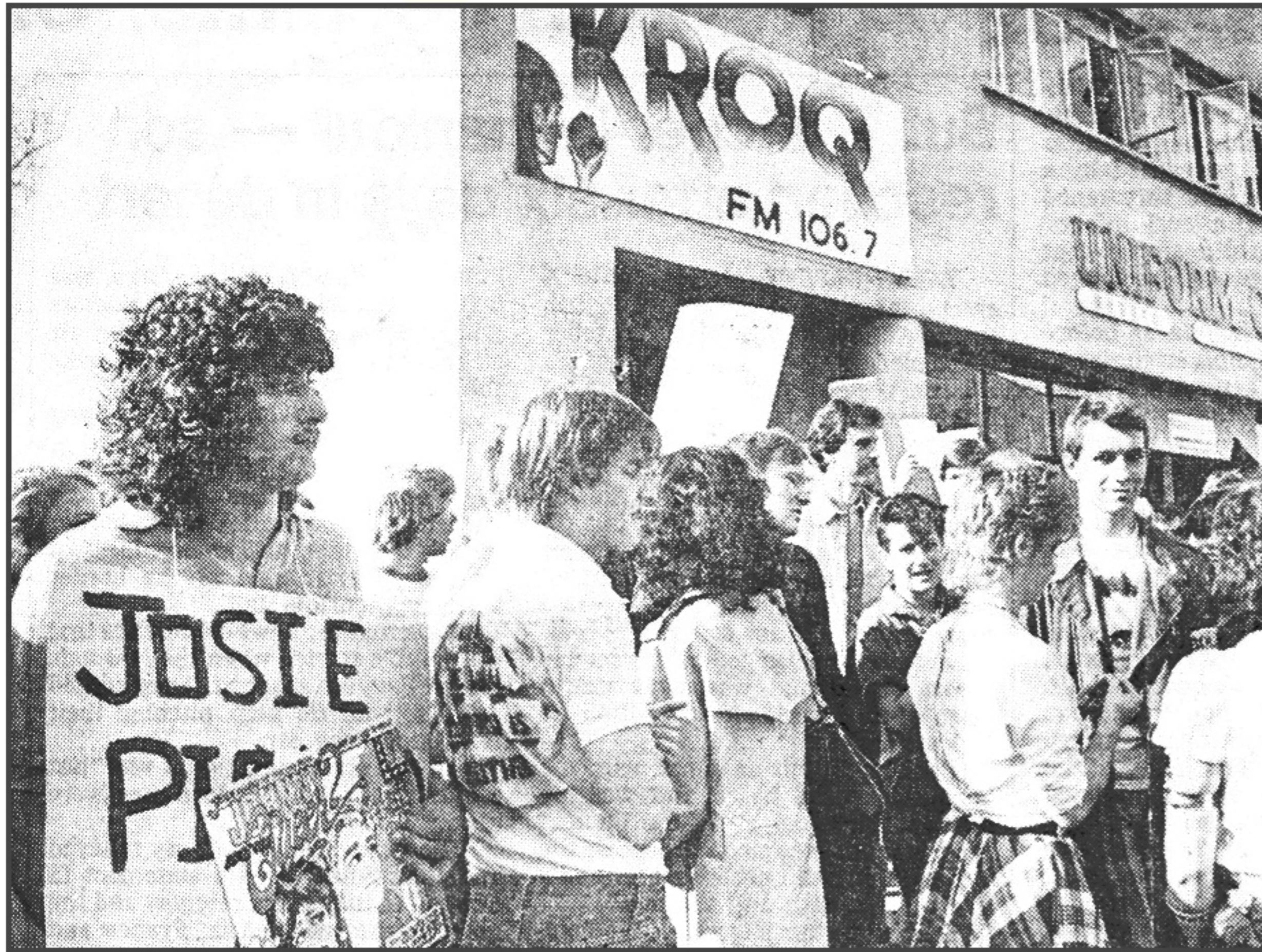


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Fans of radio station and New Wave song carry signs in support of tune they say they find humorous.

Tempest on a turntable: Uproar over New Wave's 'modern day love song'

"I saw you today, boy walking with them gay boys...I'm so afraid I'll lose you, if I can't seduce you. Is there something wrong, Johnny come on strong."

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By Patricia Wolf
Herald Examiner staff writer

The hottest New Wave song in Los Angeles has a catchy tune, a fast beat and ear-catching lyrics.

But listeners can't seem to agree if the lyrics are humorous or offensive.

"Johnny Are You Queer" is not an average record, even for the usually outrageous New Wave sound. It tells the story of a young girl who wonders about the sexual preference of her boyfriend.

Her often repeated question, "Johnny are you queer?" is never answered.

"It's a modern day love story,"

said Bobby Paine, who co-wrote the song in 1980 with his brother Larson. The Paines originally penned the tune for the group, the Go-Go's, who sang the song in concert but never recorded it. A newcomer to the music scene, Josie Cotton, recorded "Johnny" last summer.

The record cover is almost as outlandish as the title. "Josie Cotton feared the shocking truth... But she had to know," the psychedelic cover reads. It features a woman with a spiked haircut sobbing as a young blond-haired man, with an earring in his right ear gazes at another man in blue shorts.

The song became a huge hit at the few rock stations across the country who dared to play it. Listeners of KROQ, the only Los Angeles radio station which programs the song, rated it number three in the top 10 songs of 1981. Not a word against the tune was

heard until a music critic for the Village Voice called the title offensive to gays. Then Marc Allen, a member of a Los Angeles based group, People Against Obscenity, called the song immoral.

Allen tried to organize a demonstration outside the Pasadena-based KROQ to force the radio station to stop playing the tune. To counter the demonstrators, disc jockeys at KROQ asked listeners to come to the station to "protest the protesters." Rick Carroll, the station's music programmer, said the group was trying to censor the song.

Those loyal to the record and KROQ outnumbered the other demonstrators yesterday by 95-5.

"We didn't do too well," said Allen, 26, who was wearing a placard saying, "Josie picked a loser."

The five protesters included the youth pastor from Bethany Church of Alhambra and two members of the congregation.



Two women protest the airing of "Johnny Are You Queer" at KROQ.

Ruth Emmett, who called herself a, concerned parent, said she objects to the song "because it's not what the Bible tells us."

The youth pastor, Bob Cave, said the record is "trash."

"I'm concerned about the young people. This song will help break down the moral quality," he said.

Cave and Dan Danhauser, a 22-year-old self-labeled "born again Christian," engaged in the liveliest discussion about the song.

"Do you understand what the song means?" asked Danhauser, a student at Azusa Pacific College, a Christian liberal arts school. "It's just a joke."

Cave said it didn't matter if the song was intended to be a joke. "Junior high kids can't differ-

entiate like you. They'll think it means its OK to be homosexual."

To which Danhauser replied, "I think the kids are more intelligent than you give them credit for."

Songwriter Paine said the tune was meant to be funny. "We didn't want to offend anyone," he said. "We used queer because we felt it was the most innocent word to use. It means different."

Leaders of Los Angeles' gay community agree the song is funny, and not derogatory.

John Berge, a disc jockey at a Los Angeles gay bar, reported, "People are insane over it."

Most New Wave aficionados said the song is "less offensive and less obscene" than many popular tunes.