



Handout 3 - FM Radio and the Long Playing Album

Frequency Modulation (FM) as a form of radio broadcasting was invented in the 1930s. Though it does not have the geographic reach of AM radio, FM radio rejects most of the atmospheric interference heard on AM and provides a far more high fidelity broadcast. Until the late 1960s, FM was less popular than AM radio and was used primarily to “simulcast” AM broadcasts to a smaller region in higher fidelity, merely repeating AM programs. However, beginning on January 1, 1967, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) limited this simulcasting to 4 hours per day. This opened the FM “band,” creating empty space for the creation of new, independent stations, some of which chose not to imitate the formats of their AM counterparts.

During the late 1960s, several DJs such as former AM star Murray the K and the team of Tom and Raechel Donahue (seen here, photo from KSAN Jive95) pioneered what came to be called “freeform” radio, slowing the pace of their shows by playing longer tracks, introducing regional and lesser-known bands, reading less advertising and speaking in a relaxed, conversational tone. DJs like the Donahues helped drive Rock and Roll music toward the full-length LP format. The Donahues crafted shows from and discussed the creative value of the longer recordings enabled by LPs. As more DJs embraced this open ended format, more bands, and the labels that supported them, gravitated to releasing LPs rather than singles. As FM overtook AM radio in popularity, the LP began to eclipse the single as the preferred format for new releases. Radio and records were tied together in one history.



Tom and Raechel Donahue
Credit: KSAN Archives

Murray the K discusses his transition from AM radio DJ to FM freeform personality in the following excerpt from a 1972 interview with *Fusion* magazine’s Al Aronowitz.

Murray the K:

“[In the 1960s] I started getting into the music much more heavily. I mean these kids were writing music that had matured enough to open up some real heavy questioning of the ambiguity of our society. I said, ‘Hey, it’s time to grow up.’ I said, ‘Radio has got to change.’ I mean there was no more of those inane lyrics, ‘Who put the bomp in the bomp, bomp, bomp?’ Music started to really make a lot of sense....You didn’t have to hype the record anymore. The music was speaking for itself.”