

Drive-time air waves lose a talented voice

By JEANNE WHITTAKER

Carol Coughlin, FM's answer to J.P. and Dick Purtan on morning drive time radio, has motored on down the road to Toledo.

The youthful Birmingham resident's professional departure from Detroit leaves an already small number of women in "on air" and "on camera" positions further diminished. However, she said, the move to Toledo and WDOH-TV is a career move that she had to make if she is serious about breaking into television.

"That's no reflection on WRIF," she added quickly. "I've never worked for people who are as fair and honest as the people where I was. I've gotten the dumb broad treatment at other places I have worked, but never at WRIF."

Ms. Coughlin's route to television was not only circuitous, it was also filled with bumps and ruts. A jour-

nalism major at Central Michigan University, following graduation she joined the news bureau at the J.L. Hudson Co. That job ended, she said, when she was fired during one of the store's periodic "house cleanings."

Five months later "I took the first job that was offered," she said. "It just happened to be in Lansing where I wrote advertising copy for a department store."

Bored and broke, the young journalist leaped at the chance when she was offered a part time reporter's job on Lansing radio station WLS. "I fell in love with radio," she said. "It was almost as if I suddenly knew what I was supposed to be doing."

Ms. Coughlin's next move was to a full-time reporting job on Lansing radio station WVIC. However, she said, the excitement of her new job began to pale when she discovered that she and her news director were a mismatched pair.

"I decided that it was time to begin looking for work in Detroit," she explained. Shortly before Christmas 1975 she was hired by WRIF, which shares a complex with WXYZ in Southfield.

"I was the news department at WRIF," she said. "For the first six months I had a partner, but he left and I was left on my own to provide morning drive news head-to-head with J.P. and Purtan."

THE QUALITY of the product offered by the young journalist and 55 fellow staff workers shows in the ratings. "We were the top rated FM station in town. We were always at least the number two overall station. My own program came in right behind those two superstars. I think it was a real success story."

Moving over to television will cost Ms. Coughlin a portion of her freedom.

"Radio people have an advantage over TV people, because we can

keep our privacy," she explained before leaving WRIF. I get recognized when I cash my paychecks, but most of the time I can go where I want and have privacy because no one recognizes my face."

Losing her privacy won't come as a shock however. She has had first hand experience with the celebrity status that the public bestows on the media when she appears in public with live-in friend David Wittman, of WDIV's Channel 4 news team.

WILL THE NEW job prove any more taxing or time consuming than the one she has just left? It is hard to imagine how it could be. At WRIF the days were long ones, she said. Her day began at 4:30 a.m.

She handled the newscasts from 6-9 a.m. She was on the air again at 12:15 p.m. In between, she spent hours researching material for special features. The format of her program, she said, was designed to make the listener believe that he was sitting across the table.

"We tried to project the feeling that we were just people," she said. WRIF's staff is housed in cramped quarters. That, she said, will be remedied in the near future when a new building is completed to house the station.

"We don't have reporters or a police monitor, which I expect they will add with the new space," she said. "I used newspapers, wire service copy, and special reports that I

wrote up myself. About as far as we could get was a telephone interview. There just wasn't time to go running around on assignments."

"Pretty much I generated my own ideas. I think that I was there long enough to be able to work on my own. Over the three years that I was there I wound up being the only original staff person left on the morning show."

Toledo's WDOH-TV agrees that Ms. Coughlin has what it takes to be a success. Does that now mean that her hometown has seen the last of Carol Coughlin?

"I live in Birmingham," she said. "Most of my life has been spent here. I can't see living anywhere else for a long time to come."



Carol Coughlin's departure from FM radio leaves the city's already small group of women TV and radio personalities a smaller group. She will continue to commute between a home in Birmingham and her new job in Toledo. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

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Symphony takes Helena on tour

The first United States performance in over a decade of the Richard Strauss opera "Die Ägyptische Helena" will be given at Ford Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 25.

Antal Dorati will conduct the Detroit Symphony in a concert presentation of the work. Maestro Dorati, the orchestra and cast headed by Greyth Jones as Helen, wife of Menelaus, will repeat the concert-opera at Carnegie Hall in New York on April 27 and Kennedy Center in Washington on April 29.

These dates mark Dorati's first East Coast appearance with the symphony. The orchestra will return to Detroit immediately after the tour to record the Strauss opera for London Records. This first complete recording of the work represents the last major Strauss opera to be put on disc.

In addition to Ms. Jones as the lead, the cast includes Matti Kasin, tenor; Menelaus; Barbara Hendricks, soprano; Aithra; Willard White, baritone; Altair; Curtis Rayam, tenor; Da-Ud, Altair's son; and Birgit Fimmlae, contralto, voice of the Omniscent Sea-Shell.

Also appearing in featured roles will be Glenda Kirkland, Betty Lane, Dinah Bryant, Maria Cimarelli, Patti Dell, Catherine Grimshaw and the Kenneth Jewell Choral.

This opera in two acts was first performed in Dresden, Germany in 1928. The libretto is by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. "Helena" takes place after the end of the Trojan War. The first act is set on the small island of the sorceress Aithra, off the coast of Egypt. The second act is set in a tent in a grove at the foot of the Atlas Mountains.

The libretto is a variation of the Greek legend of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world and a direct cause of the Trojan War. In one version, Helen, wife of Menelaus, eloped to Troy with Paris. In another version, Helen never went to Troy; instead, she and Paris were driven ashore of the coast of Egypt. The opera, still another version, has Menelaus on his way back to Sparta after the fall of Troy and Helen is with him. He intends to kill her to punish her for fleeing with Paris.

Tickets are available at the Ford Auditorium box office. The performance is a benefit to support the orchestra.

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