

## Obituaries

### Dan Ingram, popular DJ who poked fun at his own medium, dies at 83

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by [Marc Fisher](#) June 28 [✉ Email the author](#)

Dan Ingram, one of the first and wittiest of the Top-40 radio DJs who succeeded by savaging his own medium, died June 24 at his home in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He was 83.

He died after choking on a piece of steak, said a son, Christopher Ingram.

In New York and St. Louis and a slew of smaller markets, Mr. Ingram turned the playing of hit records into a daily opportunity to make fun of nearly everything, including the music he played, the ads that paid the bills and radio itself.

His show, heard on New York City's WABC from 1961 to 1982, was a Mad magazine of the airwaves, and his rapid-fire thumbing of his nose at all forms of authority inspired the work of other ironists, such as David Letterman, [Keith Olbermann](#) and [Don Imus](#).

He was a [verbal machine-gun](#) of puns and punchlines, most of them delivered in the seconds between a song's beginning and its first lyrics. If you didn't like one line, the next was two minutes and 45 seconds away. He replied to Jimmy Ruffin's classic "What Becomes of the Brokenhearted": "They bleed to death." He introduced the Chords' "Sh-Boom": "And now, the song of the exploding librarian."

Michael Harrison, publisher of the radio trade publication Talkers, said in a statement that Mr. Ingram was "the greatest Top 40 radio disc jockey of all time — not just being a master of compacted content delivered by an awesome voice with a remarkable range, but a genius practitioner of timing. He raised the presentation of pop radio to an art form."

Mr. Ingram reigned as one of the most influential and popular DJs beginning in the early years of the format, when transistor radios first made it possible to carry your music around with you on the streets, at school and at the beach. "I literally was in their ears," Mr. Ingram observed.

He sensed and fostered an intimate connection to his listeners, and he developed an on-air persona that made his audience feel they were part of an inside group.

On WABC, which had a powerhouse signal that reached most of the eastern half of the country at night, Mr. Ingram called his listeners "Kemosabe," Tonto's affectionate moniker for the Lone Ranger on the radio and TV series of that name. He was the last DJ on WABC on the day it switched from Top 40 music to political talk in 1982.

In this author's 2007 book, "Something in the Air," radio poet Ken Nordine said Mr. Ingram delivered his bits so quickly that listeners could believe they were the only ones who got the joke. Nordine found himself calling friends to ask, "Did you catch what Ingram said?"

He proclaimed a Word of the Day ("Solid!" "Humdinger!" "Rococo!") and an Honor Group of the Day ("vacuum cleaner repairmen," "cops on the beat.") He jabbed constantly at the tired old format that he worked in for more than five decades. "Twenty-two before three on the Ingram Travesty," he announced one afternoon in 1962, "the program designed to belt the Establishment."

Some days, he dubbed his show the "Ingram Atrocity;" more often, it was the "Ingram Mess," and always, he found ways to needle the powers that were.

After the news bulletin announcing the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon, Mr. Ingram played Rod Stewart's "Reason to Believe," which featured the lyric "you lied straight-faced while I cried." After he read an ad for A&P Supermarkets touting "fresh lamb from American farms," Mr. Ingram assured listeners that this was "none of this Chinese communist lamb, this is patriotic lamb."

A&P's spots were a frequent target. When the store offered a special on iceberg lettuce, Mr. Ingram helpfully added, "You know it's iceberg lettuce because two-thirds of it is under the counter." He toyed with the ad copy for Castro Convertibles, a furniture store, so that they offered "chairs that convert into beds and ottomans, which convert into an entire empire."

Daniel Trombley Ingram was born in Oceanside, on Long Island, on Sept. 7, 1934. His parents were musicians, he in big bands and she in classical chamber groups. Mr. Ingram knew from childhood that he wanted to be on the radio. He attended Hofstra

College (now Hofstra University) but left to launch his DJ career, spinning records at stations in New Rochelle and Patchogue, N.Y., and New Haven and Bridgeport, Conn., sometimes under his own name and sometimes as “Ray Taylor.”

He figured out his act and found success at stations in Dallas and St. Louis before arriving in New York in 1961. For a few years, while he handled the afternoon shift on WABC, he also conducted a jazz and blues show, “The Other Dan Ingram,” on the company’s FM station.

His first wife, Kathleen Snediker, died in a car accident in 1962, and his later marriages to Anita Strand and Jeannie Weigel ended in divorce. Survivors include his wife, Maureen Donnelly; five sons; four daughters; two stepdaughters; 26 grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren.

After WABC dropped its music format, Mr. Ingram continued working in New York radio at WKTU and then WCBS-FM, an oldies station where he worked from 1991 to 2003, when he retired. He was inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame in 2007. In 1965, when the Beatles visited New York, WABC rented a suite above the Fab Four’s hotel rooms to broadcast the wild scene as fans massed outside the building. WABC’s other DJs focused on every move the Beatles made, but Mr. Ingram chose to demonstrate how central his station had become to New Yorkers: He led thousands of teenagers in the enthusiastic singing of WABC’s station jingles.

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### Marc Fisher

Marc Fisher, a senior editor, writes about most anything. He has been The Washington Post’s enterprise editor, local columnist and Berlin bureau chief, and he has covered politics, education, pop culture and much else in three decades on the Metro, Style, National and Foreign desks. [Follow](#) 

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