

Up Close: Lou Brutus...Radio's Last Hope

By Michael Parrish

Lou Brutus is a man of many talents. A renowned radio raconteur playing very loud music and talking nationally to rock stars large and small as he is listened to by millions each week.

He is entering his 15th season as host of the nationally syndicated *hardDrive with Lou Brutus* and is also host of its weeknight counterpart *hardDrive XL*. During the day, he is Senior Director of Active Rock Programming at Sirius XM overseeing Octane, Liquid Metal and Faction as well as the Grateful Dead Channel. He's also heard as the host of the Artist Confidential series.

Brutus not only plays music, he makes music. Amongst the bands he fronts are the legendary Dead Schembechlers and his new group Grumpy Old Punks. As if that weren't enough, he's an accomplished photographer whose lighthouse images have graced magazine covers and who can often be seen on field in the photo pits at Major League Baseball games.

He has been an air talent at legendary stations including WMMR/Philadelphia, WHJY/Providence, WHFS/Washington, DC and WRCX/Chicago. He's been seen on HBO, NBC, ABC, ESPN and The Uncle Floyd Show. He lives, breathes and defecates music. He has crowned himself as "Radio's Last Hope."

Congrats on starting your 15th year of hardDrive with Lou Brutus. How does it feel to have 14 years of syndication under your belt?

It's a tremendous feeling of accomplishment and proof of the old adage "Time flies when you're having fun." The support and love we receive from so many listeners around the country is the main driving engine and I am indebted to them for the support, which allows me to live my dream. I feel a bit perplexed as well as I cannot even begin to count the number of artist interviews I've conducted around the planet but I know it's a lot! If I remember correctly, one of my first for the show was Alice in Chains at Tigers Stadium in Detroit where they were opening for the first KISS reunion concert. My latest to date was all of the main stage bands for Rockstar Mayhem. At the most recent Rock on the Range, I believe I conducted thirty-four interviews over the two show days. Although events like that are a daunting amount of work and prep, the payoff is enormous for the listeners. I guess the two best feelings are knowing that, at least in some small way, I've helped to bring worthy artists onto the scene as well as the feeling of satisfaction from working

on something I love so much with people that I have such tremendous respect for including Roxy Myzal, Andy Denmark, Tiz, Bill, Zak and the rest of our crew.

hardDrive with Lou Brutus originally started as a weekly program, before going "XL" to every weeknight. Talk about the differences in the weekly show vs. the nightly show.

I believe the greatest difference is that the weekend version is more stringently focused on the music, the artists, interviews and music news. It has to be as we've but two hours and a lot of music to play and ground to cover! The XL version, thanks to its larger scope and feel, allows me additional canvas on which to inform and entertain. However, the central themes for both are still consistent: artist interaction, great new music and intelligent, if somewhat warped, commentary. The fact we have Randy Hawke programming the XL tunes means we've got one of the sharpest brains in radio minding the musical store which is another enormous plus. The reaction from the listeners and the growth of the show are beyond what I could have

hoped for. People are passionate about it to the point of madness.

Roxy Myzal is a huge force in creating hardDrive. We can't discuss the show without mentioning her importance. Talk about her role in making hardDrive successful.

Anyone who underestimates Roxy, her skill set and tenacity does so at their own peril! The short answer is that I get to do the fun stuff while Roxy has the adult work. The longer answer is that she deals with the nuts and bolts of maintaining the show and politics of the music world and there is no one better at it. In the same way someone in the military plans for weeks for an operation that actually lasts only a short time, she will work around the clock to arrange something like my interviews for Rockstar Uproar, which will only take up one evening to record. The amount of work she put into last year's hardDrive Live Tour was insane. Roxy lives her job in the same way that I live mine. There is no OFF switch. It's a way of life. She and I always jokingly refer to the program as "The Little Show That Could" because no matter how large the task may be thru these many years we've



always been able to make it happen. She is like family to me. Plus, she knows all the good restaurants.

You have been on air at WMMR/Philadelphia, WHJY/Providence, WHFS/Washington, DC and WRCX/Chicago. Which was your favorite and why?

I suppose my sentimental favorite would be WMMR as that's where I did my original radio internship and then became a member of the staff. It was also one of the rock stations I grew up on and convinced me that this is what I wanted to do with my life. However, I think anyone who knows radio realizes that all of these stations are or were very special places to our industry. WHJY was the site of my first fulltime show and I left my mark on the city...that they're still trying to scrub off. WRCX was plain insanity with an unbelievable staff and the most evil creative streak witnessed by civilized man. It's run may not have been as long as some other stations but I am reminded of Joseph Turkel's line to Rutger Hauer in Blade Runner, "The light that burns twice as bright burns for half as long - and you have burned so very, very brightly." It's just very humbling to be so fortunate to have worked at so many phenomenal outlets with so many talented programmers and air staff.

If you were given the opportunity to do a daily show for one station... which market and day part would you choose? And what type of show would you do?

Wow, that's tough. I honestly don't know. I've been all over the nation and there are so many places that I love. If I could figure out a way to do my thing from Cape Cod that would be pretty bitchin' but as Hyannis isn't a tour stop for many (well, any) bands I gotta kinda rule it out. As for the type of show, I think any kind of program that allows me to speak honestly, especially in a comedic way, about what's going on in the world is appealing. I've had talk offers but to date my love of music has kept me away from those. Probably the most common comment I receive regarding hardDrive XL is that it's "real." The subjects I talk about are not that of some radio star lamenting their contract, ratings or feud with some other radio-type. The topics I deal with are almost exclusively taken directly from plain, old, everyday life. It can be harder to turn the seemingly banal into compelling radio but it's far more relatable.

Like any good comedy, it's taking what we all know, but never mention, and saying it out loud. As for day part, well, I'm up very early every morning hitting the gym but afternoons are so much easier on one's constitution.

You are also Senior Director of Active Rock Programming as Sirius XM. What does that entail?

I oversee the programming for Octane, Liquid Metal and Faction. In Will Pendarvis and Jose Mangin, I've obviously got tremendously talented programmers who are passionate about their formats and music. I'm probably most hands on with Octane in terms of adds and rotations although I'm deep in all of them. Having Gregg Steele and Steve Blatter to help guide us is a definite plus as they are great teachers of the programming craft. It's like anything else in this business, ask lots of questions from everyone around you and soak up all the knowledge that you can. I think the most fulfilling thing I've done in terms of on air work at SXM is as host of the Artist Confidential series. I've not only done these long form interviews with rockers like Smashing Pumpkins and Cheap Trick but jazz artists like Harry Connick Jr. and country artists like Reba McEntire and Wynonna. Having The Oak Ridge Boys harmonize on "Seven Nation Army" five feet in front of your face is an experience I wholeheartedly recommend to anyone who can make it happen. This has also given me the opportunity to show my ability to work with artists in any format, which I believe allows me to further broaden my career.

You are sometimes referred to as an unofficial member of Slipknot. How did this come about and what is your number?

I've been jokingly referred to as the 10th Knot, which is pretty funny though it makes me miss Paul Gray all the more. Roxy and I had gotten an advance of what was going to end up being Slipknot's first single "Wait and Bleed" looong before it came out. I loved it. Roxy loved it. I personally thought it was the best thing I had heard in ages. We started playing it on hardDrive before it was actually released. Later, we went to Hartford, CT to cover the opening show on Ozzfest that year and Slipknot played first at the very bottom of the bill. We walked over this hill coming from the gate and the site of them onstage in front of a ferocious pit was as disturbing as anything from out of

the Hieronymus Bosch painting "The Garden of Earthly Delights." I remember saying out loud, "What the ****?!?" I went on their bus later to do the interview and as soon as the tour manager introduced me they cheered, picked me up bodily and carried me around the bus. They then told me how they had heard every play the show had given them. They were just another baby band and we were pretty much the only large-scale airplay they got over the first year or so. I went to see and hang with them every chance I got. I didn't know if they'd blow up or not nor did I care. I just enjoyed their company. Plus, the show was insane. Jim Root had all the guys write out thanks to me on the guitar he played every night of that first tour and sent it to me as a gift. I guess I'm just one of their biggest fans apart from the professional support I've given. Since then, I've been in the studio while they've recorded and traveled around the country with them. This year, I wrote a bio for Clown's band Dirty Little Rabbits but I did it all in prose so I think it was a little too weird to use. I went down to Nashville to hang in the studio with Stone Sour while they finished Audio Secrecy. I also traveled to Des Moines for Paul's funeral, which was a very long and difficult day. I'll hit the road with Stone Sour for part of the Rockstar Uproar Tour, too. Finally, one of the best stories I've ever gotten on air was Corey Taylor talking about working the late night shift at the big porn shop in Des Moines and listening to the show on the way in saying to himself, "I'm gonna get on hardDrive one day and get interviewed by Lou Brutus." It's pretty humbling to hear something like that. Plus, with circumstances that bizarre, ya gotta love it!



Talk about the importance of the relationships you have built with artists over the years.

Artist relationships are the cornerstone of hardDrive, XL and everything else I do. The list of artists who've received their first airplay courtesy of the shows is enormous including Godsmack, Disturbed, Slipknot, Sevendust, Breaking Benjamin and countless others. They know when they take the time they are not only reaching an enormous audience but they are going to be put into the best possible light. It's also why they come back time and time again. I received one of the nicest compliments I ever got when Rob Zombie said, "I hate doing interviews but love seeing your name on the day sheet. I know that I'm going to have a really interesting conversation." Coming from a person whose talents I respect so much means a lot. I suppose that's why I've been blessed to do projects with Rush, Theory of A Deadman, KoRn, A Perfect Circle, Metallica, Tool, 3 Doors Down and so many others. I'm often asked by other radio brethren, "Why do you get to do all these artist things?" I tell them it's a mix of hard work and professional courtesy. Always be respectful of other people. Be on time. Say "please" and "thank you." Show them the respect of knowing all facets of their life. They'll appreciate it and you'll also be prepared for the conversation to go in any direction. Also, you're not there to get wasted and join the party. If you wanna get loaded then go out in the crowd and don't embarrass yourself in front of your peers.

Not many people outside of those that care about the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry know of the Dead Schembechlers. What can you say about the band to educate the masses?

It's a very long and twisted story. I became fascinated by the rivalry between the schools. It's built on pure hatred. It was rated the biggest rivalry in all of sports by ESPN. I began to concoct the story of a long running, mythical band that played only one night a year on the eve of the rivalry game. They would sing filthy punk songs about how Michigan sucked and dressed like Ohio's old coach Woody Hayes. Their songs included "Michigan Stadium is A Pile of S**t" and "Ann Arbor Girls Are Dirty Whores." Violence, mayhem and bloodshed followed in their wake. Well, I wrote more and more songs and more and more back-ground. When I told my friends in the Columbus, OH based band Watershed

about it they said, "We must do this for real!" So I hopped a flight to Ohio, we recorded an album over the weekend and we became the Dead Schembechlers with me as lead singer Bo Biafra. I then created an online viral marketing campaign to convince people the band had actually been around for years. CD101 in Columbus, thanks to then morning man Brian Phillips and the late Andyman, hopped on it and spoke on air as if the made up background were all true. The newspapers then started covering us including half of the front page of the Detroit Free Press on the day of our first gig. Between the triangulation of radio, newspapers and web, the band simply exploded with kids convinced that we had been around since 1990 fighting the National Guard in burning couch filled streets. The weirdest day of my life was playing to a sold out Newport Music Hall a few short hours after our namesake, Bo Schembechler, passed away. He had apparently been delighted by the existence of the band. We gave all the money to his charity that night and blew the roof off the dump. Since then we've appeared on HBO, ESPN, ABC and literally hundreds of news articles. We come out to play ever couple of years, always earmarking money for the Bo Schembechler Heart of A Champion Fund. This year, we'll also give to the memorial fund for the family of Andyman who passed recently and to the Stefanie Speilman Fund for Breast Cancer Research. It's ironic that so much hatred can actually be made to do so much good. Life is funny.

What can you tell me about your new band the Grumpy Old Punks?

I always thought that young people were the wrong ones to sing punk rock. If you've got your whole life ahead of you, Mom and Dad are footing your bills and the biggest problem you have is a term paper then what the hell do you know about angst? Punk rock should only be sung by guys who are living thru the nasty things that life has to offer and who knows more about that than balding, paunchy, middle aged guys? Some of the songs include "Hey You Kids Get Off My Lawn," "That's No MILF That's My Wife" and "My Adjustable Rate Mortgage Really Sucks." Like the Dead Schembechlers, I'm the lead singer and am surrounding myself with top-notch musicians who have played in underground bands like The Devil Dogs, The Prissteens and The Jehovah Waitresses. Hope to have the debut album, "Anarchy in the Prostate,"

out on iTunes in the Fall. There's an indie filmmaker who's interested in doing a docu-pic following our progress and I also understand that Derf, the underground comic legend, may be doing something with us as well. We'll see where it goes but it should be fun.

You're always staying busy. Anything else you're working on?

I like staying busy. I'm currently in the middle of re-launching my loubrutus.com web site. I'll eventually reintroduce the Brutusman comic book thru it as a download and color it yourself line. Just started a Lou Brutus channel on YouTube, which is getting up to speed and will include various interview stuff as well as original rants and musings I create for it. I'd like to do more television and am currently shopping around for an agent who knows that part of the biz. I'm also finally getting around to the publishing world as I am working on the un-authorized autobiography of the Dead Schembechlers and a book of the thousands of backstage passes and ticket stubs I've acquired thru my travels in rock. Musically, I've been working on a hip hop song that mixes the worlds of ghetto rappers with that of role playing nerds called "Dungeons and Dragons Thug Life." I'll put it out either under the name Ol' Dirty Brutus or Ol' Nerdy Bastard. I've released some baseball related pieces thru the years under the moniker Lou Brutus and the Perfect Pachydermus Percussion Pitches and have a few more pieces written for that. Plus, I always like working my Facebook and Twitter accounts, as they are great for testing out material. Throw in my photography and the fact that I'm busily working as the world's only collector of Joe Smith baseball cards means there isn't much time to sleep. **QB**

