

Kenner, Joe & Ann, etc. All great music.

Around 1965 his station, WYDE, suddenly changed to a new format called "Countryopolitan." The days of records by artists like Johnny Horton and Johnny Taylor being played on the same station were, for all practical purposes, over. You had to be categorized, but that's a whole different story.

Duke dutifully stuck with WYDE through the 70's playing the mostly listenable, but forgettable, contemporary country. But listening to Duke made it palatable. Every now and then he would have occasion to talk about the old days, and you could almost see the gleam in his eyes. He was always sharp, always funny. He used to refer to Tennessee Ernie 'Chevrolet' because they were one of his sponsors, not Ford. For a while in the 70's WYDE had an attractive sounding female news reporter who he used to like to banter with in a lively, good-natured way. Roy Clark had a minor hit in the 70's with a record titled Do You Believe this Town? It was a clever little tune about hypocrisy and corruption in small town government. As Clark would sing the final line, asking 'Do you believe this town?' Duke would say "Believe it!?? Hey brother, I live in it." He always said it with such a chuckle that no one could possibly get upset. Everyone knew he loved Birmingham.

My favorite Duke Rumore memory, and I think the one that would best describe him to someone who never heard of him, revolves around a Christmas Day, either in the late 70's, or early 80's. Christmas was on a weekday that year and Duke did his normal 3:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. show. Christmas was always a joyous time for the Rumore families. In the 50's and 60's Duke and Joe would take their families and visit on each other's show Christmas Day. It would be an all day celebration. By this time, Joe had already retired, and may well have been Duke's last year at WYDE. Anyway, it was nearing 7:00 P.M. and time for only one more song. Duke wished everyone a Merry Christmas one last time and said "Folks I gotta play it one more time. I know it's not on the playlist, but it's Christmas and I just gotta play it one more time." Then came the chiming of bells and the memorable, unmistakable voice of Charles Brown crooning "Bells will be ringing, the glad news. Oh what a Christmas to have the blues - - - ." Of course, it was the classic, favorite version of Please Come Home For Christmas by Charles Brown. The one everybody likes. Only Duke could have played it on "Countryopolitan" WYDE. No, it wasn't on the playlist, but to heck with the playlist. Duke knew what his listeners wanted to hear.

Rest in peace, old friend I never knew.