

diversions

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Left of the dial

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College radio balances educational mission with mass appeal

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STAFF WRITER

A quick scan through the fare of commercial radio stations yields a variety of results and genres of music.

Listen to one station for an extended period of time, however, and many listeners begin to experience some *deja vu*.

That's why many turn to noncommercial college radio, which focuses on diversity in programming and fresh rotations.

At least that's the goal, said WXYC's station manager, Lauren Brenner.

"We educate people through exposure to different types of music and trying to draw connections."

WXYC 89.3 FM, UNC's student-run radio station, is funded by student fees. It is one of three student organizations whose funding is guaranteed by the student government's constitution.

"In a lot of ways, college radio is in a unique position, similar to that of the University," Brenner said.

"It has the ability to make decisions about its mission statement and its programming independently of private groups or individuals."

This freedom is embodied in the largely free-format style of WXYC's programming, which offers very little restriction and gives a lot of power to DJs in deciding what music to play on their shows.

But a lack of guidance in programming has led some to believe there is a disconnect between the station and the majority of students.

UNC student body presidential candidate Kristin Hill said WXYC has "kind of lost touch with student interests."

Her campaign platform includes plans to work with the station to help it cater to more students, especially by working with other student organizations.

She met Monday with Brenner regarding their potential collaboration.

"They don't want to be detached from the student body — they're looking for a way back in," she said.

Hill also is a student representative for WEA, the parent company of Warner Bros. Records.

But she said her affiliation with the label has nothing to do with her inter-

est in helping to make changes with WXYC.

Her interest in radio, she said, existed before she came to UNC, even though she has been working with WEA since only October.

And Hill said she doesn't see this as a conflict of interest; she is open to the possibility of collaboration between WEA and WXYC.

"Whatever we can do at Warner without overstepping boundaries of what WXYC can do — we can collaborate that way."

Regardless of her motivations, Hill said the station should be more accessible and sees future changes at the station as an important step.

"They'll bend as much as they feel is morally in line with their mission and their goal," she said.

Her meeting with Brenner left Hill feeling confident.

"Their leadership shows they are excited about what students are doing on campus," she said.

Brenner said that changes are inevitable but that predicting them is entirely impossible.

"We'll definitely preserve our commitment to diversity and good music," Brenner said. "But our direction is just as unforeseeable as the direction of music in general."

The primary focus of WXYC is educational, Brenner said, and the station achieves this by exposing listeners to new music.

While playing unique music of all kinds is important to college radio, stations also must compete with commercial radio for listeners.

Finding a balance between accessibility and highlighting music off the beaten path is difficult for most independent stations.

"We certainly have our listeners in mind at all times and actively strive to keep things fresh and engaging," Cole Goins, a music director at WXYC, said in an e-mail.

"You can't educate people if they're not listening," Brenner said. "If people turn on the station, even if they haven't heard something before, we hope they're going to like it."

Brenner acknowledges that the station has developed a reputation for playing weird music in the past, but she said programming is always shifting with the DJs and music staff.

WXDU 88.7 FM, the student radio

station at Duke University, also focuses on educating its listeners by broadcasting unique music.

"We've debated about this in the past. You know, how obscure do you want to be?" said Meredith Newmark, general manager of WXDU.

"We don't try to exclude something because it's a little bit more well-known, but we are trying to be an educational station and provide stuff that's more obscure."

Newmark doesn't see anything wrong with this philosophy, either.

"I like that we're playing stuff that nobody's ever heard of," Newmark said. "Our passion for music — I feel like that's sort of our identity."

N.C. State University's station, WKNC 88.1 FM, on the other hand, features the "All Rock Afternoon" between noon and 6 p.m. every weekday.

Other genres of music, including different kinds of specialty shows, including segments devoted to hip hop and heavy metal, are programmed at other times.

Steve "DJ Stevo" Salevan, local music director at WKNC, admits that the station plays music that, while not all mainstream, is probably more mainstream than WXYC and WXDU's programming.

"(Those stations) aren't as interested in the listenability aspect," he said. "They're more interested in exploring tangents and different genres of music."

"Which is perfectly OK."

WKNC tries to avoid very obscure tracks while also playing music that doesn't get airplay anywhere else, Salevan said.

"It's kind of a way to seduce people into music that they haven't heard before by presenting it in a listenable context."

At WXYC, Brenner said the station tries to play a diverse selection of music for everyone, "rather than playing one genre of music that's more interesting for the average college listener."

According to the station's mission statement, as written by then-station manager Jason Perlmutter in a 2002 WXYC newsletter, the station focuses on drawing connections between different kinds of music.

He wrote, "You might be humming along to the chorus of your favorite

Jay-Z monster, only to hear it followed by the very Bobby 'Blue' Bland mega-hit from the '70s from which the sample was lifted," offering an example of the type of connection a WXYC DJ should attempt to create.

Getting listeners to experience new music is a passion for Salevan at WKNC.

"There is just so much horrible stuff that gets played on commercial radio," Salevan said. "People our age are getting sick of music."

He said that by promoting alternatives to the Top 40, with local and alternative styles of music in general, college radio is part of an important musical revolution.

"It's serving as a catalyst movement in the soldiering force fighting against the crappy forces of commercial radio and commercial music interests."

Salevan makes sure WKNC's rotation includes quality music from the Triangle's music selection, which he considers to be "the best damn music scene in the entire world right now."

In addition to inserting local music into its normal rotation and a couple of local specialty shows, the station hosts events promoting local bands and even records local artists themselves.

"We really want to expose people and say, 'Hey, there are these bands that are gonna freaking rip your heart out and rock you out, and it's happening a couple miles away right now,'" Salevan said.

WXYC staff echo this focus.

"We think that college radio has a major role to be a force for local artists," Brenner said.

One way of doing this is WXYC's Backyard BBQ, which airs 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sundays and features live interviews and music from local artists.

"We definitely strive to highlight the healthy music scene around us," Goins said.

Salevan added, "I really think the media around here should all be working together to promote this."

Helping, he said, can do wonders.

"We can get people into music around here and get people going to shows, and, in doing so, really help our local music scene."

Contact the Diversions Editor at dive@unc.edu.

TRACKING THE TRENDS AT THE TOP OF THE CHARTS

WXYC

1. V/A - *Disco Not Disco: Post Punk, Electro, & Leftfield Disco Classics 1974-1986* (STRUT)
2. Jackie-O Motherf---er - *Vally of Fire* (HEXITEE)
3. Henry Flynt - *Nova Billy* (OCUST MUSIC)
4. Dinosaur 1 - *24 - 24 Music* (TRAFFIC/SLEEPING BAG)
5. Ghostface Killah - *The Big Doe Rehab* (DEF JAM)
6. Franklin Thompson - *Planet Jumper 12"* (STONE'S THROW)
7. Baz Luhrmann - *Baz Luhrmann 12"* (ERIQUE TIC)
8. Ableuchatslav - *Even In The Midst* (CUBIFORM)
9. Red Krayola with Art & Language - *Sighs, Drapped By Lions* (DRAG CITY)
10. Andy Moor - *Marker* (UNOUNDS)

WKNC

1. Vampire Weekend - *Vampire Weekend* (XL)
2. Hot Chip - *Made In The Dark* (DFA/ASTRALWERKS)
3. Radiohead - *In Rainbows* (ATO)
4. Tim Finn - *11 Be Lightning* (EUPHONIC)
5. Whitesnake - *The Whitesnake* (FRIBODY FIRE)
6. Indes - *1 W/2 Submerged* (PARE THE VAIN)
7. Ungdomskulen - *Cry Baby* (EVER)
8. Decomposure - *Vertical Lines* (BLAKE SQUORREL)
9. Band of Horses - *Cease To Begun* (SUB POP)
10. Hammer No More - *The Fingers* EP (POWER TEAM)

WXDU

1. Clarence - *Gatemouth Brown - Boopaloose* (SUNNYSIDE)
2. Denque Fever - *Venus on Earth* (M30)
3. The Breakups - *Let Your Heart Out* EP (BATH SHOP POP)
4. Polynya - *Polynya* (CHILDHOOD PET RECORDS)
5. Barbara Dane and the Chambers Brothers - *Barbara Dane and the Chambers Brothers* (SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS)
6. Yeasayer - *All Hour Cymbals* (WE ARE FIRE)
7. Whitesnake - *The Whitesnake* (FRIBODY FIRE)
8. New Young Pony Club - *Fantastic Playroom* (MODULAR)
9. King of Prussia - *Save the Scene* (KINDERCOR)
10. The Button Pushers - *Music for 8-Bit Video Games* (SELF-RELEASED)

CMJ (National college radio charts)

1. Radiohead - *In Rainbows* (ATO)
2. Daft Punk - *Alive 2007* (VIRGIN)
3. Yeasayer - *All Hour Cymbals* (WE ARE FIRE)
4. V/A - *I'm Not There* OST (COLUMBIA SONY)
5. Ween - *La Cucaracha* (ROUNDER)
6. Bonnie "Prince" Billy - *Ask Forgiveness* (DRAG CITY)
7. The Doves - *Black and White* Album (INTERCOPT)
8. Band of Horses - *Cease To Begun* (SUB POP)
9. Squid Ros - *Heart Heim* (XL)
10. Grizzly Bear - *Friend* EP (WARP)

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THE WHIGS The Athens, Ga., band (right) played Local 506 last week. Photos on the blog.

CONCERT REVIEWS Vicarious experiences of last week's shows with photos, too.

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music

INVASION

Durham's M1 Platoon makes a bold introduction with its *M1 Invasion* mixtape. 9th Wonder's production doesn't hurt.

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Broadway star Idina Menzel releases a solo album, but the "Wicked" star can't stand on her own as a pop singer.

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I SPY A LAME FLICK

"The Eye" offers its audiences nothing more than cheap thrills and a chance to look at Jessica Alba for a while.

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LET'S GO BOWLING

After a rousing match of league bowling, Erie Choir frontman Eric Roehrig catches up with Dive for a bit.

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