

The following two articles deal with the current state of radio. One contends with U.S. non-commercial radio and its subversion by corporations; the other contains a history of pirate radio in Europe, one possible solution to state or corporate control.



## U.S.: COLLEGE RADIO CRUMBLING?

By David Claffardini

For a lot of people college radio is the salvation of the airwaves. If not for college radio, there would be few, if any, places on the radio dial where you could tune in and hope to hear any punk, hardcore, experimental music, or non-mainstream rock and roll.

But the purpose of this article is not to praise college radio, but to examine why and how the medium's eclectic and adventurous programming is disappearing as pressures are being put on the stations to adopt the policies and formats of commercial radio—the very thing that most of us tune in to college radio to avoid.

I was encouraged to write about this subject after attending the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System West Coast convention held in November in a fancy Hilton Hotel in San Jose. I returned with horror stories galore about evil record company personnel who used the convention to convince (program and brain-wash would also be accurate) college radio personnel to use their influence at their respective stations to help the record companies sell records.

Warner Brothers was there, RCA was there, Polygram was there, SST was there, Enigma was there—and the message to their captive audience of impressionable youth was the same:

*"You are not doing a good job at your college radio station unless you are helping our companies sell records. And the way to help us sell records is to limit the variety of music you play and program our records over and over again."*

This message is not too surprising, coming as it does from a group of hardline capitalist business people. The shocking thing was that the college students—several hundred from 12 western states—ate up every word without batting an eye, even going so far as to ask (the question came up over and over again):

*"What else can our station do to help your companies?"*

And naturally, the record company people were more than eager to answer these inquiries

and all the responses boiled down to one single piece of advice:

**KISS ASS!**

Let's you think I exaggerate, let me quote Steve Tipp, College Promotion man from Warner Bros. who spoke on a panel during the "Record Company Relations" session. One of the students asked Steve what it takes for a station to continue receiving free "promotional" records from a company.

Steve's reply: *"I'll service radio stations if I can tell from their communication that they want to promote our records. It's like if I were (a college radio programmer) approaching a record label, I'd say 'Look man, I have this station, we do concerts, we work with retailers, we want to play your records and we want to help you reach this audience. We WANT to help you sell records.' It's a kind of kiss assy thing, but if you want the records and you want the service, that's what you got to do—you're in that position."*

And the other record company people on the panel nodded in agreement, as did the hundred or so college students in the audience.

Such advice set the tone for the entire convention. In fact, a primary purpose of this annual convention was to provide an opportunity for record companies to get an audience with key personnel (the music directors and program directors) from college radio and use flattery, bribery, and intimidation to convince them to help record companies sell records.

The convention began on an ironical note when it was announced that the convention's keynote speaker, Frank Zappa, cancelled his appearance at the last minute citing a debilitating case of diarrhea (I'm not making this up). Well, someone should have told Frank to show up anyway because his bowel disorder would have fit right in with all the other bullshit layed out that weekend.

To top it off, it seemed like someone's idea of a sick joke when we saw all the convention materials—name tags, schedules, brochures—emblazoned with an initialized logo bearing the bold capital letters "I.B.S." But as the hours wore on, the letters spoke a true confession—an unspoken motto that hung behind every convention panelist—"I.B.S., I.B.S., I.B.S."

At the "Retail/College Radio" session panelists from record companies and record stores taught the college students to communicate with their local record retailers and broadcast songs from records the retailers want to sell.

During this session, several eager beavers in the audience pointed out that a particularly good way for college DJs to please both the record companies and record store owners is by getting a job at a record store and then using their radio airtime to promote records available in the store.

Another point brought up by SST (an "Independent" label that uses major label marketing strategies) representative Ray Farrell, was how radio stations could help themselves get more record company "attention" or better "service" (record biz euphemisms for "free records, concert tickets and chances to rub elbows with the stars of the hot new bands") by getting on the phone to local record stores, telling the store managers what records are or will be receiving heavy airplay and making sure that the stores are stocking plenty of copies of those records.

As was the case at each of the workshops we attended, no one in the audience or panels

ever questioned or challenged the blatantly commercial strategies that were being mapped out. Again and again it was stressed by both panelists and the audience that the success of a college radio station is measured by the effect the music programming has on record sales.

To give a better idea of the kind of dialog that went on, I will transcribe a few quotes that I tape recorded during the "Retail" session (they are unattributed because of a couple of uncertainties I have about which person said what):

*"I think people should be really excited about selling records, not because you're selling records for a record company, but excited because you're having an impact on your market. Sales of a record are a measure of your performance..."*

*...Another thing KFJC (the college station that hosted the convention) has done is sales research. We wanted to see how effective we were in the market so we would track records we were playing and, for example (comparison) we would track the Pat Benatar record. So you know Benatar is flying 200 copies out the door at Tower and our favorite record is only selling 50 but it's on the way there. It's an educational opportunity that you can use retail for. It doesn't have to be like you are helping the record company or you're prostituting yourself to sell records. You can look at it positively. A lot of people who work in college radio obviously work in retail stores and it almost gives you a double chance to be subversive 'cause you can play what you want and you can promote within the confines of the store, and that's important..."*

*"Probably one of the best things that happened at my college radio station was when I got a job at a retail store and abandoned scholastics forever and was working 40 hours a week and also being music director at the radio station. It gave me a feel for what records were real" or what weren't. If I had a Db's records and an Individuals' record, we would be playing both records in equal amounts on the air, but the Db's would be selling five-to-one over The Individuals. This was a real good indication to me as a music director that this Db's record has a lot of potential and we should take it another step further, possibly bring the band to town to do a show and just generally help the band as much as possible but also try to get the most out of that band for our station..."*

*"Some of you might consider (record sales) charts and stuff kind of bullshit, but a lot of things are, I guess...and it's just sort of the rules of the way things are set up; and if you want to be effective in that medium, you have to accept that they exist and work with them..."*

And so with comments like these being repeated and elaborated on, and an audience of college radio program and music directors nodding their heads in mindless agreement, the reality became quite clear: the record industry bigshots have their steely claws around the neck of college radio. With sly smiles on their





faces and briefcases filled with promotional records and concert tickets, these business people are charming their way into the studios of college radio and, with unbelievable candor, are choking the non-commercial life out of it.

Of course they couldn't accomplish their dirty deeds without the assistance of eager-to-please college radio programmers (especially eager when it might lead to a music industry job), who are becoming record company zombies gobbling up salesmanship hype and spewing it over the airwaves with a collegiate zeal that rivals the efforts of commercial Top 40 stations.

Some readers might be saying to themselves: "So what's the big deal about using college radio to sell records? Magazines hype records, don't they? And musicians need to sell records, don't they?"

Well, unlike magazines, the radio airwaves are a limited resource. Anyone can start writing things on paper and begin handing it out, but only organizations with government permits can broadcast legally.

Because radio is a very powerful, influential limited resource it was decided at one time to create two different kinds of radio broadcasting: commercial and non-commercial. The purpose of creating non-commercial radio stations, of which nearly all college stations are designated, was to make sure that there would always be some broadcast bands unaffected by the commercial concerns of business, airwaves where programming could not be bought by the highest bidder.

By providing non-commercial radio there was hope that it would allow a greater diversity of programming and ideologies expressed over the airwaves and would not be limited to programming that suited the very narrow concerns of business people who, at the bottom line, are only concerned with how well a radio program succeeds at getting people to purchase products and services. In the very least, non-commercial radio would tolerate programming that might challenge the unbridled capitalism and consumer mentality that programs that certainly are not tolerated on commercial radio.

For music fans, non-commercial radio offers a place where a variety of unusual music can be played—music that is not financed by large profit-making companies.

When non-commercial radio becomes a place that companies use to sell records, the people with the most money will always win out. Your average punk band with a record out on their own label will never be able to compete with the large companies who can afford to be on the phone to college station personnel, offering them dozens of free records and concert tickets and subtle hints about possible jobs awaiting them after graduation.

College radio programmers who let themselves be influenced by record company promotional people are being duped. Record companies realize what a profitable bonanza college radio can be. Whereas with commercial radio, companies must spend huge sums of money to get their records played, with college radio it only takes a few free records and concert tickets to grease the wheels. Nowhere else can they get cheaper advertising and a crew of enthusiastic youngsters to keep the wheels turning.

Of course not all college radio personnel have bought into the salesmanship and bigger-is-better propaganda. But all it takes is for a few key people at a station to work closely with the record companies to affect all the programming.

Time and again at the IBS convention, students would ask the promo people how they could make sure that all the DJs at their station could be made to stick to playing certain records. The solutions offered were simple: set up policies that restrict what people can play on

the air. There were a number of methods suggested including having a mandated rotation of a selected number of specified records. Another "less structured, but quite effective method" is to take all the records that the music director wishes to "push" and put them in a stack and mandate that every DJ play a certain number of records from that stack during his or her show.

Audience response indicated that many stations were already using these methods but that "some DJ's still play whatever records they choose." To this, the panelists suggested sitting down for a long talk with the errant DJ, explaining the goals of the station and why it's not in the best interest to have such iconoclastic DJ's on the airstaff. The other solution was to not let any DJ's have access to records or tapes that the music director does not want aired. (In fact, several people I know that produce a variety of high quality records—but don't spend lots of money on college radio promotion—have sent airplay copies of their records to college stations, only to have them returned with notes from music directors asking that their company refrain from sending AN records to the station in the future).

Conventions or no conventions, the corruption of non-commercial college radio has already arrived and unless you have been following the subject for many years, you might not realize to what great extent big business plays in deciding what records are broadcast. (Simply glancing through magazines like MRR and Sound Choice indicates that there are literally thousands of records and tapes created every year—mostly from individuals or small companies with little or no financial clout—that are effectively barred from radio airplay, commercial or non-commercial.

## Protest The Corruption of Non-Commercial Radio

### DON'T BROADCAST MAJOR LABEL RECORDINGS



SOUND CHOICE magazine will give free advertising credit to any DJ who refuses to broadcast/promote major label recordings.

For more info send S.A.S.E. to SOUND CHOICE, P.O.B. 1251, Ojai, CA 93023, U.S.A.

(Flyer distributed at I.B.S. Convention)

College radio playlists indicate that during any month the same 10 or 20 records will be receiving heavy airplay at the majority of college radio stations in every part of the United States, from Alaska to Florida, small towns to large cities.

Is this coincidence? No way! It is the result of an elaborate, ingenious marketing structure, orchestrated and financed by the large record companies. Here is how it works: Major labels and many of the larger independent companies have promotional people send out large numbers of "promo" records to college radio music directors. Frequently, especially for stations in the larger markets, the promo people include multiple copies of records. The music directors have the option to either sell them and pocket the cash, trade them at used record stores for other records for the station, or, in a move that makes them very popular, give them away to radio station personnel. Often, enough extra records are sent so that DJ's can give them away over the air, essentially providing short commercials for the records (Recording artists, by the way, don't receive any record

royalties on promotional copies of their records).

The delivery of free records is then followed by a phone call to the music director, inquiring about station opinions about the company's records and whether or not the latest releases will make it on to heavy airplay, etc.

Uncooperative radio personnel (though there seem to be fewer and fewer) are often threatened with being cut off from record company "service" with words to the effect of "Why should we send you our records if your station isn't doing anything to help us?" In general, the promo people treat the students as if they were "privileged" to be receiving the company's "hot new releases": "Well, we don't usually service small stations like yours, but, you seem pretty eager and interested so..."

Another way of extracting favoritism from college radio is by offering students the "privilege" of meeting and interviewing the company's latest crop of cool rock and rollers. Or they are offered the opportunity to set up and sponsor a concert for the band—a show at which all the cooperative people at the station will be admitted free.

Most of the students are so star struck that they don't even realize that they are doing the companies a favor, not the other way around. But just to reinforce the master/slave relationship, when the opportunity arises, the promo people point out that if their station isn't interested in cooperating, they can always let the rival college club, etc., across town put on the concert, swig beers backstage, etc.

Another important, very effective method of manipulation is demanding that in order to receive promotional records, stations must subscribe and "report" to at least one of several college radio journals such as CMJ (College Media Journal), Rockpool, or the Gavin Report. These journals charge huge sums of money for subscriptions and are filled with page after page of record company advertisements (from companies that can afford the extremely expensive ad rates). Stations that subscribe and report to more than one of these journals often receive better record company "service".

These journals contain playlists from the cooperative "reporting" radio stations and articles about the "hot new college radio picks". The editorial attitude throughout these journals is that radio personnel should compare what they're playing with the playlists in these journals. If a station's record programming is significantly different, it is implied (saubly, very subtly) that the station is somehow unhip or not tuned in with "what is really HAPPENING in college radio". The implication is that if a station is completely out of step, then record companies will discontinue sending them any records at all.

Part of the reason this record company system is as successful as it is because of the high turnover of personnel at college radio. Students, fresh out of high school suddenly find themselves in charge of radio stations and so in their insecurity and interest in doing everything "right" they grab on to all the structures of "how things are done" that were in place the year before they arrived. There is an assumption that "this is the way college radio works and has always worked. These are the people you get your records from and will always get your records from." About the time they start learning otherwise, they are no longer in college.

In reality, there are very few "rules" about how college radio should be run. It is an incredible dynamic medium but, probably because there are so few good models from which college programmers might derive inspiration, the airwaves are actually very stagnant.

And there is a very real danger that as college stations become more commercial and more concerned about market impact on record sales and increasing listenerships to rival commercial stations, that the stations will be taken away from student control.

Already there are several college stations where the administration has hired professional music directors to decide what kind of music is appropriate for the station. The next step is



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turning the station into a commercial station and hiring a completely professional, non-student staff.

In fact, this has already happened at at least one university. According to graduate student Hudson Luce, the University of Florida in Gainesville exchanged their non-commercial radio license for a commercial broadcasting license and has turned their student-run station into a Top 40 rock and roll station. The station is now run by professionals (the students were kicked out, and Muzak is piped into the executive offices) and reportedly earns five million dollars a year for the university.

According to Luce, recent efforts to restart a student-run station have been met by resistance from administrators who apparently see such a project as a threat to the listenership of their commercial radio bonanza. Luce said that one student began circulating a petition to start a student station and was offered tuition money and other incentives if he would drop his efforts, which it seems he has.

The purpose of writing all the above is to help people be aware of what is going on. It has taken me several years, including a three year stint as a college DJ, to understand that college radio is not the freeform, non-commercial medium some people think it is.

When I was a college DJ, I did not understand the forces that were manipulating me to play certain records. Having known only commercial radio, simply broadcasting non-hit tracks from million-selling albums seemed like a real alternative, freeform programming to my naive ears. Then there were 10 or 20 independent label records that were added to the station record library each week, which I thought provided REALLY radical sounds to shake up the airwaves and listeners' minds.

It was only after graduating in 1981 when I began reading the alternative "underground" music publications like the now-defunct *Op* magazine and later *MRR* and other non-mainstream music publications (few of which were published during my college days) that I realized I had been duped. There were hundreds of recordings being released every week, copies of which never even made it into my town, let alone the radio station. And because I was not part of, or chums with, the station's programming staff who are always in communication with record company promo people, I did not understand the manipulation that lead to certain records being deemed especially "cool" or "hip" by the top end of the station's hierarchy—a hierarchy that has the power to throw any non-conforming DJ's off the air.

I learned that to find the true alternatives, you can't sit back and wait for them to be dropped in your lap. You have to search them out. Contrary to what the mass media leads us to believe, the best things in life rarely have some promotion person behind them to shove them down our throats.

(Big hype record companies count on radio people to not realize this, always insinuating that if stations don't cooperate they won't be sent any more records and their music programming will go to pieces. Actually, the exact opposite is closer to the truth. There are thousands of independent recording artists eager to send their recordings to any station that might play them.)

The potential of college radio to be a broad-ranging, world-healing channel of communication has been stymied by the selfish interests of record companies who continue to encourage college radio to offer nothing but thought-numbing musical entertainment that encourages people to buy records.

Once there is a greater awareness of the pressures that manipulate and corrupt the non-commercial integrity of college radio, people can move ahead and change things and create college stations that offer true alternative, non-commercial programming.

And for those people who feel they have

exhausted all the legal channels in their effort to create positive, non-commercial radio broadcasting in their area, there is always the option of taking the risk of creating a pirate radio station. The Spring 1986 issue of my publication, *Sound Choice*, will include a lengthy, detailed guide to ways in which pirate radio stations can be set up. Copies are \$2.50 ppd (\$4 non-US) and will be available in mid-February by writing Sound Choice/ P.O. Box 1251/Ojai CA 93023

# RESISTEZ...

A VOTRE ENVIE D'ECOUTER



# EUROPE: AHOY MATEFY!

By Ada Freulensch

Welcome to western Europe. Most countries here pride themselves on their democratic traditions. If this tradition happens to be a short one, what happened before is rather forgotten. To this tradition belongs the freedom of speech. The Europeans have always taken a different approach to theirs than that other democratic country, America. In the case of radio, the state retained a monopoly on broadcasting in most European countries. It wasn't until the early seventies that the state's monopoly began to crumble in England, France, Italy, and Germany, and it was during this time that the idea of free radios came into being. Beginning in part as a general protest against the states' monopolies, groups of all kinds began illegally setting up their own transmitters and broadcasting. The motivations behind these groups were as different as their backgrounds — businessmen rehearsing for the legalization of private radio, revolutionists rehearsing for the revolution, or just various groups on the fringe using the radio for the first time to voice their own views. These acts of radio piracy in themselves were nothing new; illegal radios in Europe have a tradition going back to the beginnings of radio itself. The Germans had a history of Worker Radio Collectives in the twenties leading up through the radios used by the German resistance groups in the late thirties. But the free radios of the seventies, although also operated illegally, must be distinguished from the other pirate stations of the time. Free radio means radio free of any of the usual controls of broadcasting, and resembles something like the society of an anarchist dream — no state, no parties, and no commerce.

The possibilities of creating free radios arose during the seventies out of the near vacuum on the European airwaves. Listeners in most European countries were supposed to be content with two or three national radio stations. Although it must be said that in most countries that states' monopolies on radio concerned only the rights to broadcasting and not the contents of the programs (which were aimed at serving the "entire" public), the monopoly nevertheless

rejected any other alternatives. The very fact of an "official" version of radio had always been enough to provoke young listeners taking the matter into their own hands. In the mid to late seventies this began occurring, especially in France and Italy at first.

Up to this time, most people's conception of pirate radio came from England during the sixties when illegal radio stations began broadcasting from international waters off the coast. Radio Caroline and Radio Veronica were the forerunners of the movement which quickly turned into a huge commercial enterprise. Although these stations offered no real alternative to the traditional way of making radio, they had a much better idea of the dynamics and the potential of the current music scene. By also introducing the Top 40, 45 music format, they were able to lure more and more listeners away from the BBC stations, forcing the BBC into the realization that it was hopelessly out of touch with the musical tastes and attitudes of the English youth of the time. This, in part, led the government to pass new laws making it increasingly difficult for offshore stations to broadcast, until one by one nearly all of them shut down. The BBC then took into their service the most famous of the pirate disc jockeys and offered them jobs at the newly created BBC station, "Radio One," which was based on the style that the pirates themselves had introduced. (Although the offshore stations have made several comebacks, the British government has always been successful in shutting them down again. Most recently the American-backed pirate station, "Laser 559," one of Britain's most popular Top 40 stations, was forced to close down after a month-long blockade of supplies to their ship.) The fate of the English pirate radio stations in the sixties provided a good example to the free radio movement of the seventies in other countries. Not only did it show the difficulties involved in taking on the state monopoly, but it also revealed some of the drawbacks of one of the state's alternatives — purely commercial radio. Any American's insight of the benefits of commercial radio need only flip on the switch, preferably to AM, and listen to the newest string of advertising jingles or the ratings which pass for radio announcing, not to mention the never-ending promises of "more music coming right up, just stay right here on..."

## FREE RADIOS

The results of the radio are shameful. Its possibilities are unlimited. For this radio as a good thing.

The radio could conceivably be the greatest method of communication in public life... that is, it would be, if it were able not only to transmit but also to receive, which means not only allowing the listener to hear, but also to speak, and not isolating him but bringing him into a relationship. Accordingly, the radio must get out of the business of delivery and organize the listener as deliverer.

Bertold Brecht, "Theory of Radio," 1932

The advocates of free radios have always been intrigued with the unused potential of the radio. As a medium the radio is unlike any other in its ability to reach large numbers of people over relatively long distances. It needs no elaborate distributions system, as with magazines or newspapers, and functions on a "low" technological level. Using only sound and speech to communicate, the radio ultimately places more demands on its public than television. By leaving room to the imagination, it has the potential to activate people — in contrast to the all-too-well-known pacifying influence of TV. Unfortunately, the radio's ability to transmit information has traditionally been used merely as a means of distribution, the flow of information going only one way, from the radio to its listeners. Realizing the potential of the radio requires reversing the flow of information. The monologue becomes a dialogue, and the radio as distribution system becomes radio as a communication system.

For the free radio movement, local radio is

10/10/10