

Pump up the volume

Attorney Jeffrey Kravitz hopes to parlay his civil rights work into a national radio show

By Deanna Broxton

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Sitting at the microphone in the KDVS studio, surrounded by shelves of CDs and old records, the walls covered in bumper stickers bearing lefty political slogans, Jeffrey Kravitz looks more like a firebrand talk show host than a constitutional law attorney.



Lawyer Jeffrey Kravitz broadcasts his concerns about the state of our rights on station KDVS.

PHOTO BY LARRY DALTON

Actually, he's both. Kravitz made his mark on the Sacramento legal community with some high profile civil liberties cases. And now he's making a mark on the general community's social conscience by bringing up the same issues on his *Panic Attack* radio show.

"This is a blast! It's like a dream come true," Kravitz gushes. "All my life I've wanted to be a talk show host."

One can almost see the wheels turning in his head while he listens intently to guests and callers, all the while nervously twisting and pulling a rubber band between his fingers. That kind of manic energy is something he applies to both his vocations.

Interviews with Kravitz are squeezed among court hearings, phone calls from clients or the police, media interviews, and his need to eat lunch—which he frequently misses. In his law office, even Slither, his yellow-bellied stuffed snake, perches precariously on a stack of files, as if ready to strike an unwitting victim at any moment.

Whether it's his robust laughter, animated dialogues, or the distant hum of industrial machines drifting through his window, there's no silence in his sixth-floor office. Outside the window, K Street bustles with life, from homeless derelicts to working professionals—a range representative of his diverse client base.

Kravitz's work on controversial cases like the Headliners adult strip club, the Timbya Whitted case of police brutality, and, most recently, the Tabloid 95 hip-hop club in Old Sacramento, have established Kravitz as a champion of civil rights. Moreover, it's cases like these that have him convinced that the erosion of civil rights in this country is even more pronounced in the Sacramento region.

As a member of the Indigent Defense Panel program, Kravitz represents many poor people who have their civil rights violated by the police. Increasingly, he said, as people

Kravitz has been practicing law for five years, working on criminal cases and licensing issues in addition to his civil rights focus. Family law attorney Katherine Sabo, a recent guest on the radio show, said Kravitz is complex and difficult to pin down.

"He has very strong opinions and very strong beliefs, and every now and then he'll say something and you think you've got him into a box. [You think.] 'OK, I've got him stereotyped. I've figured him out.' ... [Then] he'll have a very firm belief about something totally contradictory to that box you put him in," said Sabo.

Criminal defense attorney Russel Fong, who has also been a guest on the radio program, said there's nothing phony about Kravitz: "His life is not a reflection of what he wants people to see. What you see is what you get."

And what you're certain to get is an intellectual conversation, a good laugh, and maybe even a bit irritated by his chronic tardiness, which is a source of consternation for Kravitz.

"Like many, many attorneys, I am addicted to doing things at the last minute. There are always fires to put out. You need to be planning things in advance, not doing everything at the last minute. Very often, you become a good gunslinger. You shoot from the hip and hit. It's not a good idea, but you can become used to doing it," Kravitz said.

While he hasn't changed much since his activist days in college, where he said he was arrested three times for his protest activities while studying history at the University of California, Berkeley, Kravitz now works within the confines of the law. Prior to attending law school at the University of California, Davis, for several years he tried his hand at selling health supplements and publishing and editing a travel magazine.

While at UC Davis, Kravitz said he served as editor of the law school newsmagazine, *The King Hall Advocate*, and continued to promote social justice and civil rights issues. But after law school, his life once again took an unexpected turn, leaving him divorced, with his children on the weekends, and working at a conservative law firm—something that was completely out of step with who he was.

After a year, he said he came back to his senses. He quit the law firm and moved back onto the path that he's always wanted to be on—not realizing that his work on the high profile *Headliners* case, and charisma, would earn him his own radio program in 1999.

Shifting his civil rights rhetoric onto the airwaves via *Panic Attack* was a welcome transition. Broadcast from the UC Davis campus, the show airs Tuesday evenings from 5 to 6 p.m. on 90.3 FM. It features attorneys and other experts who focus on various areas of law or public policy, and has a listener-call-in format. Sabo said the host's unique use of personal anecdotes and humor puts people at ease.

Unlike some radio hosts, Kravitz lets listeners and guests have their say, though he's been told he cuts people off too much. His goal is to get people thinking and arguing about the topics discussed on his show. Yet, no matter how much they rant, he remains unruffled.

While he's never outright rude, his use of sarcastic humor is disarming, leaving callers wondering if they've just been insulted. For example, he jokingly refers to Abe, a regular listener and a conservative, as a "nut." Or he had no qualms about telling one caller to please put down his crack pipe before asking his question.

"I try to be pretty nice, even when I ask the hard questions. People joke that my style is kind of a combination of Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern. And, sure, there is some of that there," said Kravitz. "I handle difficult people all the time. That's what my job is."

While his self-confidence and frequent references to his next media appearance can seem egomaniacal and self-promoting, Sabo explained that Kravitz is only looking for any opportunity to promote his clients, their interests and the radio show. Perhaps surprisingly, Kravitz said what he wants to be most known for isn't his legal practice, but *Panic Attack*.

"I don't emphasize my practice as much as other attorneys do as a purely money-making mill. I'm most interested in this radio show right now. It's like my passion," said Kravitz. "I do everything else so that I can do the radio show. What I want is, what I will hopefully have soon, to be able to make money from doing the show."

Kravitz hopes to someday see *Panic Attack* expand to include a national audience. His desire to be involved with things that are constantly moving forward is the driving force in his life. That is why he said he chooses to live by the Chinese proverb, "He who rides the tiger cannot dismount."