

Jim Scalem



Class of 1989

Silver Circle Profile
By: **Kevin Scott Wing**



When you think of **Jim Scalem**, you think of one man who has practically devoted his career to public television in the Bay Area and nationwide.

With a career history that dates back to the late 1950s, you wouldn't be mistaken if you suggested that Scalem has practically done it all in public television. Scalem, who was inducted in 1989 to the NATAS *Silver Circle*, spent more than three decades at KQED, then went on to a top executive management position at PBS. The New York native moved with his family to the Bay Area in the 1950s, literally following his beloved New York Giants to San Francisco when the team — along with the Brooklyn Dodgers' move to Los Angeles — became the West Coast's first major-league baseball team.

Call it a testament to his undying love for the Giants and the many years he's enjoyed with his association to public television, Scalem looks and sounds younger than his 68 years. After his family moved to San Francisco, Scalem graduated from Galileo High School. His first love was radio.

"I really wanted to get into radio," Scalem recalls. "I grew up as a child of radio. My dream was to be a radio sportscaster, but my eyes weren't that good. It would've been impossible for me to do play-by-play."

Leave it to his mother, who found out about a volunteer training program at KQED. Call it looking at Scalem's future. He applied, and became a volunteer for the station at the age of 16. It was 1958.

"I volunteered as a floor director," he says. "At the time, KQED did nothing but put on live shows. It was very exciting."

Year after year for the next 32 years, Scalem became a force at KQED. After working in the mailroom and volunteering as a floor director for those early live shows, Scalem's hard work and dedication to Channel 9 would pay off when he was named the station's program manager — responsible for the entire on-air schedule of KQED.

"I programmed both Channel 9 and Channel 32 (KQEC)," Scalem says. "I learned from the best. **Jonathan Rice**, who was program director before me, was my mentor. I had a great teacher."

During Scalem's 30-plus years at KQED, numerous milestones occurred, namely the critically-acclaimed *Newsroom* program, which began in 1968, a time when American politics, society and culture were changing as a result of student uprisings which began at UC Berkeley.

"It was a very interesting time to be a part of Channel 9," Scalem recalls. And with *Newsroom*, we covered news and current events with a unique style all our own."

Scalem was also director and executive producer of the station's local and national cultural programming, and he was executive producer of on-air fundraising and promotions.

During Scalem's eight years as program manager for both Bay Area PBS stations, KQED achieved its highest ratings during its first 35 years on the air. And what was also paying off for KQED were the pledge drives.

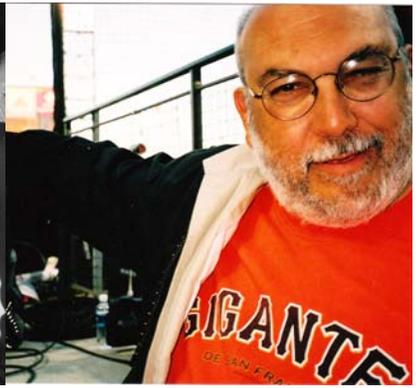
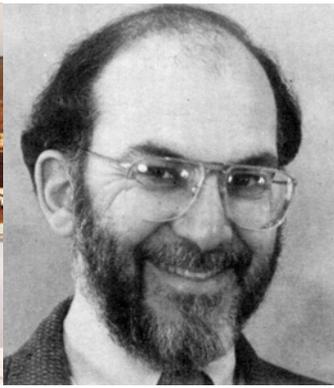
Scalem's scheduling and producing of the station's pledge drives began topping the \$1 million mark in contributions raised during the mid-1980s. In fact, before Scalem left for PBS in 1990, his last two pledge drives each brought in \$1.5 million for the station.

The secret to the success with the viewers dedicated to Channel 9 programming was variety. Scalem aired different types of programs scattered throughout the broadcast day. In the early 1980s, Scalem produced 50 live tennis tournament broadcasts for PBS. And, Scalem's acknowledgment of music and cultural programming paid off in big ways. He received two regional Emmy® awards for *An Hour with Joan Baez*, which was one of three Baez concert specials Scalem produced and directed. One of them, in fact, aired nationally on PBS as a Christmas holiday special.

It is much emulated today, but during Scalem's heyday at KQED, he created the so-called "one-minute biographies," segments which would air between programs.

Scalem continued producing and directing music programs; he produced a live telecast of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's *Sing It Yourself Messiah* for seven years, as well as live shows of the *San Francisco Opera's Opera in the Park*, which

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originated from Golden Gate Park and aired on KQED for seven successful years.

Scalem's talents, nor his outreach to the big stars of the day, didn't stop there. KQED, which continues to be one of the few PBS stations that produces programming for a national audience, collaborated with **Luciano Pavarotti**, with Scalem co-producing Pavarotti's national broadcast concert from San Francisco's Civic Auditorium.

Let's not leave out **Gilbert** and **Sullivan**. Scalem also produced two operettas with a San Francisco cultural treasure, the Lamplighters.

Scalem was also among the first in the nation to recognize cooking shows as a popular staple of public television. Programming these types of shows on Saturday afternoons drew high ratings for KQED.

"I met **Julia Child** once, and we had dinner together," Scalem says. "It was quite something to be with Julia in a restaurant. Everyone knew that unmistakable voice of hers, and people in the restaurant would come up to her to say hello. It was amazing."

Scalem also worked with **Martin Yan** of *Yan Can Cook* fame, a show that was produced nationally at KQED.

Always an innovator, Scalem pioneered scheduling techniques, such as stacking multiple episodes of shows across weekend-daytime hours and prime-time evening hours. Throughout the 1980s, "stunting" was an integral part of how KQED's broadcast day looked.

During the 1980s, Scalem came up with an idea. To schedule counter-programming one New Year's Day against college football bowl games on the major commercial networks, he conceived the idea of a New Year's Day stunt, in which all 11 episodes of the PBS drama series, *Brideshead Revisited*, aired back-to-back beginning in the morning. The stunt paid off; it was known as "the *Brideshead Bowl*," garnering an unheard-of average viewer rating of 6 during its 12-hour span.

More innovation followed. Scalem was one of the first PBS programmers to purchase and broadcast "high-impact" movie packages to air on Saturday

nights. The gamble paid off for KQED in the form of high viewership.

Production of documentaries came to the forefront at KQED in the late 1980s. Along with KQED Station Manager **Nat Katzman**, the two created the station's local version of the national *P.O.V.* series of documentaries. *Viewpoint* was 26 one-hour documentaries spotlighting "point of view" films created and produced by the San Francisco Bay Area independent film and video community.

In 1990 — after 32 years at KQED — Scalem switched gears, joining PBS as its vice president of fundraising programming.

During the next eight years, Scalem was responsible for creating, funding and administering more than 350 "pledge" programs for the 240+ public television stations. Among the more successful programs Scalem brought to the screen during his tenure: the 1994 and 1998 *Three Tenors* concerts from Los Angeles and Paris; *Riverdance*; *Les Miserables* in Concert; two **Peter, Paul and Mary** specials; three **Victor Borge** Then and Now specials; the *Eagles reunion concert*, *Hell Freezes Over*; the *Moody Blues at Red Rocks*; **John Tesh** at *Red Rocks*; **Yanni** at the *Acropolis*; **Michael Crawford** in Concert; various **Frank Sinatra** specials; **Perry Como's Irish Christmas**; and five **Lawrence Welk** Specials.

Scalem also pioneered the highly successful "self-help" genre of fundraising programming by commissioning and acquiring programs featuring **John Bradshaw**, **Deepak Chopra**, and menopause expert **Dr. Judith Reichman**.

For two years beginning in 1998, Scalem was executive vice president Media Productions International, a New York independent production company.

Most of the programs Scalem produced aired nationally as PBS or American Public Television fundraising specials.

Those programs included: **Bobby Darin** and *Beyond the Song*; **Patti Page** and *The Singin' Rage*, and *A Salute to British Comedy* on American Public TV. Ice skating was a part of Scalem's production efforts, featuring Divas on Ice, a skating special

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Saturday, October 23, 2010 San Francisco Marriott Marquis

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showcasing the talents of Olympic figure skaters **Katarina Witt** and **Tara Lipinski**.

In 2000, Scalem was ready for a new challenge in his illustrious career: he wanted to go into business for himself, and so it was that Jim Scalem Productions was created.

In the 10 years since he began his own business, Scalem has continued to produce and direct the same types of quality programming that he's been known for. One-hour biographies on **Dean Martin**, **Frank Sinatra** and **Sammy Davis, Jr.** Specials featuring the *Grateful Dead*, and musical specials featuring the works of **Peggy Lee**, **Rosemary Clooney** and **Karen Carpenter**. And, a program which featured an extensive interview with **Michelle Phillips** for a special called *California Dreaming: The Story of the Mamas & The Papas*. Scalem was at the helm of another production featuring the work of the *Kingston Trio*. That show, along with the *Mamas & The Papas retrospective*, are both currently airing nationally on PBS.

Always busy with a new project, Scalem is still on the go. Right now, through his production company, he's putting together a 90-minute documentary on the life of World War II General **George Marshall**. He is also working on a one-hour special with **Liza Minnelli**, and is collaborating on a one-hour series of specials focusing on culture and history of different parts of the world. Scalem is also working on a one-hour "self-help" fundraising special for PBS featuring renowned psychologist and author, **Judith Orloff**.

Work aside, Scalem is very happy living down the street from AT&T Park to watch his Giants play in the nation's best ballpark. He never misses a home game.

"I was very lucky to come to San Francisco when my family moved here," Scalem says. "I was very fortunate to come to KQED. I got in on the ground floor, and together, all of us did some cutting-edge things there. It was just the best experience."



In Memoriam: Frank Bindt



Frank Bindt at his 93rd Birthday Party last Oct.

Frank Bindt passed away peacefully on July 12, 2010 at age 93. He was the oldest surviving retiree of NABET Local 51 in San Francisco. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in April and received hospice care at his Walnut Creek home.

Frank's career stretches back to the pioneering days of bay area radio & television (before the great depression). Frank was born in Hawaii on October 15, 1916.

In 1930, Frank attended high school in Berkeley, and began his broadcast career at KRE, KLX, & KFRC. Frank was a Technical Director at KGO-TV until his retirement in 1985, just months after KGO moved from the Golden Gate Avenue studios.

Frank's life outside of broadcasting included a passion for large theatre pipe organs. In 2004, he was honored in Atlanta as one of the founders of the American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS/ATOE). Frank was traveling with his disk recorder, making 16-inch transcriptions of well-known artists as early as 1940. Frank was not a physically large man, yet he wrestled his heavy disk recorder up the balcony of the Fox Oakland Theatre to make early recordings of their 3m-14r Wurlitzer. Frank's efforts to preserve these "first motion picture soundtracks" resulted in pressings still enjoyed today.

After his retirement, Frank hosted the extremely popular KGO Retiree luncheons at his home in Berkeley, and continued this tradition after his move to the Rossmoor retirement community in Walnut Creek. These popular get-togethers allowed current & former KGO-TV engineers, writers, managers, reporters, and anchors to sit down together over lunch, reminisce, and catch-up with each other 2-3 times a year. Many of these luncheon regulars attended Frank's 90th Birthday party in 2006. A roast was held for Frank in June, where they shared some of the more infamous stories of Frank's career with his family and friends. Frank enjoyed his roast, and all the luncheons held in his honor, never losing his sense of humor.

Frank was also a Life Member of the *Broadcast Legends* and was a regular at the quarterly luncheons.

He will be missed by the many friends who had the privilege of knowing him.

(**Kevin Scott Wing** pens *Silver Circle* and *Gold Circle* profiles each month for *Off Camera*. The two-time Emmy® Award-winning Bay Area television journalist is a news writer at NBC Bay Area/KNTV in San Jose and is a host and producer of travel programs, including *Catch a Wave*.)

