

## Robbie Lane: Rockin' on the radio



**W**eenights, just after the 6 p.m. news on Toronto's AM740 (also known as Zoomer Radio), Robbie Lane launches into his hour-long program, *The Sixties At Six*.

It's a subject he knows quite well. Long before Cancon regulations came into effect in 1971, Robbie Lane was not only an established recording artist with hits on the charts, but he was also featured on the successful CTV television series, *It's Happening*. But we're getting slightly ahead of ourselves.

Robbie grew up in Toronto and, like most teens, turned to the radio for music little realizing how important radio would become in his future. Again, like many male teens, Robbie formed a band (along with guitarist and future Canadian Music Hall of Fame member Domenic Troiano) and began playing around Toronto, which is where he hooked up with the legendary Rompin' Ronnie Hawkins.

"Ronnie was playing a Saturday afternoon matinee at the Concord Tavern. Kids, and we were kids, were allowed in if you ordered food. One Saturday, a friend of mine went up to Ronnie and said, 'There's a guy here who'd really like to get up and sing'. This was all unbeknownst to me, so there I was drinking my pop and eating my chips when Ronnie introduced me. I got up and sang a couple of numbers. I can't tell you what a thrill that was playing with Robbie (Robertson), Levon (Helm) and those guys."

Hawkins, realizing that Robbie's whole band was with him at the club, told them to come back the following week and he'd put everyone on stage.

Robbie grins as he recalls: "Little did I know that Ronnie and the Hawks were usually hung over Saturday afternoons

and they could hardly wait for anybody else to perform, so they wouldn't have to."

In 1963, Hawkins hired Robbie & The Disciples as an insurance policy for the day that his long-time back up group, The Hawks, would leave. The Hawks eventually did leave to work with Bob Dylan, changing their name to The Band in the process. That's when Robbie Lane & The Disciples became Hawkins "A" team.

Although the group had hits on Hawkins' record label, Robbie remembers: "It was very difficult to get your records played on the radio. What wasn't difficult, was actually working. There were so many places where a band like ours could play, like high school dances, concert halls, clubs, bars, you name it, that we worked all the time."

After Ronnie Hawkins, Robbie found himself on TV. CTV in fact, with the series *It's Happening*. The Canadian record industry, still in its infancy in the early '60s, was also paying attention. Capitol Records was more than willing to sign the group to a contract, but only under certain conditions.

"The A&R guy saw us, liked us and wanted to sign us. But he said Capitol had no money, so if we wanted to be on Capitol Records we'd have to pay for the recording sessions ourselves, which is what we did. How naïve we all were back then."

Robbie moved from performing to the business side of music in the 1970s, but

jumped back over the desk in 1982. He's been singing regularly ever since.

These days, Robbie Lane & The Disciples still perform on a regular basis. I recently attended two of their weekly Sunday gigs at the Chick'n'Deli in Toronto where Robbie and his eight piece ensemble regularly pack the place and, believe me, that joint was jumpin'.

Five years ago, 1050 CHUM Program Director Brad Jones gave Robbie a shot at becoming a disc jockey for the then oldies station. Radio novice Robbie quickly warmed to the microphone and listeners warmed to him.

In 2009, when CTV turned 1050 CHUM into the audio for CP24, Robbie packed up his rock'n'roll knowledge along with his warm, friendly sound and brought it over to Zoomer Radio, AM740.

It's been a long, successful career for Robbie Lane, although there were a few twists and turns he didn't see coming. A brain aneurysm, along with the loss of his daughter to cancer, have definitely changed him.


As Robbie put it, after a brief pause: "Those things have to change you. And they absolutely have."

Robbie Lane & The Disciples official website is [www.robbielane.com](http://www.robbielane.com).

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