

Still the first lady of radio

I have no idea when I first met Meg Griffin although I do remember seeing her through a haze at a raucous Major Thinkers gig at the UK Club back in 1980. Both club and Thinkers (a New Wave band I led with Pierce Turner) have gone, but Meg remains the first lady of free form radio and keeps the freak flag flying above her channel, Disorder, at Sirius Satellite Radio.

There she has gathered around her a bunch of partisans who fervently believe that listeners prefer to be guided by the instinct and taste of an educated and caring DJ rather than the polls of media consultants.

These iconoclasts include David Johansen of the New York Dolls, Vin Scelso of WNEW-FM fame, and yours truly who hosts Celtic Crush, the only nationwide Celtic music and talk show.

But let's bounce back to the pivotal year of 1979 when New York City was the unrivaled musical capital of the world. CBGB's was ablaze and churning out bands the caliber of The Ramones, Blondie, Talking Heads and Television.

Meg and her then partner, Joe Piasek were running WPIX-FM, the most popular cutting edge radio station. Their playlist was a glorious amalgam of punk, new wave, funk, Motown and whatever



Larry
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else shook the rafters in those crazy days back when the Bronx was burning.

Everyone from Pete Townsend to James Brown visited and participated in Meg's laser-like interviews. Had Sister Mary Ramone, as she is fondly known, been given another year of musical freedom she might have remade New York's musical taste; but the consultants and those who want to shake the last dollar out of radio were on the march, and PIX's format was changed overnight to Music For Lovers. Ugh!

Perhaps it's her upbringing as a granddaughter of Radio Bill Griffin (who sang live on the airwaves) or her hardscrabble immigrant roots from Cork, Mayo and Donegal, but Meg dismisses such misfortunes with the wave of a hand. Her attitude remains, "Lose all the battles you like, as long as you don't lose the war..."

Perched atop the 36th floor of a Manhattan skyscraper, she programs her chan-

nel, Disorder, with a verve and daring that sometimes even takes my anarchistic breath away. One can hear the latest Coldplay next to Django Reinhardt, Miles Davis on the heels of Lúnasa, Otis Redding nudging Steve Earle. There are only two types of music in the lady's book - good and bad - everything else revolves around taste and Sister Mary's got that in spades.

This unrepentant punk rocker has experienced many heartbreaks down all the days of modern commercial radio but her sunny disposition and steely nerves have enabled her to weather the worst shocks of a business now almost totally fueled by money and ratings.

With a quiet dignity she moves on when she can no longer exercise her unique gifts, but always surfaces somewhere on the airwaves to the delight of her legion of fans. This, after all, is the lady who turned down the job of first MTV jock - later taken by another Irish-American, Martha Quinn - over integrity issues.

Her immigrant grandmother gave up her ticket on the Titanic to be with a loved one; likewise Meg has danced a merry jig in her own crazy affair with radio.

She has finally found the home she always desired at Sirius and was one of the first batch of programmers hired in



Free thinking Meg Griffin.

2000 - they even watched the initial Sirius satellite being launched from Kazakhstan.

At Disorder she chooses her hosts carefully and guides us skillfully, yet I only recall one piece of advice, "Be yourself, the listener can always tell." Were the seeds of this maxim sown at St. Bernard's Church and School in White Plains?

Who knows, but there's a lot of the Catholic schoolgirl's discipline, resolve and sense of adventure in the first lady of free form radio who still flies her freak flag from atop a satellite on Sirius Radio.