

# The Star-Ledger

## QVC shopping show gets into 'The Groove'

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When Rafe Gomez was growing up in Passaic, big funk bands were all the rage.

"You couldn't have a band back then without 10 or 12 people onstage -- horns, keyboards, you name it," Gomez recalls. "The Bar-Kays, the Commodores, Brass Construction, Mandrill, those were the models."

Gomez went from being a drummer in big bands to being a club DJ, working as a music researcher for legendary New York DJ Frankie Crocker, running a dance-mix label and programming music for MTV's "The Real World."

These days, Gomez can be found some weekday mornings in a coffee shop in Montclair. He's surrounded by a stack of CDs and has a portable player with headphones. The stack is the genesis of his weekly smooth-jazz jam show, "The Groove Boutique," which airs from 8 p.m. to midnight Saturdays on WQCD (101.9 FM). The show is syndicated on 12 other stations, with more to come.

Gomez will also hawk his mix CDs and CDs by smooth jazz and chill artists like Bobby Caldwell and Alex Bugnon on QVC at 2 a.m. Thursday. A return engagement is possible. Gomez says he hopes to open up a whole new audience through his home-shopping appearance.

"There's a whole audience that thinks if something is on QVC, it must be good," says Gomez, 46. "This point of view isn't included in labels' schemes or marketing plans. This reaches an audience that is older and probably wouldn't go into a record store to seek out new music. They want to experience the music. They don't care who the sidemen were or who the producer was."

The Groove Boutique idea was a simple one, Gomez says.

"You have mix shows for pop, rap and dance listeners," Gomez says. "I wanted to do a mix show for grownups. Most radio is so heavily researched now with focus groups and callouts. The only research here is my taste."

That taste is finding listeners all over the country, with stations in St. Louis and Oregon among those that have picked up Gomez's show. In the year or so it's been on the air, CD 101 has expanded "The Groove Boutique" from two to four hours, and some of the station's programming has evolved because of Gomez's success.

"It's perfect in that it pushes the envelope at a time -- on the weekend -- that it can be pushed," says Blake Lawrence, program director at CD 101.9. "People are expecting a little different thing, and it's been very well-received."

Carol Archer, the smooth-jazz columnist for industry trade publication Radio and Records, said "The Groove Boutique" is fresh programming for a format that hasn't produced much lately.

"I consider it an innovation," Archer says. "CD 101.9 has the largest cume (total audience) of any smooth-jazz station in America. They have 1.6 million listeners a week. The show is getting a response, and the station has upped its investment. In its first ratings book, the show attracted a full share increase in its time slot. That's significant."

Gomez posts his playlists on his Web site ([www.grooveboutique.com](http://www.grooveboutique.com)).

For every familiar name like vibraphonist Roy Ayers or Earth, Wind and Fire, you might find a New Zealand jazz band like \$1 Million, whom Gomez describes as a cross between Stevie Wonder and Jamiroquai. After Gomez played the band, he got e-mails from New Zealand from the band's management. His site has links to buy the music on his playlists, and the band had been hearing from American listeners.

Also, Gomez was tapped to remix Smokey Robinson's "Quiet Storm" by fellow Montclair resident Harry Weinger, the keeper of the Motown vaults.

"I stripped out all the music from the original track, but left the vocals," Gomez says. "I tried to create the feeling if Smokey had walked in a jazz session with standup bass and a drummer. I got Roy Ayers to play vibes. Smokey's vocals were perfect. So many vocals nowadays are tuned and pitch-shifted. Not this one."

The cut has gotten a lot of club play in Europe and can be found on the 2005 album "Motown Remixed."

Besides the audience response -- the Boutique is No. 4 in its time slot with men 25-54 and No. 2 with women in the same demographic -- some jazz labels are happy they've found an outlet for some of their artists in the format.

"His show has taken a lot of our artists to very different markets," says Suzanne Berg, senior vice president for promotion at Verve Records. "John Scofield is one of our people who has benefited from the show."

"I think the way a lot of radio mix shows are going these days are with mixes of Britney (Spears) and Mariah (Carey), and our type of music doesn't necessarily fit into that. But this show gives us another avenue to be heard."

Tom Taylor, editor of the Cherry-Hill based radio tip sheet Inside Radio, says Gomez's show has, on occasion, outperformed the rest of CD 101.9's programming in the ratings. According to Gomez, "Groove Boutique" is one of the top 5 Arbitron-rated Saturday night mix shows in the New York metro area.

"There's definitely an appetite and a taste for this," Taylor says. "I'm sure CD 101 would like it fine if the rest of the station caught up to Gomez's ratings."

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