

JANET BARDINI interview *by Chris Edwards*

Whilst with any radio station, the best known names are those heard on the air, but there are a number of equally important number of people working behind the scenes.

Laser 558, based in the North sea, was extremely popular in Europe, and was run from an office in New York's Madison Avenue. One of the staff there was Janet Bardini. Chris Edwards caught up with her, when she was in London recently, and asked...



Photo by Gus Philippas for WFUV

A bit of background on you, where you were born and brought up.

I'm from New York City. I grew up in an Italian-American household, in the suburbs of New York. New York is the number one radio market in America. So I was one of these kids who were totally engrossed in radio. I listened to radio nonstop.

How did you get into radio? Why radio?

I was a big of a fan as a kid. There was AM pop radio: WABC, WNBC. When rock radio came about, I listened to a lot of those radio stations in New York: WNEW, WPLJ. So I specifically went to university to work at their



radio station. That was Fordham University. At that time Fordham was a student run 50 thousand watt radio station. They had a mix of different programming. They had block programming, but during the evening the students programmed their own music. I did not major in Communications, but I worked at the radio station. I did news. I went out reporting. I had my own radio show. I did programming. From there being in the number one market in New York, it was very easy to get a job, especially if you were a news person, you could go work on the news desk of one of the stations or the television stations. Doing jock work was a bit more difficult. You could not come out of college and join number



Photo by staff of WYPS 107.1 for Janet Barradini

LASER HONES IN ON ADVERTISING BEAM



LASER DEEJAYS RIC HARRIS DAVID LEE STONE JESSIE BRANDON CAPTAIN BUZZ CODY JOE YOUNG & STEVE MASTERS

Laser 558, the American-based North Sea pirate radio ship, will carry commercials "within the month" according to the man selling its airtime, Roy Lindau of Music Media International in New York.

Four years ago Lindau, then vice-president of established U.S. radio rep house Major Market Radio, signed a contract to sell Radio Caroline's airtime. When Caroline failed to materialise Major Market resigned the account.

Now, he says, he has been retained by Eurad SA, the Panamanian company which owns the Panamanian-registered ship, Communicator, to sell airtime for Laser at \$250 per 30-second peak-time commercial. Neither he nor two lawyers associated with the Laser venture — Glen Kolk of Miami and Tony Morris, a London solicitor who has advised Eurad SA on the 1967 Marine Offences Act and related legislation in European countries — will say who is backing Eurad SA.

Kolk refuses even to say whether the shareholders are U.S. or U.K. citizens, but Lindau does imply that some of them are American commercial broadcasters who

might lose their FCC licences if it were found that they had invested in overseas radio stations.

According to both Kolk and Lindau, Laser has been set up with no other aim than to make money. "There is nothing political or religious behind it," says Lindau. "People call and ask if the Moonies are financing it, but that's not the case. The people on the ship have a standing instruction: if they can't do a story in the news without editorialising or being political then they should drop the story."

According to Lindau, the station is costing between US\$60,000 and \$80,000 a month to run at present: "The total investment will be approaching \$2 million by the time we start turning a profit," he says. "We don't have a pocket so deep we can go on indefinitely, but I said when we started that we would know in six months whether it would be a success or not. If we're not turning a profit by Christmas then we will have to rethink." Such a "rethink", he admits, might mean selling time to religious broadcasters or broadcasting more than just the occasional ID in a European language.

But Lindau believes advertisers can be attracted by Laser's potential pan-European coverage, at a time when "global marketing" of brands is a watchword in the U.S. He says he is "talking" to several multi-national advertisers — although few, if any, have apparently signed up with the station so far.

Is he confident of success? "It's still a little early to tell, I've got to confess," he says. "I've sold radio airtime long enough to know that people who express interest may turn skittish when presented with a contract."

"Everyone wanted to know if we would actually go on air, and be efficient and business-like," he adds, and says that a dipstick survey is now planned in "more than one country" to get a feel of Laser's audience.

"I think the time is right for us," he says, "with all the talk about global advertising, and Sky Channel and the Music Box."

One problem which neither Lindau nor Kolk expect is trouble with the law.

Tony Morris in London advises that Laser is not in breach of the Marine Offences Act if it employs no U.K. citizens on board the ship; if it is supplied from a country that is not a signatory to the 1965 European Agreement for the Prevention of Broadcasts from Stations Outside National Territory; if the ship from which the broadcasts are made is owned and registered abroad and moored outside territorial waters; and if there are no U.K. investors in the ship or a related company.

At the same time, no-one in the U.K. may advertise on the station — although it is unclear whether a British company which might benefit from advertisements placed by American associates would also be in breach of the law.

Glen Kolk does admit that the station is broadcasting without a licence, on a frequency allocated to other broadcasters by international treaty and convention, but says that makes it "unlicensed" not "illegal". "I have not been able to find any statute of any country which makes what we're doing an offence," he says. "There is no affirmative basis on which to prosecute us in any country."

He adds that Laser is able to avoid breaking U.K. law by getting supplies from a country like Spain — not a signatory to the 1965 convention. ■



Left: Bradley Ughetta from MMI

Right Page: Bridget, John Moss, Sandra, Ellen & Roy Lindau. (MMI New York Office)

ONE MINUTE WARNING

Laser 558's programming policy cuts through the DJ and the ad clusters. And the listeners love it, writes John Moss, president of Music Media International, which sells Laser's airtime

Since May 24, 1984, Laser 558-All Europe Radio has been broadcasting — around the clock — a wide mix of international hit music with very little extraneous talk. And by mid-October 1984, about five million people in the UK alone were loyal Laser listeners (source: MRIB).

The secret to Laser's success is really no secret at all; we simply give the people what they want — good radio. Laser is entertainment with just the right mix of music, personalities, give-aways and advertising. Our listeners know that when they tune the radio dial to 558 on the medium wave, they'll never be more than one minute away from contemporary music.

We remain consistent in our programming promise and it works throughout the entire broadcasting day. The concept is merely vertical

programming, nothing else. That's how people want to listen to their radios. People want the type of music that they most enjoy, when, where and whenever.

On Laser 558 there are only six well spaced one-minute slots per hour for adverts. Each announcement stands out because it has music at both ends. We believe clusters dilute advertising effectiveness and give listeners a reason to change stations. They know the commercial interruption is less than a minute.

We've targeted our station to be solidly Pan-European. The station operates legally by broadcasting from international waters at 25,000 watts. Laser's nondirectional antenna beams its broadcasts to no particular country, but our greatest popularity is in the UK, Holland and Belgium.

Multinational advertisers

are just starting to take advantage of Laser 558-All Europe Radio's massive signal coverage which reaches a total of nine countries in western Europe. Multi-lingual campaigns are encouraged.

With only commercial ILR stations operating in all of the UK, there certainly is room for Laser's brand of round-the-clock consistency.

In UK markets, if there is only one local station, it is forced to provide a service that is all things to all people.

By operating in international waters we are not affected by needletime restrictions in our presentation. We know the listeners look forward to a time when UK radio programmers have the same advantage.

Meanwhile, our marketing goal is to be everyone's second favourite radio station. We don't try to offer the indepth news, weather,



John Moss: Laser is blazing a trail

time and traffic coverage that only local radio stations and the BBC can offer.

At Laser 558 we actively promote the use of radio advertising to advertising agencies and clients alike. If we promote the use of radio as an advertising vehicle, the budgets for the radio community will increase. Currently little more than two per cent of all UK advertising ends up on radio.

Our audience understands better than governments and some ad agencies that the

world is getting smaller everyday. There is ample opportunity for all broadcasters to capitalise and build international, national and local radio ad budgets. On Laser, music is the international language. As long as the audience keeps listening, we'll continue to broadcast an exciting, energetic American-style radio station that is solely supported by advertising sales.

Extract from Radio Academy Newsletter

one, WNEW. Basically most of us went to the suburban stations. That's what I did. I worked on a couple of different suburban radio stations as the midday host and

Music Director.

How did Laser come about?

I was just out of school in 1985. I had a part time weekend shift on

a radio station. I was hoping to get a full time radio job. I was reading the New York Times employment section and saw an advert that read like this: "English speaking



European radio station looking for an administrative assistant for their New York office.” I said “What is this? English speaking European radio station?” I did not suspect anything about pirate radio. So I went down to the Madison Avenue office of Music Media International. I had an interview with John Moss, who had taken over from Roy Lindau. He explained to me what a pirate radio station was; it’s in international waters broadcasting from a ship in the North Sea. He told me Radio Laser was unique in the sense it was all American jocks. That was the appeal. He was looking for administrative assistance, like a secretary, to work in the day to day office. So I thought “Pirate radio? The North Sea? What the heck is this?” Anyway I went back and spoke to Donald J. Barnett, the general manager of WFUV at Fordham University. I told him; “There’s a job in this office that represents a pirate radio station. What do you know about pirate radio?” His response was “You will probably not get paid but you will have a really great time.” So I took the job at Music Media International and assisted in the day to day operations of the Madison Avenue office.



“ I have pictures of the studio. Everything was on cart. ”

Who else was there at the time?

John Moss was running it. The Sales force was Bradley Ughetta and a woman named Ellen. Sandy was the office manager. It was a front because they couldn’t sell advertising time in the UK. They had to have a clandestine office. They opened it up as Music Media International where they sold time on an international radio station. Laser’s fan club was also based there. They pitched multinational corporations like Virgin Atlantic, because Virgin Atlantic was coming up at that time, and Coca Cola. Also other small shops. It all went through Music Media International. So that’s how I ended up with Radio Laser.

Did you get from there to London?

There was no London office.

John went there. He worked out of a business centre somewhere. He’s an incredible sales person. He’s an incredible radio executive. There was no official office. There couldn’t be, we would have been locked up. I did go there when Laser was going to celebrate its first year on the air. There was supposed to be a big party at the Hippodrome. It did not happen. It was my first time in London. I thought that it was the coolest place to be. It was a dream come true.

Did you go to the ship?

I did. One day John Moss called me when I was at the Portobello Hotel and said “Get ready we are going to go to the ship. Meet me and Joanne (his wife) at Victoria”. I thought this could be fun. I met him there with his wife. We took the train to Ramsgate. I asked “Who are we meeting there?” He said “Like some shady character.” I thought that we were going out on a big boat. We went out on a speedboat. We were exposed to the elements. Unfortunately, the weather had turned when we came back. There was thunder and lightning. I thought “Oh my God, I am going to die on the North Sea.”

How did you get on the ship?

We got there on the speedboat. When we arrived, The Communicator crew and some dee jays greeted us. Tommy (Rivers) was



“ We get out on the ship (...) Charlie Wolf was there. The other female jock was Erin Kelly. Rick (Harris) was there. ”

I. to r.: Craig Novak, Erin Kelly, Charlie Wolf and Ric Harris.

not there. Ric (Harris) was there. Chris Carson was there. Liz (West) was not there. Tommy and Liz were away in Morocco on a trip. Charlie Wolf was there. The other female jock was Erin Kelly. Jonelle was not there. I had met Jonelle off the ship. She came later. This was in May 1985.

Before they had Holly Michaels and Jessie Brandon.

They were way earlier. I never met them. But I was on the ship. I have pictures of the studio. Everything was on cart. I continued to work for Radio Laser in the New York office until everything ended.

What happened after that? Did it just close up one day or run down gradually?

What happened was they could not operate anymore, because the DTI was circling them. They had to sneak out of there in the middle of the night. That was the end of it.

It was kind of sad. They were a big deal. I remember the first time I flew to London in May 1985. It was when Virgin Atlantic first began operating, so they only had one flight in or out of Newark airport every day. I flew first class. I was 25 years old. I thought to myself: I am in London staying

at the Portobello Hotel, where many rockers stay. I am having a great time. I am eating Indian food and I am going to record stores. People knew about Radio Laser, you heard it everywhere.

They were wall to wall at one time. Every cafe or shop you went into had Laser on. In traffic jams, they were on. On building sites, they were playing.

I heard Laser more than I heard Capital Radio. In the shops and in the cars.

What did you do after Laser?

After that I got a job at a New York suburban radio station, WXPS 107.1. I was the Music Director and the Midday Host. Myself and the Programme Director, Paul Cavalconte, developed a new format which is still used today: Adult Album Alternative (Triple A). We were the forerunners of developing this format. From there, I became a Shadow traffic reporter. I was not in the helicopter but I worked in the studios. I worked on some very big radio stations as a traffic reporter, such as Z100 which was number one in the market. I was also the afternoon traffic reporter

for the classic rock station Q104.3. Life in the #1 radio market was fun but stressful, late night shows, parties, etc. I ran myself down and I developed Chronic Fatigue, you call it ME here. I got really sick. It was the kind of thing that no one knew how to fix, how to deal with it, how to treat it. Someone said to me “Why don’t you try acupuncture and Chinese medicine?” That’s what I did. I got better. It peaked my interest in learning more about it. I ditched my radio career to go back to school to get a doctrine. I did some radio on a part time basis on a couple of different stations when they needed me. But as I began my acupuncture practice I said “No. I’m not doing radio anymore”.

Fast forward: WFUV eventually became a NPR radio station, National Public Radio. It’s part of New York public radio. It’s a member-supported, non-commercial radio station that gets most of its funding from listeners and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. My friend, the late Rita Houston, whom I worked with at WXPS 107.1, became the Programme Director. She was a well respected, well known broadcaster in America and especially

The MV Communicator in 1984



in the NPR world. She was the kind of person who discovered artists before everyone else. She discovered artists like Adele and Mumford and Sons. In 2018, we were out one night to see Paul Simon play his last show. A week later, I got a phone call from Rita while I was in London on holiday. She said “Hey, I want to talk to you about something. Do you want to come back and do some radio for us? It’s like riding a bike, you never forget how to do it.” I said “Yes, sure why not?” So since 2018, I have been the Saturday morning host on WFUV 90.7FM, WFUV.org. You could stream it worldwide. It’s a very popular radio station that carries on the triple A format that we developed.

You have also moved into acupuncture and Chinese medicine?

I have my own practice with physiotherapists. I have studied in China and taken post graduate course work worldwide. I’ve also lectured in London at the University of Westminster. It’s the medicine for today. During the peak of Covid, Chinese medicine practitioners around the world relied on the herbal medicine for-



Photo by Janet Bardini for WFUV

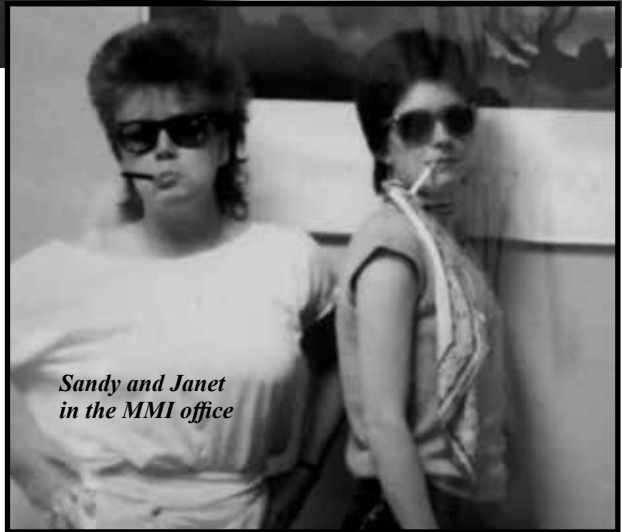
Ellen the sales person



mulas that doctors were using in the Wuhan hospitals to treat Covid. And even post Covid, acupuncture and Chinese medicine continues to help. That's my life. I live in New York in Harlem. I am really happy to start travelling again. I am happy to be back in London. It's my second home. I hope to be traveling more.

Listen to Janet Bardini on Saturdays from 6-10am ET, streaming on WFUV.org.

Janet Bardini interview by Chris Edwards, transcribed by David Burton © OEM 2022



Sandy and Janet in the MMI office