

Radio Only a Pirate Could Love

*Long John Silver
is on the airwaves,
and the FCC is
out to scuttle him*

A melodious jingle spelled out the call letters to late-night radio listeners from Coney Island to the Carolinas. "W-F-A-T... FAT's where it's at!"

A professional-sounding disc jockey cut in: "The nation's number-one pirate station!" Spinning a raucous 45 from Little Richard's pre-born-again heyday, the underground d.j. peered out his window and spied two men brandishing bizarre gizmos in the courtyard below. His apprehension accelerated into alarm as the men followed their electronic divining rods to his building's door and then dashed inside.

"Oops, gotta sign off early, folks," the d.j. yelled as he dove across the room to kill the power. Maniacally, he yanked red-hot vacuum tubes from the illegal transmitter and stuffed them under a mattress in the bedroom that doubled as FAT's studio. An accomplice ripped out the incriminating connections of a 125-foot wire antenna running out the window to another building.

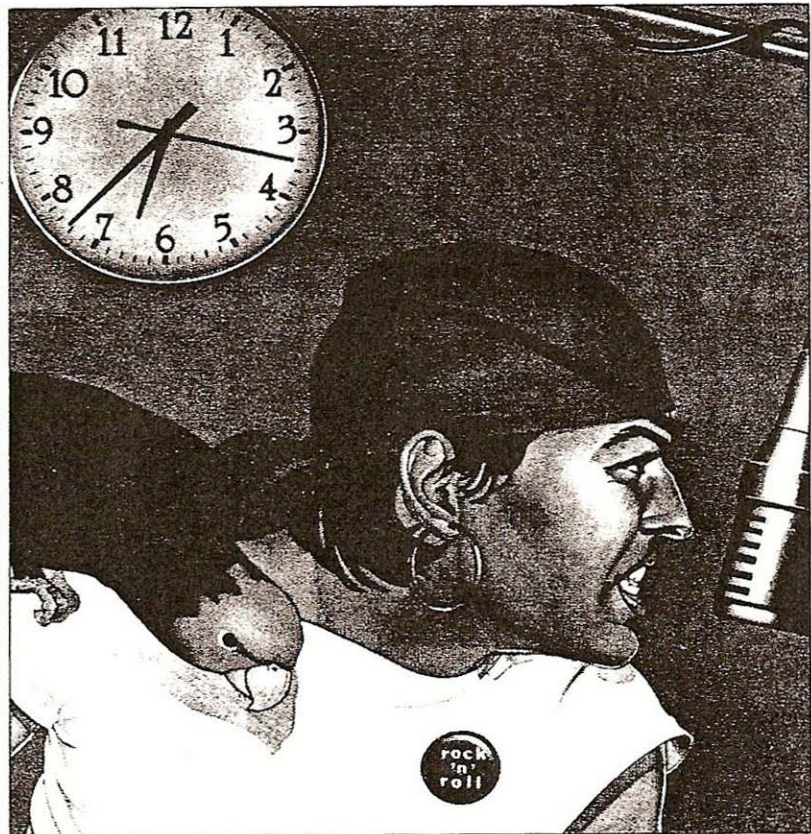
By then, the FCC agents were already pounding furiously on the apartment door. Minutes later, they had seized the guerrilla gear and put the FAT d.j.s on a no-radio-show diet for keeps. Later, in

court, the pirates slipped off the hook with a warning from the judge. At least they didn't have to walk the plank: Broadcasting sans license is a Federal offense, carrying a potential one-year jail term and/or a \$10,000 fine.

But FAT is only one pirate vessel in an offbeat flotilla still cruising the nation's airwaves. An estimated two dozen enjoy relatively smooth sailing in New York City waters alone. Authentic media outlaws, these broadcasting buccaneers brazenly rove the radio dial from sea to shining sea.

Flying their Jolly Roger from a clandestine antenna, Brooklyn's swashbuckling crew beams out sounds so slick that few Brooklynites realize it's a pirate station they've heaved to on the dial. With 5000 watts of lawless power fusing the console's glowing tubes and coils, the station spans the borough on weekends with *outré* phone-in forums and marathon music fests.

Back when FAT was busted in 1979, the FCC had to nab perpetrators in the act. Now a set of warm tubes is enough for arrest and conviction. (And tapes of the illegal broadcasts, of course.) Even so, piracy continues to proliferate, and not only on American shores.



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From Borneo to Boston, pirate captains won't give up the ship; every time the FCC sinks one, two more pop up to take its place. So next time the local d.j. gets stuck in a monotonous groove, twirl that knob and explore your radio's uncharted regions for pirate bands—there's still no law against listening.

—SHAY ADDAMS

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