

Gold & Silver Circle Profiles



GOLD & SILVER CIRCLE PROFILES

by Kevin Wing



To say that **John Catchings** has had one helluva exciting and interesting career in radio, television and video production - and all while living and working in his hometown of San Francisco, one of the greatest cities in the world -- is a serious understatement. It's a travesty, really.

The man has done it all.

But, more importantly, Catchings has not just done it all, he's done it all extremely well.

Not to embarrass him, but that's an understatement, too. And, yes, a travesty.

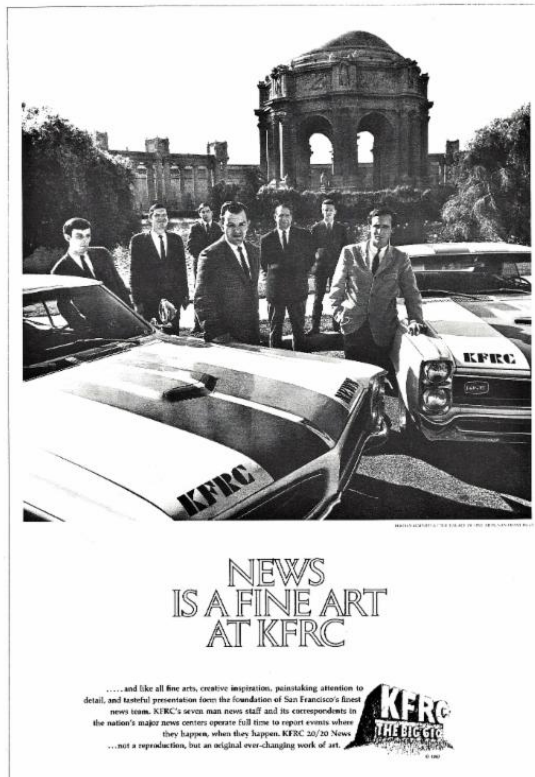
Catchings, who, in 2002, was inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, is a rare breed. Known in the business for his success as a radio and television producer and manager and the owner of a very successful production company, Catchings and Associates, Catchings simply knows how to take charge and get things done. He is also known for his "attention to detail".

In the 1960s, his San Francisco broadcasting career began in radio. He worked for a couple of radio stations and then, one day, in 1966, he was hired by San Francisco powerhouse KFRC to do the news. By the early 1970s, ABC Radio took serious notice and hired Catchings away to work in



management at KSFX.

Catchings never intended to get into the television side of the business. In fact, it almost didn't happen. He felt at the time that radio was the more "immediate" broadcast medium between the two. But then, one day, he was invited to work a couple of weeks at the assignment desk at KGO-TV Channel 7 to see if he liked it, and by the end of those two weeks, he got the surprise of his life: television had lured him in.



The Big 610

An old KFRG promotional, from 1966, featuring Catchings and colleagues.

KNBA in Vallejo," Catchings says, reminiscing. "Then, I went to KBRG, which was at the tail end of playing classical music at that time. I did the news in the morning. Then, I went to KMPX one more time."

That was early 1966.

For the next 13 years, he worked at KGO-TV in a number of news and sports management roles, even serving as acting news director in 1990.

Then, throughout all of the 1990s, he worked a block away, at KPIX Channel 5, also in an upper management role.

By the 2000s, Catchings decided it was time to try going into business for himself. And so, he formed his production company.

More on Catchings career later, but first, let's go back a bit to when it all began.

Born in San Francisco, Catchings is a third-generation San Franciscan and is the oldest of three brothers and two sisters. He grew up near Balboa Park, in a neighborhood now called Mission Terrace. Then, it was off to Ocean View and, finally, the Excelsior District. A graduate of Archbishop Riordan High School, Catchings went on to City College of San Francisco.

By the time he was there, Catchings was already working in broadcasting, doing fill-in work at KMPX Radio.

"I filled in for quite awhile, then went to

But then, something really big happened. As in The Big 610.

Catchings was hired at KFRC Radio, and began working for those famous San Francisco call letters. Exciting times.

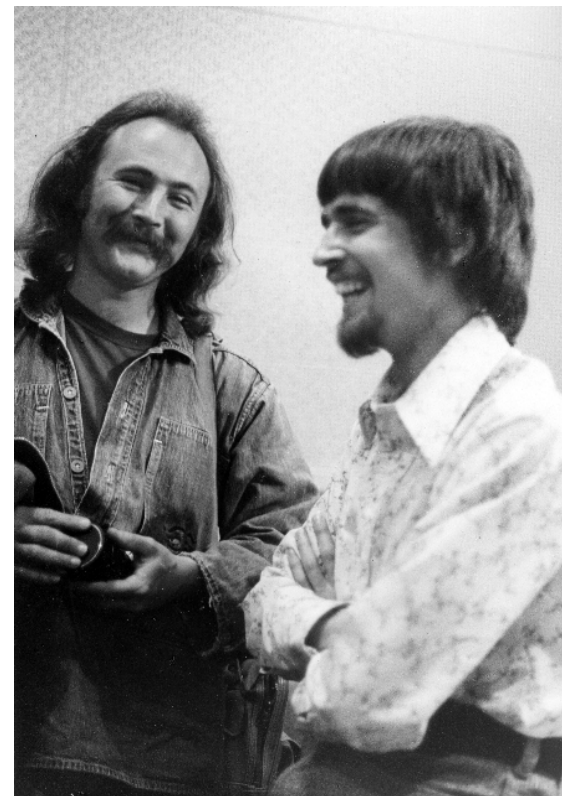
"I was assignment editor, reporter, sports guy. I did special projects," Catchings says. "I did a talk show called *Focus*, featuring a mix of entertainment folks. I had nothing to complain about. I always felt fortunate that I got paid to do something that I loved doing."

Then, there was the music.

"We began with the Parade of Hits," Catchings says proudly. "We invited listeners to call in and vote for their favorite songs of all time. That was such a popular thing that we blew out the phone lines. We compiled the votes and counted down the top 300 hits of all time. We were The Big 610. In those days, we played anything that was popular. We even had groupies."

Catchings, like everyone else at KFRC, rode that huge wave of popularity. With the arrival of the 1960s San Francisco sound and the "Summer of Love", KFRC became one of most popular AM radio stations in the country. It was the place on the Bay Area radio dial where, at that time, "the hits just (kept) on coming."

"The whole time I was there, I'd have to say that we had just the greatest staff. Many of whom became lifetime friends. Such as **John Motroni** and **Ron Naso**. And **Tom Saunders** from KFRC's competition, KYA. It was a pretty exciting time."



With **David Crosby**, in 1973

"One of the things I learned at KFRC was to pay attention to detail," he adds. "At the time, there was a reason for everything we did on the air. I always wanted to know the reason, because when you understand why, you do it right. I adapted that style of doing things, and it paid off."



*A conversation with **Mike Wallace***



*With San Francisco's pride and joy, **Robin Williams**. This photograph was taken backstage at KPIX's north studio, where Williams filled in as host for **David Letterman** on "Late Show with David Letterman".*

George Moscone refused. Catchings invited White to appear on the 11 p.m. news to talk about the resignation controversy with anchor (**Fred**) **Van Amburg** (*Silver Circle*, 1988).

In 1972, Catchings left KFRC when he was hired away by ABC Radio.

At KSFY, which was originally KGO-FM, Catchings was the director of programming and operations. He was originally hired as a producer, then was promoted to the management position.

In 1975, after a decade in radio, Catchings switched gears and decided to start what would be the first incarnation of his production company.

Then, one day, in 1977, **Pete Jacobus** approached Catchings with an idea. Jacobus was, at that time, the news director at KGO-TV.

"He asked me to come to work for him at Channel 7 as an assignment editor," Catchings says. "By then, I'd had a number of offers in Los Angeles to do radio there. But Pete asked me to give TV a shot for a couple of weeks to see if I would like it. I ended up staying."

The following year, in 1978, it could be said that Catchings had his first run-in with San Francisco history as far as television news was concerned.

In November of that year, former San Francisco Supervisor **Dan White** resigned because he wasn't earning enough money as a supervisor to support his young family. White tried to get his job back by rescinding his resignation, but San Francisco Mayor

Hours after leaving the studio, White went to City Hall and assassinated Moscone and Supervisor **Harvey Milk**.

Another big story for Catchings happened to be the so-called "Golden Dragon massacre", the name of which came from the restaurant where tragedy and fate came together one night in the late 1970s.

"Back then, we used to make daily beat calls before our 11 p.m. news," Catchings says. "I got leads for stories all the time because I cultivated contacts and sources."

One of Catchings' sources told him that there had been a break in the Golden Dragon massacre case. The update: that San Francisco police knew that the weapons used by the suspected killers had been dumped in San Francisco Bay.

"It was a big story, but we needed to confirm this before we went on the news with it," Catchings recalls. "So, I called **Joe Freitas**, who was the district attorney (for San Francisco) at the time. I called him at home. Van was on the other line, listening. I told Joe we were going to go on the air at 11 with the latest. Joe had this long pause, then denied it. I said we were still going to go on the air with the news. We went back and forth, then he said we'd harm the case if we went on the air that night with it. Well, we didn't want to harm the case, so we compromised."

The compromise? Realizing the competitiveness of television news, Freitas told Catchings that he would give them an exclusive by telling him where divers would be searching in the waters the next morning and that KGO-TV's cameras could be there, exclusively.

"I wanted a reporter and camera there so that we could document the whole thing," Catchings says. Then, at the district attorney's press conference later that day,



Gold & Silver Circle induction, 2002

(Left to right) Jack LaLanne (Gold Circle), Wayne Freedman (Silver Circle), Elaine LaLanne (Gold Circle), John Catchings (Silver Circle), Lucille Bliss (Gold Circle, sitting), Rosy Chu (Silver Circle), David Meblin (Gold Circle), Barbara Rodgers (Silver Circle), Don McCuaig (Silver Circle). Missing: Bill Schechner (Silver Circle).

the latest developments in the case were revealed, but Catchings had asked Freitas that it be mentioned that Channel 7 held off on airing the news at the request of the district attorney.

"And, Van was there! On scene! Everyone was wondering why he was there," Catchings recalls. "It was a big deal. And, so it was, we broke the story at 5 p.m., with all the film from that morning, the graphics we'd made, and everything else."



Family time

With wife, **Lynn Jimenez**, and **Bentley**

and its studio crew.

"We rented out the studio all the time. It worked out great," Catchings says.

In the mid-1990s, Catchings got wind of the fact that CBS was looking to send late-night star **David Letterman** on a cross-country tour for his show.

"David Letterman was at the height of his popularity at that time," Catchings says.

Soon, Catchings was promoted from assignment editor to the executive producer of the 11 p.m. newscast. Remaining in that position throughout the 1980s, he briefly became acting news director, then left the station after being wooed by KPIX and its news director, **Harry Fuller**. The reason Catchings became acting news director at KGO-TV was to temporarily fill the vacancy left by Fuller.

"I became director of sports programming at Channel 5," Catchings says. "We did a lot. 49ers telecasts, 49ers pre- and post-game shows, and I EP'd the preseason football telecasts. We also did Bay to Breakers telecasts and A's games, Bank of the West tennis and Cal football games."

In a short time, Catchings was promoted to be KPIX's director of station operations.

"I really had fun there, too," he says.

Catchings decided he could rent out the KPIX north studio from time to time to bring in extra revenue for the station

Catchings thought it would be great to bring Letterman's show to San Francisco for a week. CBS brass eventually came to San Francisco and Catchings gave them a tour of the Palace of Fine Arts as an excellent venue for the show.

Catchings' idea worked, and Letterman and his production crew originated his show from there for a week.

By 2000, it was time for Catchings to leave. "When you stop having fun, it's time to do something else," he says.

So, that year, Catchings left KPIX to start his award-winning, full-service production company, Catchings and Associates. His video production company is very successful.

"I thought I'd start something new, by combining consulting and production," he says.

He began consulting for Tech TV, which, by then, was being led by Fuller, a longtime fan of Catchings.

Today, Catchings focuses on television and video production for corporate, government and non-profit clients.

"I've been working in broadcasting and production since 1964," Catchings says. "Fifty years. These days, I'm more inclined to work on projects that interest me. I'd rather do things that I like to do, like working with non-profits, which is very rewarding.

Catchings has another milestone coming up: his 25th wedding anniversary, in March. He married **Lynn Jimenez**, in 1990. Her name and voice are very familiar to Bay Area radio listeners of KGO Radio.

"We love to travel," Catchings says. "Local and around the world. We love Australia, Fiji, Bali, Maui and Spain. We love Monterey, and Sonoma. We like to walk a lot, and enjoy wine tasting and dining out."

Today, the couple resides in the city's Richmond District with **Bentley**, their Havenese. At one time, the breed was the national dog of Cuba.

Catchings enjoys giving back, hence, his long-tenured devotion and loyalty to the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts



At work, with **Bentley**

and Sciences, of which he has not only served on the Board of Governors, but is also co-chairperson of the Chapter's archives and museum committee.

What are the keys to Catchings' success?

"In doing what we do, we meet a lot of interesting people in all walks of life," he says. "We tell stories that cover just about any subject imaginable. To tell the story accurately, you have to take time to listen and understand it. As a result, you're always learning. Every so often, situations arise where you can apply that knowledge. At which point, someone will say "how do you know that?". And, my answer is always the same, "we did a story on it".

Kevin Wing is a San Francisco Bay Area-based producer for ABC News' *Good Morning America*. He also serves as editor of *Off Camera* and as vice president, representing San Francisco, on the Board of Governors of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. He is also a 2013 Silver Circle inductee. Tweet Kevin @KevinWingABC

Soundbites



Bay Area television viewers have become accustomed to watching **Carolyn Tyler** cover some of the most important stories during her nearly three decades as an anchor and reporter at KGO-TV ABC7. Last month, Tyler received quite the honor: she was named Veteran Journalist of the Year by the Bay Area Black Journalists Association. It's fitting: in 2007, she was inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for her more than 25 years of contributions to the television industry. In