

# Radio Divas--Female radio personalities light up airwaves despite challenges

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"Radio is still a male dominated field and women have to compete," said [Frankie Darcell], who balances a radio career with being a mother. "As a woman you cannot just come into this business and just say a few call letters and expect to be major. You have to come up with a neat hook that is going to work and people will respond to." "I am very lucky and very fortunate to be in my position," said Olivia Fox, co-host of the syndicated "Russ Parr Morning Show" on WDTJ. "It has been a long haul. I have seen many women who've had the same skills I did but didn't look the right way. Men can look like anything. But for women, they want to see your headshot. Na Na, host of WDTJ's "Sunday Morning Inspirations" and "Talking with Na Na," said she has been inspired to succeed in radio by people such as Oprah Winfrey and accepts the idea of being a role model herself.

## ABSTRACT

Frankie Darcell, who is currently a radio host on WMXD-FM in Detroit, has been in the urban radio business for more than twenty years. She and other female radio personalities discuss the challenges of being a female in the business.

## FULL TEXT

With 20-plus years in urban radio, Frankie Darcell is still "the talk of the town," having weathered some tough storms to succeed in a business dominated by males.

"Radio is still a male dominated field and women have to compete," said Darcell, who balances a radio career with being a mother. "As a woman you cannot just come into this business and just say a few call letters and expect to be major. You have to come up with a neat hook that is going to work and people will respond to."

For Darcell, who is currently at WMXD (92.3), it has been important to be diligent, persistent, and more importantly, find a niche to make herself stand out as a female in the business.

Born and raised in Brooklyn to a family with six children, Darcell left home in pursuit of a college education with a basketball scholarship to Morgan State University in Baltimore.

"I actually started out majoring in physical therapy/pre-med., but began to change my mind when I discovered an interest in journalism," she said.

Darcell eventually started to write and then interned at a student radio station, which was her first radio job.

"The present NAACP president, Kwesi Mfume, had a talk show then at the station, and asked me to work the board for him be-cause somebody did not show up," Darcell recalled.

The in-tern-ship opened the door to Dar-cell hosting her first night show, from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.

"It was horrible," she said. "I was so excited that I knocked over a recording machine while talking on air."

The experience, however, did not discourage her from moving forward in radio.

"I discovered a love for talking," Darcell said. "I realized that I can give more of my personality."

After graduation, Darcell started her career at WRAP-AM in Norfolk, Va. She then moved to WZAM, a gospel station.

"I was young, hungry and I wanted to succeed," she said. "Living with my parents allowed me to follow

opportunities to other cities when needed. My dad, a military man, wanted me to join the service, and I actually took the entrance test and failed. It had to be divine order from God because it kept me in radio."

Darcell, like most female radio hosts, has had to struggle to get the type of accolades that male personalities get. Female radio hosts usually play second fiddle to their male counterparts, especially in major markets.

"I am very lucky and very fortunate to be in my position," said Olivia Fox, co-host of the syndicated "Russ Parr Morning Show" on WDTJ. "It has been a long haul. I have seen many women who've had the same skills I did but didn't look the right way. Men can look like anything. But for women, they want to see your headshot.

"However, I am fortunate to be part of a show where I'm allowed to be me, and not made out to be the butt of jokes, the way women have historically."

On most of De-troit's urban morning radio shows, the primary host is male, although CoCo be-came the top personality on WJLB's morning show after Big Tigger left.

In Detroit, fe-male radio personalities such as the late spiritually-oriented Martha Jean "the Queen" Steinberg of WQBH and jazz-oriented Rosetta Hines of WGPR have helped pave the way for personalities like Robin Hardin (formerly of WCHB), Mildred Gaddis (WCHB), Lady BG (WJLB), Janet G (WMXD), Shay in the Midday (WDTJ), Maxine Michaels (WGPR), Randy Miles (WDMK), Theresa Hill (WDTR), Kris Kelly (WJLB), and A.J. Parker (WDMK). "I believe women bring to the airwaves the same skill and organization that women bring to most organizations," said JoAnn Watson, talk show host on WHPR. "They have fire, vigor and force, which is unique to the personality of women. I feel that we have a responsibility to communicate issues of importance with the community."

Watson started the "Wake up Detroit" show on WCHB. She said God told her minutes before the first show that the city of Detroit needed a wake-up call.

Na Na, host of WDTJ's "Sunday Morning Inspirations" and "Talking with Na Na," said she has been inspired to succeed in radio by people such as Oprah Winfrey and accepts the idea of being a role model herself.

"It is a blessed position to be in," she said. "Women are setting a standard of empowerment. People want to see their own. There are so many images thrown at us. (It's good) to hear a woman, just an ordinary woman, like everyone else. I get to have home-town female schoolmates see my career grow. Someone is encouraged just by hearing you.

"I believe if you don't have challenges you will never grow. Black women have to deal with double standards because they are Black and women. As women, we've all been through a lot."

Photograph (Frankie Darcell)

## DETAILS

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