

Reel + Broadcast
Women

The Women Behind Austin's Newest
24-Hour Music Television Network

Mommy & Me

Story by S. Kay Bell

MOST BOSSES, EVEN IN THE LIVE Music Capital of the World, tend to look askance at workers who spend the day toiling away to tunes.

Not Constance Wodlinger. In fact, she provides the soundtrack for her employees.

Of course, music is Wodlinger's business. As president and CEO of Austin's Music Entertainment Television cable network, she makes sure that not only her employees are serenaded, but so too are the rest of the region's music lovers.

"The concept is to establish a platform of exposure of the local and regional artists and all the artists that tour through here," Wodlinger says of the channel that debuted in October 2005. "That's three to four thousand [touring acts] a year. And the State music office has more than 2,000 artists [listed] just here in Austin."

It's an imposing play list, but Wodlinger has assembled an enthusiastic, music-loving staff to help her meet the challenge. Her secret weapon, however, is METV's vice president and executive producer, Jacqueline Renee. Not only has Jacqueline been part of two music television networks Wodlinger launched earlier, she knows the boss better than anyone else in the office: she's Wodlinger's daughter.

There's no escaping "the" question: just how do a mother and daughter manage to work side-by-side under the pressures of operating a fledgling 24/7 TV station? The immediate answer: simultaneous laughter.

"We've worked together often enough and long enough that she can finish my sentences," said Wodlinger. "Or something will come up and Jacqueline's already provided the answer that I would have had for the same question."

"There's obviously a lot of respect," added Jacqueline. "It's been part of my life since childhood."

Given the time-consuming demands of the year-old METV - "There are 168 hours in a week and we fill 168 hours," said Wodlinger - it's a good thing that both women have personal as well as professional appreciations of music.

Wodlinger's musical connection began in her Kansas City childhood. Growing up in the Midwest, she listened to WHB, one of the powerful AM stations that dotted the country. "Like all young people," said Wodlinger, "music was important."

Professionally, however, she initially detoured from the musical path, working first as a newspaper journalist, then in corporate communications, before turning to radio, where she was among the vanguard that recognized the potential of FM radio to promote pop and rock music.

"In the early '70s, that was a very radical departure," said Wodlinger. "Up until then, [FM stations] were thought to be substandard. Generally they were either simulcasting the AM stations or they were what we would call elevator music. They weren't very exciting."

Eventually, FM's better technology won out against AM radio, helped in large part by the inclusion of FM-band radios as a standard feature in cars.

And by 1985, Wodlinger was ready for a new challenge. The melding of music and TV was a natural next step.

Evidence of Wodlinger's extensive music associations is proudly displayed in her office. Framed gold and platinum records, presented to her by artists and record labels, watch over her current efforts to promote

Austin and Hill Country artists. A superstitious music lover might even think one of these mementos is a harbinger of success for her latest effort; the hirsute mugs of the already world-famous Texas trio ZZ Top smile down from the wall near her desk.

Thanks to such connections, Jacqueline's introduction to a diverse musical world began early. "Music was everywhere," said Jacqueline. "I've always enjoyed being around music and growing up around the radio stations and meeting [legendary DJ] Wolfman Jack when I wasn't even old enough to say his name."

The younger music executive also is a pianist who has penned her own songs, performed in bands and even recorded her own CD. The urge to get back on stage sometime resurfaces, but is short-lived. "I still enjoy it very much, but it's not my focus," said Jacqueline. "I always wanted to follow in Connie's footsteps and learn the business side of it."

While Jacqueline's move off stage might be a loss for audiences, the combined effort of these two women is a definite plus for Austin-area musicians.

"Probably 95% of the music that you hear [in Austin] has no video to go with it, so we've undertaken the task

Constance Wodlinger came to Austin in 2005 expressly to start the first in a series of national music video networks designed to showcase local and regional talent. Jacqueline Renee brings not only a strong musical and TV programming background to Austin's METV, she knows better than anyone else in the office what makes the network boss tick.



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(TV)

of taping a lot of performances and creating videos for the artists," said Wodlinger. "We give them the rights to duplicate it and use it for other promotional purposes and we've had some release our videos nationally as their video release."

Considering the sheer number of performers, both based here and coming to display their talents in Texas' main music city, how do they pick the bands they broadcast?

"We have on staff avid fans of every genre of music you can imagine and there are some very interesting conversations that go on," said Wodlinger. Her daughter chimed in and both women lit up as they recounted, in the sentence-finishing fashion mentioned earlier, a typical office musical discussion:

Wodlinger: "It's hip hop or it's indie rock ..."

Jacqueline: "Or Red River or ..."

Wodlinger: "Americana or ..."

Both lapsed into laughter at the scene. Then Wodlinger put it into perspective. "Everyone is passionate about their favorite musical style," she said.

And that passion is just as evident in the mother-daughter team determined to spread the word about Austin's music scene. ★

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