

# DATEBOOK



## Underground film on underground radio

Documentary in progress tells story of how KSAN's Jive 95 became part of S.F. culture. **PAGE 66**

## COVER STORY



Adam Pardee/Special to the Chronicle

Producers Eric Christensen, left, and Jim Draper look over old photos with director Jesse Block, right, before a screening of “Something in the Air: A Rock Radio Revolution,” a documentary about KSAN radio in the 1970s.

# Classic radio station turns signal on to dial up funds

Old friendships rekindled at screening of Jive 95 documentary

By G. Allen Johnson

After being taken on a 90-minute trip down memory lane, Joanne Greene asked a group of aging hippies at San Francisco’s 4 Star Theater a question that instantly brought knowing laughter: “How many of you had waterbeds?”

When a sea of hands went up, she replied, “They were awesome. I don’t think I could get out of one any longer.”

Greene, who as Joanne Rosenzweig was news director of KSAN in the late 1970s, participated in a Q&A after the

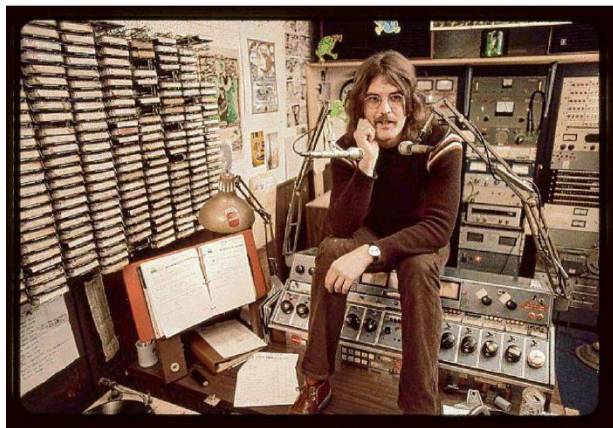
first of two screenings of the work-in-progress documentary she appears in, “Something in the Air: A Rock Radio Revolution.” The film chronicles the birth of underground radio at KMPX in 1967 and then KSAN radio, which from 1968 to ’80 broke new ground as an alternative radio station known as Jive 95 and became an indelible part of San Francisco culture.

Director Jesse Block, senior producers Jim Draper and Eric Christensen, and marketing director Randy Gordon hosted the back-to-back screenings at the 4

Star on Aug. 18, intended to generate feedback and donations or investments for finishing funds. The film has changed since a similar event was staged at the Smith Rafael Film Center in November, which was the first time it was shown publicly.

Draper, along with another producer, Kenny Wardell, who died earlier this month, worked at KSAN during those glory days and has been working with the team on the documentary for the last 10 years. They need to scale a few

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"Something in the Air: A Rock Radio Revolution"

Former KSAN disc jockey **Richard Gossett** is featured in the documentary.

## KSAN

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financing hurdles, including about \$250,000 to clear music rights — such as the title song made famous by Thunderclap Newman, the “other band” of the Who star Pete Townshend.

“If anyone has contacts with Pete Townshend ...,” Christensen deadpanned after the second screening, which was followed by a performance by longtime local rock band the Great American Robber Barons.

“Something in the Air” features musicians who benefited from KSAN airplay, such as Elvis Costello, Huey Sostello, Sammy Hagar, Carlos Santana, Elvin Bishop and members of the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead, among others. It also provided a platform to counterculture actors Peter Coyote and Howard Hesseman; journalists Ben Fong-Torres and former Chronicle music critic Joel Selvin; freeform DJs such as Dusty Street, Edward Bear, Norman Davis, Richard Gossett, Tony Kilbert, Raechel Donahue and Bonnie Simmons; and newsmen Dave McQueen and Wes “Scoop” Nisker,

who memorably told his listeners, “If you don’t like the news, then go out and make some of your own.”

The documentary is packed with wild stories too, from acid-fueled DJ sets to a late-’60s strike that paved the way for the station and the vision of legendary General Manager Tom “Big Daddy” Donahue to thrive. There was also live concert coverage; interviews with celebrities who were clearly high, such as Mick Jagger and the guys from the Sex Pistols; and real hard news, such as when KSAN was one of the first on the scene after the assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk.



Adam Pardee/Special to the Chronicle

**The Great American Robber Barons perform after the screening at S.F.’s 4 Star Theater.**



Adam Pardee/Special to the Chronicle

**People chat outside the 4 Star Theater as they wait for the screening of “Something in the Air.”**

The movie includes a wealth of archival material that the filmmakers of “Something in the Air” figure, in its finished form, will add to a burgeoning number of documentaries that chronicle mid-20th century San Francisco, such as the recent “Carol Doda Topless at the Concor,” “Joan Baez I am a

Noise” and “San Francisco Sounds: A Place in Time.” It also would make a great companion piece with a recent book, “The Jive 95,” by Hank Rosenfeld.

“As somebody who had been at the station that has been an important part of my life, and to be able to share all the materials that I rescued from the dumpster when the station changed hands, it’s rewarding,” said Draper, who began as an intern with KSAN in 1976 and gained lasting memories such as consuming beer and malt balls with Blondie. “I think it was a significant station in a very significant time.”

In those days, radio stations were community resources, akin to a Facebook or Craigslist of its time. DJs and producers would field phone calls, pass along details for neighborhood events and

even, as Kilbert recalled during the Q&A, to solicit help for finding lost dogs.

“We were kind of entrusted to be relatable companions to the nine Bay Area counties,” Kilbert said of the KSAN mission. “It didn’t matter your age or your stage — we’re here to serve you. Broadcasting is not just a job, it’s a service. A very high service.”

That spirit was alive and well at the 4 Star on Sunday night, when former KSAN employees rekindled friendships. Greene and Kilbert, the latter now living in Hawaii, for instance, hadn’t seen each other in four decades. True to their hippie optimism, they expressed hope for the future of San Francisco, doom loop be damned, and the country, as excitement over Democratic presidential candidate

Kamala Harris builds throughout the Bay Area and beyond.

The only wistful note struck in the evening was noting how many of the personalities who sat down for the filmmakers for “Something in the Air” are no longer alive.

“It was quite an extraordinary group of people and a very special time,” said Greene, whose book about a personal crisis, “By Accident: A Memoir of Letting Go,” was published last year. “But you know, some people live life with all the gusto, and that can sometimes make our lives a little bit shorter.”

To donate, invest or learn more about the in-progress “Something in the Air: A Rock Radio Revolution,” go to [www.aradiorevolution.com](http://www.aradiorevolution.com).

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