

FM 88: Tiffany free radio on a budget

Some positive things have been happening to CJSR lately. They won the referendum for a fixed amount of funding from the Students' Union, a new, much needed on-air board has arrived, and they just celebrated five years of FM radio broadcast in March.

But just what is CJSR, and what does it have to offer students and the community at large. Technically speaking, CJSR's role is to provide an alternative to what other radio stations play. That's

and don't not play music because someone else is playing it."

Not only does the station ply the airwaves with eclectic musical programming, specialized programs are produced as well, each one appealing to certain audience segments. Taylor cited the heavy metal program as an example. "We've got the only heavy metal show in the province," he said. "You're not going to hear this stuff anywhere else, it is the best around." On the other side of the musical spectrum, Taylor spoke

Speaking of a desire to experiment, Istvanffy says he has seen a rise in alternative music due to a greater willingness on the part of major record labels to accept and distribute the smaller independent labels who record alternative acts. Not so long ago the major record companies were often reviled for embracing a narrow, stifling attitude toward anything new that didn't fall within industry norms.

As Istvanffy puts it, "six years ago it was easy to say 'yeah, big labels are evil; they only want one kind of music, and a very narrow scope of music.' That is no longer the case at all. As smaller labels started up to fill in the gaps, big labels recognized peoples' tastes were eclectic and there was money to be made with all the smaller labels and different kinds of music." Now, Istvanffy says, the majority of the music CJSR receives comes from or is distributed by the major labels.

However, not all is rosy on the record distribution scene. A conflict exists between Polygram records, a major distributor, and many university radio stations. Polygram demands hundreds of dollars to distribute their product to radio stations, and while commercial radio can and does pay the price, a small campus station with a limited budget cannot afford the financial burden. From CJSR's point of view, paying for record distribution that helps a corporation sell records is a philosophical burden as well. "We're the only radio station that will play 75 percent of their catalogue that doesn't get played on commercial radio," said Istvanffy.

Campus radio can reach a large audience for Polygram's music, "and for that reason, it cannot be justified to pay," Istvanffy explained. "I think Polygram is plainly wrong. They don't draw a distinction between commercial and alternative radio...they're quite blunt about it." While such a hard line hurts programming a bit, CJSR still receives other major labels and smaller independents, and DJ's are encouraged to bring in their own albums (Polygram included) so that "there is never a shortage of music."

CJSR is not just music. They do provide news and sports coverage and their licence requires a certain amount of well represented community access and in depth public affairs programming. The highly popular ethnic programs include Polish, Spanish, and Chinese language broadcasts, as well as African and Caribbean music shows.

The various types of programming provided by the station are many and diverse, each with its own time slot, making a programming guide essential for CJSR listeners. *Airtight* magazine has been the station's program directory for several years. Initially, the magazine was separately funded by the Students' Union, but two years ago, when the

relationship between the Students' Union and CJSR was less than brotherly, the SU "decided it was not worthwhile to fund the magazine." The station has published *Airtight* in various forms since then, most recently in association with the *Edmonton Bulletin*. Recent problems with the *Bullet* led to a contract breakdown in January, leaving *Airtight* in limbo for the present.

"Having that print medium as part of your station is very important," said Taylor. But financial resources to produce such a magazine are lacking, and although they are working hard at getting *Airtight* back in circulation, Taylor says CJSR sometimes feels

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like they are "up against a brick wall" about the guide. The guide will not die if Ian Istvanffy can help it. He promises something will be published and distributed soon, before summer at the latest.

On the overall subject of station finances, both Taylor and Istvanffy are happy that SU funding has been stabilized with a yes vote on the referendum question. Half of CJSR's operating budget comes from the SU out of the fees that students pay to their Union. The other half comes from the community in the form of ad revenue, bingo and casino fundraisers, and concerts. The total budget from all sources amounts to approximately \$120,000 to \$130,000. While that figure may seem large, it is in fact small when applied to all the necessities of a radio station.

CJSR suffers from a very tight budget that prohibits maintenance

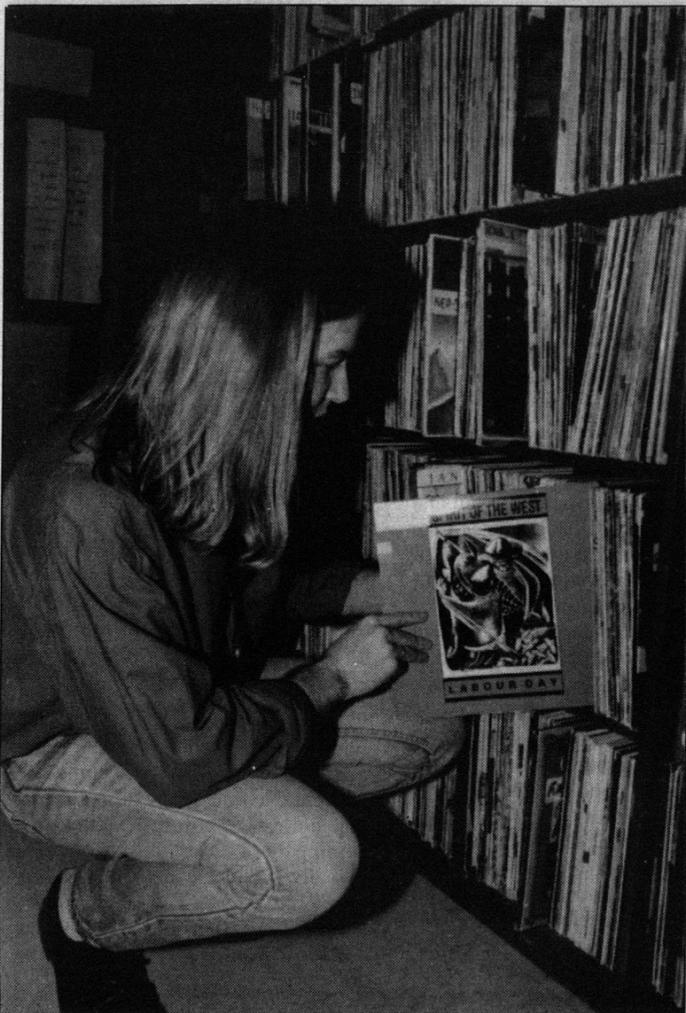
and upgrading expenditures. There is not enough money for tape Istvanffy explains, nor is there enough to get all the news sources they should have. Equipment upgrading is piecemeal as there is no capital expenditures budget. Any equipment that needs to be bought must come out of fundraising efforts. Thus, things like a CD player and a sorely needed on-air board, both only recently acquired, take a long period of time to fund. Even record replacement is out of reach. "We have no record budget," says Taylor. "If a record walks out the door (which does happen) there is no money to replace it."

While SU funding is appreciated, Taylor notes it is less than outstanding. "They're worried about where their money is going, and they have every right to be," he said, but of the top campus radio stations, of which CJSR is considered among the top five, "we are probably one of the lowest funded," said Taylor. "We get \$2.50 per student - Calgary gets \$5.00 per student."

Both the station manager and program director see community funding as the other financial contributor that is not being fully accessed. Taylor cites corporations as one possibility to improve community contributions. "We'd like to improve corporate sponsorships," he said. "We are a non-profit organization; if you donate money to us, you get a tax receipt, so if you're a company looking for a tax shelter, dump some money on us." In Istvanffy's view, community radio is "very much becoming the third element in broadcasting in this country...this is where we're going to grow, in the community itself."

CJSR then, is a station with something to offer everyone. It is radio for those who are tired of commercial radio that does not explore or expand. It is radio for the adventurous.

Turn them on, and they'll turn you on.



Program director Ian Istvanffy picks some groovy tunes from CJSR's large record library.

according to their licence as granted by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

On the music side of things, the station emphasizes eclectic alternative tunes, but that label is often associated with nothing but punk or new wave music, a false assumption in CJSR's case.

"We try to play the absolute best music we can find to play," says CJSR program director Ian Istvanffy. Station manager Chris Taylor adds to that sentiment by noting there is "something here for everyone. Even if you are a CHED or K-97 listener, we've got something for you. It's just a matter of knowing where to find it."

Providing an alternative does not mean CJSR only plays what other stations are not playing, indeed there is often a certain amount of overlap between the kinds of music played by CJSR and commercial radio, but the emphasis for CJSR is not necessarily in labels, but in quality. As Istvanffy explains, "I very much like to stress to the DJ's, don't play music just because it's politically correct, don't play music because the band has a cool name,

of the highly regarded blues program hosted by Doug Langille, who Taylor feels is "probably the best blues radio person in the country."

Canadian content plays a big role in the station's music programming too. Istvanffy explained that CRTC regulations stipulate a 30 percent can-con guideline must be followed. "We strongly agree with can-con regulations," he said, adding, "we don't program all our can-con outside of prime time listening hours like commercial radio does." As for keeping new music circulating,

Istvanffy stressed station policy stipulates all DJ's in eclectic slots must play four pieces of music from the station's new acts section every hour, new acts being anything released in the last eight to ten weeks. "They're (DJ's) not just playing old favorites," he said. "It keeps DJ's fresh; they always have to be experimenting.

Story and photos
by Kevin Law



CJSR station manager Chris Taylor spins some discs for the mighty 88.5 FM.