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'Radiochick' gains satellite following

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NEW YORK - Leslie Gold wants to be known as the only chick a guy wants to listen to for four hours, and she'll do just about anything to achieve that goal.

The bawdy host of "The Radiochick Show" on Sirius Satellite Radio frequently invites female guests to strip in the studio and leads such segments as "20 Questions with a Hooker" and "Wheel of Wifebeaters." She dishes advice to male callers on a variety of relationship issues, from telling them how to cheat on their girlfriends without getting caught to persuading their wives to participate in a threesome.

About the only thing that's off-limits is her own nudity.

"I'm much too repressed to do that," says Gold, a diminutive blonde with big blue eyes whose body often becomes the topic of conversation on her show, which airs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. EST weekdays on Sirius channel 148.

"When your listeners are all male and all your cohorts are male and you're a girl who thinks like a guy, boob talk is inevitable," she says.

But she's quick to point out her show isn't all about sex.

She recounts a "serious" discussion with sidekick Chuck Nice and producer Paul "Butchie" Brennan a couple of months ago about the Terri Schiavo right-to-die case - then spending the next 20 minutes speculating what songs the brain-damaged Florida woman might have had in her iPod. (Among their guesses: "You Keep Me Hangin' On" and "Comfortably Numb.")

"Just when you think we've gone serious, we make sure we get good and disrespectful," says the 40-something Gold, who refuses to reveal her exact age.

Off the air, Gold has made a name for herself feuding with Kathie Lee Gifford. She and Brennan scored a pair of tickets to "The Late Show with David Letterman" in 2000 when Gifford was a guest host. Gold already had a beef with Gifford: "She wasn't nearly cool enough to be hosting 'Letterman.'"

During the opening monologue, the chipper former talk-show personality, whom Gold says clearly wasn't wearing a bra, started singing about the tabloids ruining her life. Midway through the song, Gold slipped off her bra "Flashdance"-style and gave it to Brennan, who stormed the stage and threw it at Gifford, yelling "Put on a bra! Radiochick

rules!" (He was briefly detained, though no charges were filed.)

The "Late Show" band stopped playing. Gifford was thrown for about a minute, then picked up the bra, put it on over her dress and finished the song.

When Gifford later left "Live With Regis & Kathie Lee," Gold had parents hold their toddlers outside ABC's studio with picket signs saying "Regis would've paid me" and "Feed me, Kathie Lee," a reference to allegations that Gifford's Wal-Mart clothing line was produced in sweatshops.

Gold is just as tough with her guests, once pressing comedian-actress Brett Butler about her reportedly erratic behavior on the set of the television series "Grace Under Fire." The women had a testy on-air exchange, then Butler stormed out of the studio.

Gold insists she doesn't needle her guests just to be obnoxious but that she poses questions that begged to be asked, no matter how inappropriate.

The Radiochick has riled her share of listeners, too. She sometimes gets hate mail, which always comes from women, she says. Many get offended because she refers to herself as a chick and talks about her body.

Over an egg-white vegetable omelet and toast at a diner in her Upper West Side neighborhood, Gold refuses to apologize for her brazenness.

"I'm not telling you you have to listen, I don't have a gun to your head. If you don't like it, by all means, find something you do like."

While critics call her show a setback to the cause of feminism, Gold says she's proof a woman can succeed in a man's world.

Fresh from getting her MBA at Harvard, the Bridgeport, Conn., native bought a window manufacturing company and ran it for 10 years. The job was financially rewarding but grueling, so when she sold the business at a hefty profit in the mid-1990s, Gold saw a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"I thought, gee, I can do something for love, rather than money, which really is a luxury I don't want to squander," she says. "My thought process was really this simple: I think I'm entertaining, I'm too ugly for television, so how about radio?"

But Gold ran into a problem: She didn't have a clue where to start. She asked everyone she knew, from the dry-cleaner to the person who plowed her driveway, until someone recommended a tiny, 1,000-watt radio station in Westport, Conn.

WMMM-AM gave Gold a chance, putting her and a friend on-air at first for half an hour a week, then expanding to two hours, all unpaid. Their show consisted of disco music, celebrity gossip and parody songs. They did it for six months with no callers and practically no listeners because the station powered down to two watts at night when it aired.

"You had to be across the street with tinfoil in your teeth to pick up the signal," she says.

Prompted by delusions of grandeur, Gold cobbled together a homemade tape of the show and mailed it to some of the biggest names in radio. Tim Sabian, then program director of Howard Stern's show, told her she was awful but showed promise. She sent Sabian a tape a week for six months to critique, and he eventually helped her land a job at WRKO-AM in Boston, where Gold and the friend dubbed themselves "Two Chicks Dishing."

In 1999, when their contract was up, Gold moved to New York's WNEW-FM and found her voice as the Radiochick. She started working with Brennan and Nice, and her show became more sexual and edgy, gaining a huge male following. After WNEW fired her (for political reasons, she says), she ended up at WAXQ-FM, another New York station that eventually fired her (for creative differences, she says).

"I kept getting fired even though I had great ratings. Some places I got fired twice," she says with a laugh - and the confidence of someone who has moved on to bigger things.

Since her Sirius show began in January, Gold has been reveling in a national audience and unlimited freedom from government regulators.

"The thing about satellite is you can say anything you want," she says, unleashing a string of swear words that belie her girlish looks. "It's really great to be in an uncensored format. I don't mean just using four-letter words, you can actually tackle any subject, and none of it is off-limits."

Her lewd behavior has drawn comparisons to Stern, who joins Gold at Sirius in 2006. She downplays the similarities, calling them "incredibly flattering and inaccurate," and noting her show's success and approach are different.

Sirius' 1.4 million subscribers pay \$12.95 a month to hear dozens of channels of commercial-free music or other channels with talk, news and sports. (Rival XM Satellite Radio has about 4 million subscribers.)

Media ratings company don't track figures for satellite radio, but Gold has been a boon to Sirius, says John McDermott, program director for the company's comedy programs. Her show receives several thousand calls a day, far more than any other show on its channel, he says.

"The Radiochick Show" works because it's funny and relatable, McDermott says. Gold, Nice and Brennan "are people that are living your lifestyle, that have the same interests."

On this particular day, Gold must think her listeners are interested in hearing her narrate while a Penthouse Pent performs a "Stupid Pet Trick."

"Sometimes my own show grosses me out, but not often," she says as she muses about having the model ride around the studio on a tricycle naked. "Once or twice a year."

ON THE NET

<http://www.radiochick.com>

<http://www.sirius.com>