

Substantial Disruption



Stomping Upon the Terra (Emil Franzi 1938-2017)

By Mike Tully

Our people are slow to learn the wisdom of sending character instead of talent to Congress. Again and again they have sent a man of great acuteness, a fine scholar, a fine forensic orator, and some master of the brawls has crunched him up in his hands like a bit of paper.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I first saw Emil Franzi in a political science class in the early 1970s. He was a guest speaker, covering for Conrad Joyner. Dr. Joyner held local office, but his goal was Congress and Emil was the brawler to his scholar. I don't know if Dr. Joyner prepared a lesson plan, but it was a waste of time if he did. The lesson was pure, unalloyed Franzi: blunt, basking in the moment, bereft of political correctness. It was the first time I saw Emil "stomp upon the terra," to use [Lord Buckley's](#) phrasing. Conrad Joyner was gregarious, effervescent and entertaining. He also wanted to be liked; that was important to him. Suffice it to say Emil was less concerned about being liked. While it's accurate to describe Emil as a "scholar" because of his impressive intellect, he would have preferred "master of the brawls." I can't say I liked him that first day, but I was damn sure impressed by the stomping.

Radio is an enemy, a ruthless enemy marching irresistibly forward, and any resistance is hopeless.

- Arnold Schoenberg

Later, I was honored not only to be Emil's friend, but his radio co-host. I transitioned from television production to radio news and public affairs in late 1973 and Conrad Joyner and Emil Franzi were valuable contacts. Conrad Joyner was one of my (and everybody else's) favorite interviews, famously "unavoidable for comment" while Emil had a preternatural talent for press relationships and an ability to cut through the sinews of political issues. Emil's currency was his word, and a valuable currency it was, since reporters live and die by their sources. Emil was a walking political seminar, bursting with knowledge of politics and politicians and more than willing to share if you were willing to listen. If political science courses were basic training, Emil was the commander on the front lines.

I co-hosted Emil's "Inside Track" radio show in 2004 and 2005. While many have appropriately focused on Emil's incredible memory, intellect, and incandescent personality, his genius as a radio host is often overlooked. While he didn't have a so-

called “radio voice,” Emil understood the medium. From his haunting intro music (the soundtrack to “Quigley Down Under”) to his parables, Emil built and retained an audience that followed him from station to station, year after year, with loyal sponsors who supported the program. “Inside Track” was a brokered program, meaning Emil bought a block of air time from the station and sold commercials to cover his cost. Most brokered programs are “vanity radio” misadventures that attract neither audience nor sponsor. Emil more than paid for his show; his radio longevity was Tucson’s reward. He was interesting, challenging, compelling, infuriating, inspiring and impossible to turn off.

"A man's got to have a code, a creed to live by, no matter his job."

- John Wayne

As I shared weekend co-hosting duties with the brilliant Tom Danehy, Emil replaced the final hour of “Inside Track” with a program called “Voices of the West.” He focused not only on western history, of which he possessed encyclopedic knowledge, but also western books, television shows, movies and even soundtracks. Most experts can rattle off the names of actors, directors, and writers ... but composers? Emil could. One of his favorite guests on “Voices” was a make-up artist. Emil was recognized in 2014 with the [Western Writers of America](#) Lariat Award, the first broadcaster honored in such a fashion. There is talk of converting the first floor of the Old Pima County Courthouse to a branch of the Tucson Art Museum, featuring Western art. If so, it should include a “Voices of the West” room, with a lending library of books, music, and movies. The room should be named after Emil Franzl.

Lord, we give you Curly. Try not to piss him off.

- “City Slickers” (1991)

There are Renaissance men and women who master various and diverse subjects, but rarely juggle all of them simultaneously. Usually, as a new topic is mastered, a previous one ebbs. Not so with Emil, who mastered politics, government, journalism, classical music, opera, broadcasting and western lore. All these disciplines coexisted brilliantly and faithfully in the starry starry night of Emil’s atomic mind.

I last saw Emil two days before he died. He was uncharacteristically soft spoken and distracted, and his emaciated vessel evidenced cancer’s death march. He was more falling leaf than timber. While I miss Emil, I will not mourn him. Instead, I’ll honor him by helping stir the American slumgullion of political discourse, nodding to the empty chef’s hat nearby as the cauldron simmers. And that is all I have to say about that, save one last comment:

Lord, we give you Emil...