

Chuck Roast's Punk Rock "Funhouse" by Daniel Makagon – Razorcake

Chuck Roast was a true believer. He heard punk and was instantly hooked. And he knew that if he could play punk records for others, they, too, would be excited by the music and the culture. Having access to 100,000 watts certainly helped with that mission. But doing a punk rock radio show in Houston, Texas came with its share of internal and external challenges. Chuck's commitment to the scene extended beyond the "Funhouse" radio show in important ways. Although he no longer hosts a radio show, he remains connected to music in Houston and beyond through his record store, Vinal Edge.



Chuck Roast DJing at KPFT

Daniel: Let's start by talking about the nuts and bolts of the show—when it began, what the show sounded like, et cetera.

Chuck: I moved to Houston in 1979. I was pretty much living out of the trunk of a car. And the first thing I bought when I moved into an apartment was a clock radio, where I found KPFT 90.1 FM, a Pacifica station. Pacifica is also associated with a station in California (KPFA) that did *Maximum Rock'n'roll Radio*. Within a month I went down and volunteered, because it's a volunteer public radio station. And I could swear that a month later I was doing a radio show. Pretty much rock and roll.

It wasn't long after that that there was a new show called "Funhouse" on KPFT that was originally hosted by two guys who went by the names Perry Coma and New Trend, an avant-garde artist in town and the singer of the punk band [Really Red](#). They had a pretty good run with that show; it was the right time with punk rock coming into its own. But they burned out and killed it way too quick. I thought, "This is exciting; this needs to happen." Again, I was doing a late-night weirdo rock show, but as soon as it was announced that they were moving away from the show, I

was like, "I want to do that show." The radio station assumed I wanted the time slot. I said, "Yeah, I want the time slot, but I want to do that show." They were shocked because they wanted to kill it; they hated it and had a hatred of punk rock. But I could see that this needs to happen. This was right when hardcore was coming in.



Chuck Roast DJing at KPFT

I initially went in on my own, but then brought in another guy I knew who was into punk rock named G-Man Mark. We hosted the show for a while. Then when he moved to California, I took on this other guy who went by the name Austin Caustic. We pretty much did that run from 1980 for about ten years or so. We moved around a couple times, but generally it seemed to happen at 10PM at night. I think in the early days we were on Friday or Saturday night, the primetime radio slot. At some point we didn't want to be on Friday night, because we wanted to be at shows.

So that's the structure of the show and this was at the height of hardcore, so we were doing a lot of that, be it foreign hardcore or Texas bands and whatnot. We also included a lot of industrial noise. We were really into bands like [Nurse With Wound](#) and stuff like that. So we always opened the show with some kind of noise. That led into punk rock. We did a thing at some point to see how good we were as DJs that we called "An Hour of Thrash." In that hour, we played the shortest, fastest songs we could. We're talking like, one-minute songs. It was real exhausting. Can I flip that many records that quick?

Daniel: Were you the only option for punk rock radio or were there other shows during the early days and/or as "Funhouse" aged?

Chuck: KPFT maxed out at 100,000 watts, so it's a big deal station. There was one other station at Rice University: KTRU. We had friends over there. They had a show called "The S&M Show" that was around for quite a while. They did a little bit of punk rock, but it was more focused on new wave. We were really more of the punk rock show for the longest time.

Daniel: Did you have any sense that given your wattage and—for lack of a better phrase—your cornering of the marketplace, that your show was having a big impact on the local scene?



Chuck Roast

Chuck: I was really amazed at how the show took off. Before we took over, it was just kind of this radio show. It was probably a little bit of the timing with hardcore taking off; hardcore really broke at that point. I was just amazed by how many people in the piney woods of East Texas, or wherever, this was their lifeline. Every day of my life since then, I run into people who say, “Man, ‘Funhouse’ changed my life, blah blah blah.” It was also at a moment when people were doing a lot of taping. I don’t know how many people told me that they [taped our radio show](#). There used to be a website that was run by someone in Washington state, I think, who was dedicated to tapes of our radio show. It was called Texas Punk Archives and people would upload tapes of our radio show there. I was amazed at what a big deal it was.

Daniel: A lot of early punk radio shows were crucial to helping local scenes grow. Were there things you did to help develop the scene in Houston beyond playing music during the show?

Chuck: At some point, I was getting bands contacting me that would ask about getting shows in Houston, because there wasn't really a good venue that was reliable. And I started booking shows; it became Funhouse Mob Presents. We booked everybody from JFA and the Dead Kennedys to local bands. Putting on shows definitely helped the scene and the radio show. We're definitely a smaller market than L.A., and Texas is a weird place. But it was a tight scene between the radio show and the concerts. It was just known that you existed in this gravitational twin planet kind of pull.

We also put out a little zine called *The Shred List*, where we listed what we thought were the top punk rock records for that month or whatever. It was a printed thing that we delivered to record stores. Eventually we ended up putting out a real zine called the *United Underground*. I remember one time I went out to San Francisco for a punk rock record shopping trip; someone got me free flights. I slept on the couch of this guy who was in the Sluglords—his wife was in Frightwig—and I saw one of those *Shred Lists* sitting on the coffee table, which was kind of funny that it made it out there. I just spent the week shopping for records or going to see shows wherever I could. I was really deeply into it; my life revolved around punk rock and it was nothing but going to shows.

Daniel: Houston is a big city, but there's still a sense that Texas is a conservative state. Did the show struggle because of problems with conservative beliefs in Texas?

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I got death threats all the time.

Chuck: I really felt it was important that I had my name Chuck Roast—which is a radio name and not my real name—because I got death threats all the time. We really toyed with offending. We were snotty punk rockers. And we loved to get in the face of Christianity; we did really brutal Christmas and Easter shows, which were kind of funny. But people did call in and threaten to kill us.

It was the era when people were putting those metal fish on the back of their cars.

We had a contest where if you came in with a bunch of those metal fish that you peeled off of cars, we'd give you something.

We even had a thing one time, which is kind of funny. It was the era when people were putting those metal fish on the back of their cars. So, we had a contest where if you came in with a bunch of those metal fish that you peeled off of cars, we'd give you something. We had another thing: there was a free Christian magazine called *Plain Truth* that you could pick up at all the grocery stores. We had a contest where you would pick up every single copy in Houston, throw them in garbage bags, and bring them by. So, we were always trying to be snotty and it didn't go over well in Texas.



Chuck Roast

At the same time, when I first opened [Vinal Edge](#), my record store, I was still doing the radio show. There were times when people came into my shop, freaked out, and just gave us hell. Texas is a very Bible belt area.

Daniel: As the show continued to age and punk rock became popular, at least compared to the early days when punks were hated, did any of that resistance subside?

Chuck: As time went on, it certainly got a little bit better. How long can you freak out over something? I didn't catch as much flack as I did during the early days. But it was still there. And the management of the radio station, while they were used to me, they still hated the show.

Daniel: And Pacifica went through a big hullabaloo all across the country during the 1990s.

Chuck: Yeah, they really did. The station management definitely didn't get punk rock and yet this is supposed to be a very liberal radio group. It's kind of funny—I went on vacation, my co-host played something questionable, and got kicked off the radio. They threw him off for playing the Bongwater song, "The Power of Pussy." They objected to the word "pussy," which is just ridiculous, because we were playing everything. The local Houston alternative paper, *Public News* at the time (now *Houston Press*), their political cartoonist drew up a cartoon about it. They described the person at the station who threw us off as being Nixonian, which I thought was hilarious. I came back and begged to not have my show removed. Then I did the show for a while, but killed it. I felt like it was time to stick a fork in a punk rock radio show's ass and call it quits.



Chuck Roast DJing at KTRU

The management that was there when I left, I had really had it. You know, I lived through a bunch of different managements at this radio station and I always survived, and then I was feeling like, "How am I going to outlast the people in charge at this point?" And so I did fifteen years there and swore I'd be done with radio and ended my relationship with that station, although I still respect the station. I was off for a year and then Rice Radio—[KTRU](#)—approached me to take over a radio show there. So I went back and did another ten years at Rice doing avant-garde programming.

Daniel: What, for you, was the difference between those two stations and the shows you hosted?

Chuck: Well, KPFT, you have to do a lot of fundraising. KTRU was funded through the college, so that made it easier to do programming at Rice. We definitely were wild and woolier at Pacifica. And we pretty much played what we wanted, as long as we were careful about how we snuck it around the station people. The funny thing is that Rice radio, run by students, you would think would be a little more open. But I felt like they were over-regulating themselves. It was kind of worse there, because these students were so afraid of offending anybody. You couldn't play songs that referred to drugs in any way, or so many other things. But I just took the attitude of I'm going to do what I want; you're just going to have to deal with it. If we get in arguments about it, that's just how it is, because this is what I do. But I was doing less controversial stuff; I was doing more weird sounds and stuff.

Daniel: When did you stop doing that show?

Chuck: That was probably around 2005 when I stopped doing that one. I did fifteen years at KPFT, a year off, and then ten years at Rice.

Daniel: At one point there was an important link between record stores and college radio. The music that was played on college radio could impact what was sold in local record stores. As a record store owner, can you talk a little bit about the impact of radio on your shop, especially given the rise of podcasting, streaming, and other new media outlets that might alter how local radio functions?

Chuck: I don't see it as much now. KPFT is still kicking, doing its thing, although it is more singer-songwriter focused. My personal store, it doesn't affect me as much. There's still something, but it's way more online that people find out about stuff.

And KTRU's kind of a funny story. Shortly after I left—I got out at the right time—they sold the station to the local NPR affiliate. The NPR affiliate was doing classical music with a little bit of news. They decided to buy KTRU, paid a lot of money for it, and do all classical music on that one. Then they did all news on the existing station. It was a bad idea because they needed to raise enough money to fund two radio stations from the same audience. That failed and then the station got sold to a Christian radio station, which is what it is now. The college got all the money from selling the station, which is great for the college, and then told the (student) radio station: "Oh, you can do it online because that's what everybody does these days." It's still an online entity, where not that many people listen because there's a lot of competition. I know my habits of listening and they are not listening to KTRU online, which is sad, since there are still some great shows on there.

Daniel: Going back to your early days with KPFT, how were you getting records? I assume you and your co-hosts were going to the station with a crate of records?

There was a bias against punk rock in the early days; it was this vile thing that everybody hoped would go away.

Chuck: Yeah, we weren't relying on anything at the radio station. One of the most important things for me is that when I noticed it was hard to buy all these punk rock records in stores, because there was a bias against punk rock in the early days; it was this vile thing that everybody hoped would go away. I wonder if other people did this, but I bought records from bands as they came through town. I'd like to think that I was the first person with a record store food truck. [Laughs] I had a Volkswagen van that I would load some crates in. I'd roll up to certain gigs and just open the door. I had a clip-on light inside. And people could shop out of my van. I know later in the '90s there was a movement with kids being distros, but I didn't see much of that in the early days. I have a feeling that somebody was doing that in other cities. And that gave me a life. My life has been wonderful because of that.

Daniel: A direct timeline from selling records like out of your van to opening your own store?

Chuck: Yeah.

Daniel: How were you getting records in situations where bands weren't coming to Houston?

Chuck: I would write to bands I would see in the back of *Maximum Rock'n'roll*, be they in Italy or wherever else in the world. I would set up these things where I would buy a few from them. I was really passionate for a while about foreign hardcore. It was fast, hard, and exciting. And since I was contacting people to try to book anyway (in the United States), you had to write letters. I wrote letters and said, "Hey, maybe you're interested in booking or you could call into my radio show or send me something and I will play it on the radio. Or I'd like to buy some to re-sell." I might buy like, five copies of something and they would send me a promo also for the radio show. It just seemed to me that it should all tie in, since I was writing them anyway: I'll bring your band to town, I'll play your music on the radio show, and I'll sell it to some kids who are just passionate. I know that if they just hear this stuff, they're gonna want it. Why wouldn't I do all those things at once? I was really feeling the passion for it. Man, I want to spread this stuff. I was passionate about music all my life, but at the time it was just like, this needs to be heard.