

Arts • Entertainment • Travel • Dining

KLOS DJ-author Joe Benson keeps his opinions off record

By KARLA TIPTON
Assistant Showcase Editor

Joe Benson may be a DJ on one of the most popular rock 'n' roll radio stations in Los Angeles, but he's also a fan.

And it's from the perspective of a fan that the disc jockey from KLOS (95.5 fm) has put together his series of four volumes (and counting) of record encyclopedias titled "Uncle Joe's Record Guide."

"That's always been my attitude on the air," said Benson in a phone interview from Los Angeles.

Benson will be signing copies of the books from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday at B. Dalton Booksellers in the Mervyn's shopping center in Lancaster.

About four years ago, Benson got the idea to publish his radio scripts from his Sunday evening program, "The Seventh Day," which he's hosted for more than seven years. The program features seven classic rock albums played in their entirety, with tidbits of historical rock information provided by Benson sandwiched in between.

In accordance with the show, "I wanted the books to be very factual," he said. But neither on the air nor in his record guides does Benson offer his opinion.

Of rock critics, Benson is no fan.

"Books like 'The Rolling Stone Record Guide' really bother me," he said. "Generally, when rock critics tell you something is good, it's because they discovered it. You have to be 'hip' to be a rock critic."

Besides their self-importance, critics are often way off base.

Offering an example, he said, "When Led Zeppelin's first album came out, critics hated them. But they're the most popu-

lar rock group ever, having only released 10 albums." (Led Zeppelin are among the groups profiled in the most recent volume.)

His approach is one favored by the artists. "The bands appreciate it," he said. "When Mick Jagger liked the book - whoooooa."

The guides chronicle the histories and discographies of the Beatles (Vol. 1); the Rolling Stones (Vol. 2); Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and the Who (Vol. 3); and Led Zeppelin, Bad Company, Deep Purple, Aerosmith, ZZ Top, AC/DC, Rush and Van Halen (Vol. 4). A volume on progressive rock, including bands such as Pink Floyd and Genesis, is his next project.

For the books, Benson has done extensive research on the artists through magazines, taped interviews - and by drawing upon his collection of about 5,000 records - as well as going straight to the horse's mouth.

"The resource which I find personally the most rewarding is talking to the artists themselves," he said. For the "Hard Rock" edition, he spoke to members of every group included except for Led Zeppelin and Bad Company.

And while having personal access to the bands puts him in an

See KLOS on H13



JOE BENSON

KLOS

From H2

enviable position in the minds of average fans, "It doesn't change my perspective (as a fan), but it gives me a broader universe to draw upon."

Benson has also had to do some research into computers. And since all the books have been self-published - using a computer desktop publishing system - he's also learned the ins and outs of the publishing industry.

"Realistically, a legitimate publisher might pay you 10 cents per book, and they take complete control of everything. I said, to hell with it, I'll do it myself," he said.

"If I realized how much work it was, I might've thought twice."

Thus far, he's had to do everything himself, including setting up promotions and retail offices

in more than 30 markets across the country.

"It's growing as it goes along," he said. "Now that the third and fourth books have come out, it's become obvious to the industry that it is a series and it will keep going," he said.

Six more books are in the planning stages, which will make it a 10-volume series.

Benson hopes radio programmers - as well as young people wanting to educate themselves about the music - will pick up on the usefulness of "Uncle Joe's Record Guide."

At this point, however, the books haven't skyrocketed him beyond the average income bracket of most fans.

"At this point I'm not doing it to pay the rent - which is good," he said.