Beneath the makeup

Alice Cooper rocks on as disc jockey

By Heather Larson
Wellness Editor

He kicks back on an easy chair in the 93.3 KDKB lobby; chatting with fellow employees about how he missed the Jet concert he really wanted to see so he could go to Edmonton, Canada to present an award at the Juno Awards—the Canadian version of the Grammy Awards.

The staff tells him he's lucky he missed out because the sound at the Marquee Theatre was horrible. He then shares a musician's intimate knowledge of how sound works in small venues because he's played every kind of venue imaginable.

He's Alice Cooper, KDKB's rock star in residence and brand new night disc jockey. Absent today is Cooper's gothic eye makeup. He wears a white polo shirt, khaki pants and golf shoes because he faces a tee time later.



Alice Cooper i s the new voice of 93.3 KDKB. His radio show airs in 10 states, including, of course, Arizona.

Photo by Heather Larson

Cooper is a striking dichotomy: by day he's a father, a golfer and an outgoing famous rock star who lives in the Valley. At night, he's the insane entertainer again, doing his show on KDKB. Always ready to lend a hand with local charities, he gives more to the Valley than many of its famous residents. In person he's a nice guy. He's gracious with fans. In every way he's a rock and roll legend.

A KDKB listener walks into the lobby to collect a prize and is taken aback by the fact that Cooper is just sitting in the lobby. He glances at Cooper and blinks. His eyes wide, it's clear he's impressed to see Cooper but doesn't know what to say. He turns away to talk to the receptionist. He looks surprised when Cooper says hello to him as if he were a professional greeter. Cooper does that. He likes people.

"I'm not a recluse at all. I'm a very outgoing person. I look at it this way: at my house, it's private. When I walk outside the house, I belong to the public because they made me. The public owns me. Most people would say 'no, they don't.' Yes, they do. When everything you own is paid for by the public, either buying your records or going to your concerts, they own you. And they should own you. I don't have any problem with that," he says.

His attitude is contrary to what most are led to believe about rock stars. MTV news correspondent and Rolling Stone rock journalist Kurt Loder wrote of fame and rock stars in his book, Bat Chain Puller: Rock and Roll in the Age of Celebrity, "To be famous is to be perpetually importuned...on the street, in midmouthful at restaurants, even while taking a leak. There is little respite from one's fans...and so the more fame a person acquires, the more reclusive he or she appears to become." Cooper appears to be immune to his fame, even above being bothered by it.

He isn't the type of person who would ever want to disappoint a fan. "I'm never going to say no to an autograph I'm never going to say no to a picture. I'm part of the public. Not being a recluse when somebody asks, 'will you do this charity thing?' I play golf every day. I don't have any problem with that. I've never had anyone come up with any kind of a violent thing. I don't need bodyguards I've never had anything like that. I'm very outgoing. I'm easily approachable."

In fact, it seems Cooper's name does come up any time there is a local golf tournament for charity. He likes to back charities he believes in. He's involved with the Solid Rock Foundation, a Christian nonprofit foundation that gives inner city kids an alternative to gangs, drugs and guns. Charities like this have a special place in his heart.

Cooper says, "I think I'm always involved in any situation that is a hopeless situation. I avoid charities that have got so much money its ridiculous. When you get into a charity that's already raised 85 billion and they still haven't found a cure to this thing, I go 'OK, maybe there's no cure.' But when it's somebody who really needs something that's attainable, then I'll be there for that."

'When I walk out of the house, I belong to the public because they made me.'

–Alice Cooper

As one of Phoenix's famous residents, he's brought to the Valley Cooperstown, a haunted house and now his night show on KDKB, which is also syndicated to stations across the country.

He never actively sought to do any of these things. He says they simply fell into his lap.

A fellow Little League parent pitched the idea of opening a restaurant to Cooper, who wasn't receptive to the idea at first. Cooper thought he'd hear the name "Alice's Restaurant" next. The other parent surprised him with the clever "Cooperstown," after the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. The catchy title was enough to get Cooper to talk to his manager about it and Cooperstown was born. Eventually, the haunted house followed.

Cooper's latest venture is KDKB night radio show on local rock station 93.3 KDKB. Rock stars have become syndicated disc jockeys before, as in the case of Ted Nugent, Greg Kihn and others.

"I think with Dee Snider doing it and Little Steven (Van Zant), who else could talk on the radio and make it convincing? And especially to have the authority and the background to talk about these other bands, that was easy... The trick with me is the fact that I can talk about Pink Floyd and say, 'Oh by the way, I used to live with Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix came over that day.' Those things really happened. That makes the show really interesting. I certainly have different insights than anyone else has," he says.

The show is packaged in pure Cooper-style, with imaging that says things like, 'Didn't you know that a straight jacket is fashionable?' and "All Alice, all night, all insanity on 93.3 KDKB." After a song by Aerosmith plays, Cooper shares an anecdote about how he saw Al Roker get a colonoscopy on the Today Show. He comments that he'd rather see Katie Couric get the procedure done. Once he's in front of the microphone, Cooper drops the average-Arizonan persona for the personality of a shock-rockin' showman.

Cooper's show currently airs on 12 radio stations in 10 states. He talks about his famous friends, from Rob Halford of Judas Priest to John Kay of Steppenwolf. He shares his entertaining and crazy personality throughout the show while playing music. Ever accessible to fans, the show has an "Ask Alice" segment when listeners can call in and pick his brain. The kind of music he prefers is as classic and legendary as the man himself.

"I'm a fan of any garage band because they represent real rock and roll." I can appreciate a great pop record. I can sit down and listen to Britney Spears or Justin Timberlake and go 'Wow, what a great record.' Not my kind of music, though. I much prefer snotty garage bands. That's where we started; that's what we were. That's what the Stones and Aerosmith are. There's a certain swagger with being five guys in a garage with long hair. That's where I came from so that's what I still support."

He says he'd hate to be in a band attempting to make it in the music business today because everything has already been done. He hasn't heard anything original since Jane's Addiction came out. For young bands trying to make it, his advice is to concentrate on writing songs, which will sustain a band more than images ever will.

Cooper says, "If you don't have the songs and you have all this image – all you really have is a puppet show... You can become a media star but you listen to those albums and say which one of these songs are they going to be playing 30 years from now? You can't find one of them. Whereas you can find Bowie songs and Alice songs 35 years later they're still playing. And they're still vital. I'm not saying we were that good. I'm saying we were in a position where writing songs was everything.

"When we started, when Eighteen, our first big single, came out, it was up against Simon and Garfunkel, The Supremes, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Beatles, Tony Bennett—there was a top 40 that you had to crack. You had to make a record that was going to be as good as anything out there. Now when you put a record out, there's metal, alternative metal, dark metal, black metal, this metal. Back then, it was just, 'is the song good enough to make the charts?' We come from that school. To me, music writing is everything. People to this day come to see Alice Cooper not necessarily to see the guillotine, they come to hear 'No More Mr. Nice Guy, Billion Dollar Babies, "School's Out and Eighteen."That's really what they're there for."

The man who uses a guillotine in his concert performances has a softer side in real life: helping disadvantaged kids. The man who lived rock and roll in its formative years now brings that history to life in a nightly radio show. He's Alice Cooper and he is many things to many people. And we're lucky he calls the Valley home and us his neighbors.