



Courtesy of Dr. Demento

## The Doctor is still in

Dr. Demento's zany show has been on the air for 30 years.

By Brenda Rees, PencilNews correspondent

LOS ANGELES – If laughter is the best medicine, than Barry Hansen is a very healthy fellow.

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BETTER KNOWN AS Dr. Demento, Hansen is celebrating 30 years of his syndicated radio program, "The Dr. Demento Show," which is a beloved weekly ritual for the 2 million listeners who turn in for madcap fun and silly songs.

As part of his 30th anniversary festivities, the good doctor is making personal appearances and releasing a new double album of demented ditties.

Hansen will be part of the first Los Angeles Radio Festival (Oct. 27 - Nov. 3) at the Museum of Television and Radio in Beverly Hills. Held on Halloween, "Three Decades of Dementia: A Conversation with Dr. Demento," will feature Hansen discussing how his radio career influenced other artists such as Bobby "Boris" Pickett, Frank Zappa and "Weird" Al Yankovic.

In addition, the two CD package "Dementia 2000" (Rhino Records) contains 42 popular songs from the Dr. Demento Show such as: "It's a Gas," by Alfred E. Neuman, "Bulbous Bouffant," by the Vestibules and "Another One Rides the Bus" by Weird Al.

Dr. Demento enjoys a vinyl snack with a friend, presumably from out of this world.



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Hansen tells PencilNews that his radio show is still “a 40-hour a week job for me.” Every week, he selects songs from his vast archives (about half a million recordings), reads the thousands of requests and, finally, sorts through the CDs

and tapes sent in by fans. Many listeners, no doubt, want to become the next Weird Al who found fame on the Dr. Demento Show in the 1970s.

“I would have to say that because of the Internet I get more requests than I ever did before,” says Hansen. “It’s quicker and easier to get the requests, but there’s a lot more of them!”

Times have changed since the Dr. Demento Show first aired in Los Angeles in 1970. The Internet has altered the musical landscape so that unsigned comedic talent has a fighting chance, says Hansen.

“Anybody can now create a website, press a few CDs and can actually make a living or at least justify their time,” Hansen said. “It used to be, folks had to hit all the record stores and try to convince owners to carry their album. It was hard work and many times, it didn’t pay off.”

For an avid music researcher like Hansen, the Internet can be a great resource for information, but he says he rarely visits E-Bay or the other trading sites. He does admit, however, to wandering in thrift and antique stores looking for musical treasures, even though most are “picked pretty clean.”

But in the 1950s when Hansen was growing up in Minneapolis, thrift stores were overflowing with records. Hansen traces his career to back when he was a 12-year-old boy discovering that the local Salvation Army store sold records two for a nickel. “I came home with armfuls,” he recalls with a chuckle.

While his parents were genuinely supportive of Hansen’s budding musical interests, they made sure their son developed an ear for classical and jazz sounds. Still, comedy was welcomed – Hansen remembers when his father brought home a new Spike Jones album that “was a pretty big deal in those days.”

Humor can be the great leveler in a stressful society, says Hansen, but it’s also tough work. He encourages his fans to keep trying when composing that next big demented hit. “Try out your material on audiences, see if they laugh, figure out what is funny,” he advises. “Weird Al is successful because his parodies are right on. It’s not just one funny word or phrase. The whole thing is funny. It’s pure. That’s what you want. You want it all funny.”

*Got a funny song for the Dr. Demento Show? Send it to Dr. Demento at P.O. Box 884, Culver City, CA 90232. For more information on Dr. Demento, check out [www.dremento.com](http://www.dremento.com)*

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