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Books: At the dawn of rock n' roll

New book takes readers back to the glory days of rock radio

By Cheré Coen

Dave Pierce was just another All-American boy growing up in rural Acadiana, graduating at the top of his high school class where he became an All-State running back.

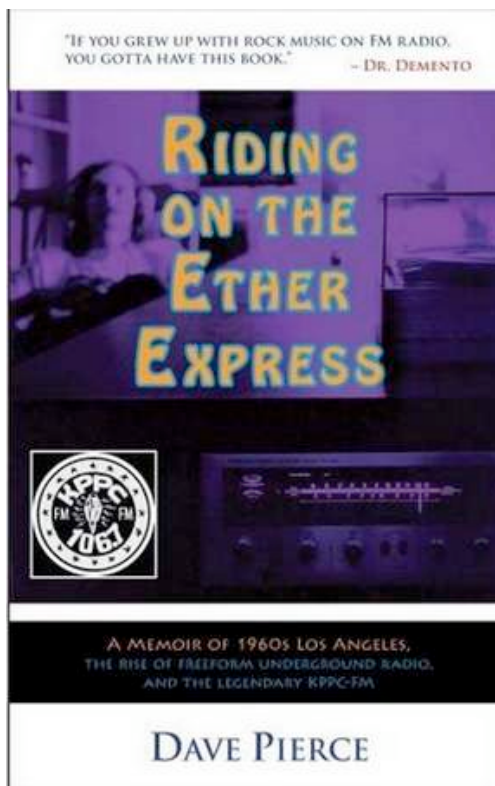
But then, that's who the people were in the counter cultural revolution, Pierce insists, just a bunch of All-American kids.

"To understand the '60s, you have to understand the '50s," he said. "They (movers of the '60s) grew up as All-American kids. So did I. That's what the radical movement was all about — All-American kids."

Pierce recounts his experiences from his childhood in Intracoastal City and Abbeville to his wild days in Los Angeles working on a scholarship at the Pasadena Playhouse and later building KPPC, at one time the No. 1 station in L.A. in *Riding on the Ether Express: A Memoir of 1960s Los Angeles, the Rise of Freeform Underground Radio, and the Legendary KPPC-FM* (Center for Louisiana Studies).

A book launch party will be held from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday with a 60s-themed party at the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum.

Pierce begins his story in Acadiana with reminiscences of his childhood and teen years to show how early rock 'n' roll and other cultural influences of the 1950s molded the events of the following decade. After his stint as an actor with the Pasadena Playhouse in the early '60s, Pierce worked as a deejay at several Southern California stations. He had developed radio experience at Lafayette's KVOL and acting in plays at USL.



Once at KPPC in the late '60s Pierce helped open up FM to a rock 'n' roll format, using radio personalities as deejays and "The Credibility Gap" comic troupe for news, which included future Hollywood stars David L. Lander, Michael McKean and Harry Shearer. KPPC deejays included Charles Laquidara, Jeff Gonzer, Steve Segal and the legendary Dr. Demento. And all was broadcast in the basement of the Pasadena Presbyterian Church.

Although commonplace now, the KPPC staff would meet musicians and air their records and commentary when they came to town for concerts, something not done before, Pierce said.

"The book gives you a peek into what it was like then, when The Beatles came to town, when music was actually being revolutionized, when the big concerts started," he said.

For example, Uni Records, a "nobody label," contacted KPPC about one of its new artists creating a stir in England, a man named Elton John. Before John's concert at the Troubadour in L.A., he staged a pie fight outside the station.

"It was a fascinating time to be alive and living in the '60s and in a hotbed like Los Angeles," Pierce explained.

"The '60s were about celebrating the joy."

The decade also had its protests — Vietnam, the civil rights, women's and environmental movements. In the book Pierce incorporates letters from his best friend, Woodie Bernard, who became a Green Beret fighting the Vietcong while Pierce was fighting police in Los Angeles.

"It's a nice contrast to what he was doing and what I was doing," Pierce said. "Who's to say who was right and who was wrong."

Eventually Pierce and his family returned to Louisiana to get away from the smog of L.A. He worked as a sales manager for Fox and wrote, directed and produced plays at The Abbey Players in Abbeville. After retiring two years ago he was lured back into radio at KXKC, 105.3, which is available from Carencro north to Lecompte and over to Simmesport, and works for the CW network.

Pierce is hesitant to comment too harshly about radio today, but added that there is "very little" that he likes.

"Tom Petty in *The Last DJ* says it all for me," he said.

"I remember when the radio meant something," Petty said in a 2002 Rolling Stone interview when the song came out. "We enjoyed the people who were on it, even if we hated them. They had personalities."

And one of them just wrote the book.

Appearances

The 60s-themed book release party for Dave Pierce's *Riding on the Ether Express: A Memoir of 1960s Los Angeles, the Rise of Freeform Underground Radio, and the Legendary KPPC-FM* will be from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum, 701 E. St. Mary Blvd. Free books will be given to the

“grooviest” costume, and period music will be played.

Pierce will also sign copies of *Riding on the Ether Express* from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. today at The Depot, 201 W. Lafayette St. in Abbeville, and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at Barnes & Noble, 5707 Johnston St. Former deejay Sean Tracelek will perform.

On the Web

Tom Petty's *The Last DJ* on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Piq2D0cwFdg>

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