



PEOPLE & PLACES

OZONE

A Breath Of Fresh Air

0 • ZONE [oh-zohn] noun

- 1) A powerful oxidizing agent, which in the upper atmosphere absorbs ultraviolet rays.
- 2) Informal: Fresh, pure air
- 3) Morning drive host on WBBT FM 107.3

By Steve Cook

Today's lesson focuses on definition 3. With a name like Ozone, he has to be some wild-haired, wild-eyed, head banging, fresh-out-of-DJ-school kid. Or so I thought. Instead, what or whom I met was indeed a breath of fresh air. Ozone is no kid, although I have to admit he looks about 10 years or so younger than his age. I won't reveal that, or his real name, which I only happen to know because he slipped and said it in quoting a conversation he had with his wife.

Here's what I am willing to reveal. The genial, soft-spoken (in the real world) guy has had a love affair with radio since he was ten years old, or so. He recalls sneaking out of bed after his mother and step-father were asleep and phoning his favorite all-night DJ. "I was a little groupie," he admits. This was in the mid-sixties, in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

His late-night phone calls finally garnered him an invitation to visit the studio. So, at about the age of 13, he and a friend hopped on their bikes in the pre-dawn hours and made the thirty-minute trip to the KEZY studios.

Ozone knew, at that point, he wanted a career in radio. Though he got sidetracked and followed other pursuits in his late-teens, his love for the business was rekindled at the age of 20 when he learned that his brother (some thirteen years his senior) had taken a job in radio.

And, for the most part, he's spent the ensuing years on the air...first in the Fresno area, but with gigs in Portland, Oregon; Kansas City, Missouri; Denver, Colorado; as well as Guam and Hawaii.

When he was first hired as an on-air personality, he received some advice from a seasoned pro, "Don't use your real name. A thief can know when you're on the air, and go to your home and rob you." So, the future Ozone became, in those early days, Jonathan Scott.



However, during Al Gore's environmentally-focused presidential campaign of 1992, "Jonathan Scott" joked, "If I ever get my own morning show, I'm going to call myself 'Johnny Ozone.'" It was in Guam that radio personality, "Johnny Ozone" became a reality. Eventually, the "Johnny" was flushed and he became simply, "Ozone."

While in Kansas City, the young DJ met the future "Mrs. Ozone." The two were married in Denver in 1991. Ozone tells me that his time in Guam was a turning point in his life. "Family and children are so important to the people there," he says. "It made me want to have children of my own.

By the time his own first little one was on the way, Ozone's mother- and father-in-law had moved from Missouri to the Richmond area. His wife actually came here to give birth to the couple's first son, while Ozone stayed behind in Guam.

Fast forward to the mid-nineties. Ozone has started his own Internet business, designing websites. "I was the first DJ with my own site www.ozoneman.com," he says. At this time, he made the decision to leave radio, move to Richmond, and provide for his growing family with the website business.

He was out of radio. But radio was not out of him. Through his years in the business, Ozone had made somewhat of a name for himself as a writer of jingles and music parodies. Actually, he has written for such radio icons as Rick Dees and Mancow. It was one of those parodies that got him back into the biz.

"I would listen to Jackie and Bender on the radio here in Richmond," he says. "They were a husband-and-wife team, and when she became pregnant, they joked on-air, calling their unborn child, 'Cletus the fetus.'" Ozone wrote a parody about Cletus, which the couple, aired on their morning show. That parody

led to a part-time local radio job, which led to another, and another, so that today, Ozone is spinning records (or some modern similarity to such), playing the "Greatest Hits of the 60s and 70s" on FM 107.3 WBBT radio.

Ozone is back in his element, but one gets the feeling he would enjoy spreading his wings somewhat and doing the sort of radio show that his talents would allow him to do. Impersonations, comedy bits, song parodies... the guy can do it all. However, in a structured 2008 FM radio station, one can only catch a rare glimpse of such talent.

Nonetheless, "I'm having fun," he says. Although, sitting alone in a studio, pushing buttons, with little interaction from others, "Sometimes," he admits, "I have to find the drive (to continue doing what he's doing) from within."

A casual listener might not fully appreciate what Ozone brings to the (turn)table. In a world of ratings-driven, formulaic radio, despite certain constraints, Ozone is a breath of fresh air. Away from the mic, he's even more so. He has involved himself in local charitable and community endeavors. But, even more importantly, an area where his true passion becomes evident, is family. Ozone and his wife have two sons. Of the boys, he says, "They're my best friends." As much as he clearly enjoys talking about his family. That too, can be somewhat of a rarity in the entertainment world.

There are indeed many layers to this Johnny Ozone. He's not just another pretty voice. But, it's that voice that's kept him on the air...waking Richmonders each morning, playing some of that good ol' rock 'n roll, and, on occasion, using his creativity to give us a good laugh. And, when you think about it, someone who can do all that...well, that is a breath of fresh air. □