

Q & A With KPCC Host Larry Mantle

Former PCC Student's 'Airtalk' Show Makes Mark in News Radio

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Thousands of listeners join former PCC student, KPCC broadcast journalist Larry Mantle on weekdays at 10 a.m. for lively and in-depth discussions of news, politics, science, entertainment, the arts, and more.

Not too long ago, Mantle celebrated his twentieth anniversary on the airwaves with a memoir, "This is AirTalk -20 Years of Conversation on 89.3 KPCC."

The anthology of interviews includes conversations with former President Jimmy Carter, Steve Martin, Senator John McCain, Anne Garrels, GE CEO Jack Welch, Rosa Parks, Maurice Sendak, Carl Reiner, Milton Berle, and many more.

"Of course our total audience ranges from toddlers to the very old, but the median age of the KPCC audience is 52. The audience is 55/45 male/female, which is typical for public radio news. As a group, the KPCC audience is very highly educated," said Craig Curtis, program director at KPCC.

"It's surprisingly difficult to pin down the ethnicity of the KPCC audience with precision, but basically the audience is 2/3 white and 1/3 non-white (Latino, African-American, Asian, Native, Pacific Islander, etc.)," said Curtis.

Mantle is renowned for his long-format interviews and his intellectual approach. Now, we ask him questions to learn more about the person behind the soothing voice and the insightful interviews.

Courier: How did your broadcast journalism career start?

Larry Mantle: I already had a degree in Psychology and wanted to become a minister when I came to Pasadena to attend school. As



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Larry Mantle discusses his radio show at KPCC.

a student, I was listening to KPCC and called the radio station to ask for a job.

After passing a writing test and writing news for a while, the station manager suggested that I enroll in a broadcasting class to enable me to get on the air. I became a part-time host of the morning show. That was almost 25 years ago ... At that time, KPCC only had five full-time employees, now we have about 100. Over the years our radio station evolved to be the third largest NPR station in the country.

Courier: What is your greatest accomplishment?

L. M.: I became the news manager in my

early twenties. It was extremely challenging and empowering at the same time.

I suggested taking call-ins in my nightly interview program. Airing listeners' voices as a response to interviews with experts was something that had never been done in public radio before. It gained instant popularity and my half-hour show shortly expanded to be a two-hour program.

Every morning on "Air Talk," I am trying to help the public, including myself, to deal with overwhelming and complicated issues by inviting listeners to share their different points of view with other listeners. Aside from the discussions, or maybe through them, KPCC

gives people a sense of community.

Courier: What was the proudest moment of your life?

L. M.: My son saying he admired me meant the most to me.

Courier: Who is a typical KPCC listener?

L.M.: I would say they are curious, open-minded individuals who want to learn on a continuous basis and who want to be connected with other people. We have detailed statistical information available regarding our listeners as well.

KPCC's total weekly audience in the Los Angeles Metro area is about 520,000 people, according to Arbitron, Inc., a major consumer research firm.

Courier: How do you handle boring topics?

L. M.: If I don't feel interested in the topic, I don't host it. But as most journalists are, I am generally hungry for knowledge. I am expert in nothing, but interested in virtually everything.

Courier: How important is the web to KPCC?

L. M.: It has become an extremely important part of KPCC. The web provides listeners the next, deeper layer to research issues we talk about on air. They can choose when they want to listen to our programs. Somebody told me yesterday that earlier that day he heard my interview on the net with author Philip L. Fradkin. We recorded that show over a month ago. With the podcast our news became portable and more convenient to listen to. People can walk their dog and listen to their favorite talkshow at the same time. We upload polls onto our website and use the results to generate conversations.

Courier: Who would you like to interview if you could pick anybody, dead or alive?

L.M.: Nelson Mandela, because he made such a remarkable impact on the United States. I would love to get a sense of him. I don't mean information that I can look up. I am more curious to observe how he responds to my questions, what is his personality and how open he is. Richard Nixon as well, because I find him to be the most inscrutable elected official; even his friends could not tell what he was thinking. And of course, Frank Sinatra too.