans anniversary salutes on various programs, including Ken Michaels' "Every Little Thing" Saturday at 9 p.m. on XM Ch. 76.

1050 ESPN
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