



Casey Kasem

Radio
Broadcaster

Lebanese American Became the Voice of Rock 'n' Roll

In the noisy world of rock 'n' roll, Casey Kasem didn't have to scream, and he was heard more than any other disc jockey.

"He was a great communicator," said Howard Kramer, curatorial director of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio. "That's the mastery of great DJs, their ability to communicate and make a connection, through their voice and their persona that they create, with the listener. That's essentially dead today."

The American-born son of Lebanese Druze immigrants, Kasem gained popularity along with the music he played, first on radio stations in one city after another and then in the syndicated *American Top 40* s h o w

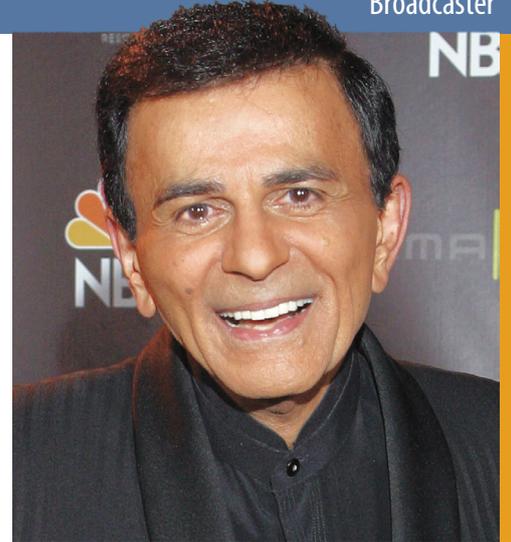
elected to the National Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

Marc Fisher, author of *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Generation*, said that although Kasem was based in Los Angeles, his "real appeal was between the coasts."

Starting in 1970, when U.S. radio stations were strictly local operations, *American Top 40* "was the one piece of very glitzy, professional, well-produced radio that would appear" on hundreds of small-town stations. And Kasem's "very palatable, genial style" was welcome everywhere, Fisher said.

On each week's program — at first three hours, then four — Kasem would count down the 40 most popular songs in *Billboard* magazine's "Hot 100 Singles" chart. He would introduce songs with trivia about the artists and behind-the-scenes looks at their lives, a novelty that Fisher said helped make the musicians celebrities. He would read listeners' letters and "long-distance dedications" for songs on the air.

"The part of the program that was most distinctive was these long-distance dedications, where he was able to spin these very dramatic, emotional stories out



of the requests that people made to far-flung loved ones and especially folks in the military who were overseas who were writing to him so that their girlfriends back home might hear their dedications," Fisher said. "Kasem had a real knack for telling their stories in a very affecting way. I think those were the heart of the show, in many ways."

Kasem, Fisher added, also had a "very distinctive, terrific voice. It was instantly recognizable, which is why he became a very sought-after voiceover artist." (To hear Kasem's style, listen to it on YouTube.)

Kasem developed other shows to capture different segments of the audience. Unlike other announcers, Kasem "was quite the entrepreneur himself," Fisher said, "definitely the producer of the show as well as the voice."



Casey Kasem accepts a radio icon award during the Radio Music Awards in 2003, in Las Vegas. Photos © AP Images

heard nationwide; he retired in 2009. He was the first disc jockey

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Ahmed



Akkad



DeBakey



El-Baz



Gaida



Gibran



Haiek



Hayek



Kasem



Khaled



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Masry



McAuliffe



Shihab Nye



Rihani



Said



Salama



Shamieh



Zerhouni



Zewail



Tlaib

Rashid Abdu, Physician
Ahmed Ahmed, Comedian
Moustapha Akkad, Film Director
Michael DeBakey, Heart Surgeon
Farouk El-Baz, Geologist
Gaida, Singer
Kahlil Gibran, Artist and Poet
Joseph Haiek, Publisher
Salma Hayek, Actress
Casey Kasem, Radio Broadcaster
DJ Khaled, Rap Music Artist
Khalid Khannouchi, Marathon Runner
Ferial Masry, Community Activist
Christa McAuliffe, Teacher in Space
Naomi Shihab Nye, Author
Ameen Rihani, Poet
Edward Said, Author and Activist
Kareem Salama, Singer
Betty Shamieh, Playwright
Rashida Tlaib, Politician
Elias Zerhouni, Medical Vanguard
Ahmed Zewail, Chemist