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Settin' the Standard: an interview wit' KPFA radio broadcaster Maya 'Rise'

by *Minister of Information JR*

Principled Black and Brown unity is something that we have been practicing ever since African captives were brought to this hemisphere in chains. It only made sense considering that the Amerikkkas were on land that was built by Africans and stolen from the Natives.

There are stories about the Seminoles, who were a nation of Creek Natives, who teamed up with runaway Africans who'd been enslaved and created free communities that fought back against the slave system. There are other stories about how the Maroons, Africans and Natives, in Brazil who lived in and maintained their warrior community known as Palmares for over 100 years.

And even more recently, the Black Panther Party worked closely with the American Indian Movement and the Brown Berets, and today the POCC works closely with the Brown Berets and the Native Youth Movement. Although our people have some cultural differences, our oppressor is the same, and the conditions that we are forced to live under are similar. That is why we have fought and will continue to fight in principled coalitions against the ruling class's interest.

With the government-designed war going on behind enemy lines between Black and Brown captives, we need to realize that although we may feel like our particular group won a particular battle, by fighting each other we are helping our common enemy win the war against our respective peoples.

In the field of media in the Bay Area, we've taken it among ourselves to set an example of Black and Brown principled unity. Maya has been a consistent supporter of revolutionary Black broadcasters, who have had to fight the powers that be at the Bay Area-based KPFA radio station to be heard. She also is a true community journalist who brings the voice of people from the hood to the airwaves. We support Maya and Settin' the Standard and urge all of our supporters to do the same. Check Maya out ...

JR: Tell us about your KPFA show, Settin' the Standard, and what is the theme?

Maya: Well, what can I say ... we "set the standard" with principled programming. The theme of my show would have to be fuel for our struggle. I was raised with conscious educating music that made me think and that gave me information about what was going on in the world.

I realize the state of hip hop and also all the talent in the Bay, so I tap into that "political consciousness" that we're living in the Bay. I'm aware of all of it, and I transmit it out. It is also important to me to make space for all this talent that isn't getting played on those corporate owned stations.

It seems my show often falls on significant dates. On May 1, I did Mother's Day, but most significant was the Dec. 12 show. In my culture, that date is recognized as when Mother Earth appeared in the flesh with a message for the Mexican people. It was on that date that I realized I couldn't afford to waste the air time I control.

JR: People complain about the politics of commercial radio. Can you talk about the politics of community radio in the Bay Area?



Maya is wit' her son Yolo inside of the KPFA live on-air studio.

Photo: JR

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Maya: I can only speak on my experience at KPFA and Pacifica Radio. I believe in transparency and the truth being told; that's why I went to KPFA. I don't know if I could live with myself anywhere else. But it does make me sad to be battling up against whom I find myself challenging at KPFA. But as a community we must evolve; we can't continue to ignore our young people.

One might think community radio is a place for community voices to be heard, but more like what seems to happen is a selective (aka entrenched) majority are more concerned with their job security and personal situation than actually uplifting and providing space for the community.

I don't believe I was ever programmed to (i.e., that any programs spoke to people like me) by this so called progressive station, and if I was, they call it the ghetto hours (midnight-6 a.m.), like when I'm on. I wouldn't be listening; I'd be 'sleep.

Personally, I'd love to hear Peja Peja's reggae music midday. Back 20 years ago when Gus Newport was mayor of Berkeley, Tony Moses had his show on all afternoon. Imagine that. So much for progress, huh?

So I program for myself, but really I should be programming for the children, or fear they'll all become strippers. But yeah, your question, politics of community radio – I find KPFA to be very elitest, classist, racist, sexist women against men, and little room is made for true community involvement. Mostly either you're in with the in-crowd or you're out; you know that, JR.

But there are elders who have set the example, like Miguel "Gavilan" Molina. He's been holding down La Onda Bajita (broadcast Fridays 8-10 p.m.) with Mr. Chuch and Giggles for over 25 years, and they've opened up that air time for community activist groups like the group formally known as Olin, Zapatista Radio, Rock en Rebellion, Making Changes with Cesar Cruz, and then they've opened up space at New College (777 Valencia, San Francisco) for live audience participation and have bands perform live monthly.

I saw you and your girl gettin' your boogie on there. Tell 'em it's poppin'! They initiate a lot of the anti-war broadcasts. They're out in the communities from Sonoma to Fresno. And that's where the politics come in. As the "progressive left," is it right to put this criticism in the paper? I don't give a damn, I'm for solutions.

JR: Can you talk about your relationship wit' POCC Radio: The Block Report?

Maya: I started editing Block Reports some time ago. Syntax knew I wanted to edit, and Weyland got hella pissed when he found out I was editing some Hard Knock premium; people had been waiting like a year after they'd pledged and still hadn't received it. Dev hadn't gotten to it, so he passed it on to me. Weyland told me erase all of it off of my computer.

So next Syntax gave me some Block Reports to edit. JR never had any problems. Plus you seem to like my ideas and be down with my thoughts; that's rare. We communicate well, and for the most part you're receptive to my ideas, which makes it most conducive.

I really enjoyed the content and learned a lot from the work I did editing Block Reports. I felt like the Great Spirit was just doing the work, and I was the vessel. I'd get the instrumentals, then somehow I'd just drop 'em in just the right spot for the beat to drop on point. It was just a good ass feeling. They were mostly long interviews, over an hour back then.

My relationship with the POCC really solidified around the assassination of Stanley Tookie Williams. We had recorded several people speaking on the issue, and months before, like in October of last year, I submitted a proposal to produce the special broadcast (live during several hours prior to his execution from) outside San Quentin.

Well, without getting too much into it (like the principle of giving voice to communities and letting them speak for themselves), the proposal was pretty

much thrown out after I approached Aileen from the news department and let her know who I had in mind to host the special – under the premise that it's a news event.

So how ironic that Amelia Gonzales Garcia (department head/ management) and a music programmer would turn out to be the hosts. Even Davey D and Anita Johnson knew JR and Kiilu should and would be the best hosts to rep this issue. This was their beat!

Anyway I got all emotional and pissed at how they scratched every surface to keep representatives like JR out of this and found some puppet hosts at the last minute. It was as if they cared more about keeping you out than really reppin' for the people or even including Kiilu's production ideas. I believe someone wrote an article about it that the Bay View published.

We had produced so many voices speaking on Tookie (that) although my slot (1-4 a.m. Monday) is technically music, how could I not air all of the voices not given space in the "special broadcast"? From then on, POCC Minister of Information has continued to contribute to Settin' the Standard.

Archives of the program can be heard at kpfa.org. Click programs on the top and scroll all the way down, bottom right, Settin' the Standard! Fa' sho, let us know what you think. If you have something to contribute, we love to keep it roots, stay close to the ground.

JR: What do you think about principled Black and Brown unity?

Maya: That's the business! I think it's great when people have principles and can see through the capitalist propaganda, regardless of skin tone.

JR: When is your show and how can people get in contact wit' you?

Maya: Right now I been steady holding down the 1-4 a.m. Monday morning. I alternate with another single mom from Brazil, so she brings that flavor on the weeks I'm not there. I can be reached at the work number, (510) 848-6767, ext. 262.

To leave comments for the Program Council, the extension is 622, same number. If they prefer, my email is maya@kpfa.org, and you know they can be my myspace friend. But fa' sho be my friend so you can get the bulletins of when we are on. Plus I like to see that I have a "new message."

The next time that Settin' the Standard is on 94.1 FM KPFA or www.kpfa.org is on May 29 from 1 to 4 a.m. (PST).

Email JR at blockreportradio@yahoo.com.