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Brian Copeland genuinely thrilled with '7Live'

Peter Hartlaub, Chronicle Pop Culture Critic
Saturday, September 25, 2010

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Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle

Brian Copeland, who scored a huge hit with "Not a Genuine Black Man," hosts new show "7Live" on KGO-TV.

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"Time to start the conversation."

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Brian Copeland says that's the first thing in his head when he wakes up in the morning, often as early as 5 a.m. He's gathering information off the radio as he gets breakfast ready for himself and his 15-year-old son, and everyone is working as he drives the teen to school.

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"I've got the kid sitting next to me with a notepad taking notes for me," Copeland says. "He's like my stenographer. 'Oh, that's a great one. Write that down. I can do something on that!' I drop him off, and I come in to work, and I'm still picking up stories. The conversation goes on the entire day."

Copeland has been hustling for decades, first as a stand-up comic, and for the past 19 years as a talk show host on KGO, with a slot on Sunday mornings and as the regular fill-in for stalwart Ronn Owens.

Copeland's one-man show, "Not a Genuine

Black Man," was supposed to last six months. Six years later, he's still performing "Genuine" as far away as [Washington, D.C.](#), and New Orleans.

And last week the single father of three dived into perhaps his biggest challenge, "7Live," an hourlong hybrid talk/interview/news/commentary hour on [KGO-TV](#) that makes ample use of social networking.

Copeland had vowed to stay off live television after a 1990s stint as a KTVU morning-show co-host and weatherman that he says was a good job but a bad fit. He was skeptical when he received a cell phone call from KGO news director Kevin Keeshan about "7Live" earlier this year.

"I felt that the possibility was remote," Copeland says. "'Genuine' changed everything. I

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had reached this point in my career where I had control over what I do. In radio they let me do what I want. As long as I don't say one of the seven words, I'm fine. ... I didn't want to go back to a position where I have a boss who is telling me what I can or can't do."

But the more he heard about "7Live," the more he saw an opportunity.

"At first I thought 'Man, are you going to do a live show in this economy? Are you nuts?' Because everyone else is cutting everything," Copeland says. "The fact that they were willing to do it was exciting (and) daring. Because nobody does this anymore."

Wide-ranging mix

The show offers a buffet of news, entertainment and commentary, sprinkling the whole thing with hefty doses of [Facebook](#) and Twitter comments and the occasional [YouTube](#) clip. In one recent show, Copeland and his co-hosts, Jennifer Jolly and Lizzie Bermudez, cover everything from PG&E's role in the San Bruno pipeline explosion to Twitter accounts for dogs. Future shows will feature live advertisements incorporated casually, much like the live Sleep Train or Amici's Pizzeria spots common to talk radio.

The X-factor is the studio audience, a group of 20 guests called the "Voicebox," which is where Copeland seems to excel. The job taps strongly into his stand-up comedian roots, whether he's warming up the audience before the show or thinking on his feet and trading quips with the audience during the program.

"He has the unusual ability to entertain and inform at the same time," says "7Live" executive producer Maggie Baxter. "He's very engaging."

Ronn Owens says Copeland was memorable from the moment they met - at first with a spot-on imitation of fellow KGO host [Ray Taliaferro](#).

"He was a young guy who listened to a station that usually doesn't have a lot of young listeners," Owens remembers. "He got the format and he was obviously eager and he wanted to do something. I just liked him. We clicked on a friendship basis."

Copeland says he was "taught by the best" in local broadcasting. That starts with former KITS host Alex Bennett, who had Copeland on the air for five years. Former KGO anchor [Jim Dunbar](#) is a close friend. Copeland says he learned live TV from Ross McGowan, who is the godfather of Copeland's son Adam.

Copeland is careful not to bash KTVU and says the people he worked with during five years on "Mornings on 2" were great. But he said that outside of a daily commentary, he had little control over what he did. Typecasting was also an issue.

"I had been doing this edgy, political stand-up," Copeland remembers. "I hated the fact that I would go to do stand-up, and now I'm not taken seriously. 'What's the weatherman doing up there?'"

Creative license

Not a problem with "7Live," where Copeland says he has creative license. During a recent show, he decided to stretch out his interview with child-safety activist Ed Smart. A segment focusing on the Oakland Police Department was dropped. During the Thursday show, he showed some comic outrage. "Lighten up!" he shouted at the screen, after covering a "Sesame Street" decision not to air singer Katy Perry's duet with Elmo



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because parents claimed she was too scantily clad.

Copeland says his secret weapon is his obsession with local news, a trait he shares with Owens. Copeland grew up in San Leandro - his experiences as a black youngster in a mostly white town fuel "Genuine" - and has raised three children, including an older son and daughter who are in college.

Owens, who calls Copeland one of his best friends, still likes to razz the younger broadcaster. Asked what he's learned from Copeland, he answers this way: "I've learned about how to have a dinner with somebody and never have to worry who's going to pay, because (I'm) going to pick up the check," Owens quips. "Now with this show, he's promised to take me out. And I can order anything I want from McDonald's ..."

Copeland is full of one-liners, too, but he stays mostly serious when he talks about his new show. When it's time to start the conversation, he doesn't joke around.

"The thing that I say about this show is that it's a living, breathing organism," Copeland says. "It's going to change and it's going to evolve. There are little surprises and neat little things that we haven't discovered yet. And that's cool."

7Live: 3 to 4 p.m. weekdays on KGO-TV. The show also streams live at abclocal.go.com/kg0.

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Akit 8:48 AM on September 25, 2010

Just last week, I saw Brian Copeland's "Not a Genuine Black Man" at SF State and it was a very good show with a mix of comedy and emotions. Good for him to get back on the local TV scene.

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Uncle_Winky 2:41 PM on September 25, 2010

I really like this guy. I wish he would change his mind and go full time on KGO.

He's charming, intelligent, and humble.

SFGate's Zennie should take note and try to emulate. On second thought, he would never make it.

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fuchito 11:08 PM on September 25, 2010

YES YES YES! Aside from Herb Caen coming back to life, Brian is a much needed figure back in the Bay Area TV scene! Right on KGO!

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