

CHSR is not all it's crapped up to be

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"CHSR plays nothing but shit!"

I've heard that comment at least once a month for the past five years. I've always been a little curious about what people meant by it. Back in 1991, everyone who said it maintained that they were into classic rock, the stuff you could hear on CFNB and CIHI. At that time, CHSR was playing Nine Inch Nails, Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, and Sarah McLachlan. Five years later, the folks who muttered those infamous words are listening to CIHI and Capital FM play the stuff CHSR played in '91 but still claim that what we're playing now is shit.

That's okay. It's what we're all about. We break new ground and introduce new music to the scene. If we had obeyed the demands of the classic rock enthusiasts five years ago, if all the other Campus/Community (C/C) and alternative radio stations throughout Canada and the U.S. had obeyed that demand, we would still be stuck there, listening to hits of the 50s, 60s and 70s. Okay, a bunch of people enjoy that music at least part of the time. But would you like our music industry to freeze there? Of course not.

If we stopped today, if we only played what was familiar and comfortable, the same calamity would occur. Believe us when we say there are really cool groups making downright awesome stuff right now - stuff that you are going to be into in a big way...eventually. By listening to C/C radio today you'll get a sampling of that art.

It's a strange thing music does to the human soul. It can mellow us out, pump us up, feed our imagination or help us zone out. It's part of our ritual and part of our rebellion. We want it to move us in new ways and we want it to always stay the same. We take it seriously. For some of us, the changing times and the emergence of new sound on our favourite stations is almost painful. It is certainly distasteful. It always sounds like garbage. That's why your parents or your grandparents can't understand how you can listen to "that noise."

CHSR is committed to staying on the cutting edge of sound. We have to take our lumps for it, and some segments of our campus community will always believe that CHSR plays shit.

"I like the new stuff and I want to hear it, but what I hear on CHSR really is crap."

So, you've tuned in with an open mind, wanted to hear something new, anything but grunge (or maybe rap...or maybe metal...or whatever). When you tuned in you heard - wouldn't ya' know it! - grunge. Basically it was shit. Your mind is made up: you hate CHSR.

Slow down a moment. When did you tune in? Whose show did you listen to? What was their format? Enjoying C/C radio is not like listening to radio as much as it's like watching T.V. New listeners frequently have a problem with this. They are used to turning on the radio, and hearing music which sounds like the music they know they'll hear for the rest of the day

on commercial radio stations. They advertise this fact all the time: "Light rock," "Easy Listening," "Classic hits." They tell you that you can count on hearing their "sound" whenever you tune in "all through your day."

CHSR can never do that, and CHSR will never tell you that. We can't because we change from soft to hard, from rock to Indian movie soundtracks and on to rap all in the run of an evening. The format is called "block programming" and it's what allows us to have so many students and community members participating in this organization. If we limited ourselves to one sound, we would have to turn almost all volunteers away, and we would lose out on some incredible and intense music and spoken word.

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Before you shrug and ask who cares, there's more to consider. All of the commercial stations have to pay their DJs to play music chosen for them by management to ensure that no one plays anything outside their format. That's expensive! It doesn't even work for them anymore. So they've gone automated.

It's a weird fact that, in the evening hours, the only live radio in Fredericton - the only station where you can hear a real live human being - is CHSR. If we were automated, or if we limited broadcast personnel to the folks who would broadcast one sound, we would not be serving the student's interests. That is, we would not be allowing students the opportunity to broadcast over FM radio.

One thing CHSR does is give everybody a little bit of what they love and an opportunity to sample what they didn't know existed. Instead of blasting rock twenty-four hours a day and satisfying one segment of our community, we play rock during some shows, reggae on others, country on others, classical on others, jazz, folk, native, Hindi, riot grrl... No one group gets a monopoly because everybody gets a chance (it's a lot like how the senate is supposed to work...if it wasn't for those dang politicians.)

The problem for many people is that they tune in only once, and unless they have considerable luck and a good memory for the next week, they are going to hear something completely different from what they want. Since our programs are so different from each other, you can't possibly make a judgement on the entire station based on one, or even a few times you tuned in at random. And we always have someone new coming in. Some programmers are just hitting their stride, and others are getting tired or too busy and have to leave.

Block programming makes our audience work a little harder than the cyclical (continuously

regenerating the same) formats of the commercial stations. You have to pick and choose what shows you listen to with us - pretty much what you're used to doing with your television viewing. Nobody watches one channel all night.

Nobody decides that MITV sucks because they tuned in to a show that doesn't suit their tastes. They may decide the show sucks, but that rarely causes them to swear off the station forever. That would be silly.

What T.V. has - that we need to provide for you - is a Program Guide. Without a T.V. guide you would spend your day sitting dependently in front of the boob tube, flicking back and forth between documentaries and movies-of-the-week and thinking to yourself that most of these channels only broadcast shit.

All this pretty much brings us around to what *Soundcheck* is all about. This article alone isn't going to change anyone's mind about CHSR - listening to the programs that interest you will. Use the guide (pages 7-10). Pin it to a wall, or hoist it on your refrigerator (maybe hang it from the ceiling with some old CDs in a kind of mobile arrangement). Consult it before you whip that dial into overdrive and we're betting you will be impressed with what people just like you can do.

"But I tuned in. I liked the music, but the DJ kept screwing up. The show sounded terrible!"

It happens. Sometimes our flesh and blood programmers goof up. It does happen - even to the best of us. Most of the programming on CHSR is quality stuff. We train very hard to be the best unpaid professionals we can be. Before you pass too harsh a judgement, consider the fact that, on average, forty new programs are started every year. There are always brand new programmers going on the air for the first time. They may get a case of the nerves. They may make some glaring mistakes. One or two have even knocked us right off the air (oops!). They will learn. Their edges will smooth out, and

some day they'll surprise you with a show that rocks your world.

In the meantime, or if you've tuned in to a

program that just consistently sucks, there is a solution. Listener evaluations are always welcome at CHSR. Rather than letting standard shows ruin our sound, we set up a system that lets anybody - member or not, student,



Tristis Bhaird dispels common misconceptions about CHSR.

PAT FITZPATRICK PHOTO

community listener, other programmers - whoever listens and cares that CHSR broadcast the highest standards, voice their opinion. Hopefully, all this critiquing will help weak programmers see where they have gone wrong. They can retrain or concentrate harder. Maybe they'll even have to go.

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Evaluation forms are available by request at the station's offices on the top floor of the office wing of the Student Union Building. If you don't have time to come in and get a form, you can still let us know how you feel by calling the station at 453-4985 and asking for (or

leaving a message for) the Program Director. Tell us what bothered you about the show. Was it technical or something the programmer said? Did they play really awful music? Did they cut off the music part way through? Did they drone on and on with no seeming purpose? Were they offensive? Did they bring in friends and just goof around with inside jokes and innuendo? These are some of the things we listen for ourselves. They form part of the evaluations we have every year. We're not doing it to hunt down the weak and the sick, though; we use the information we get to make all our shows better.

To encourage the goal of top-line broadcasting, we also offer awards once a year. They're called the Barry Awards (named after our one of our founders, Barry Yule). If you hear programming that makes your heart flutter, you are invited to let us know. We may take closer notice of a show that we've been ignoring lately and they could get the honour they deserve.

Finally, not just as a last resort, there is always the option of getting involved. CHSR is as good as its volunteer members. If you want programming that's up to your personal standards, get personally involved. We welcome all comers.

You've listened to the rest and you've heard the best, now it's time to try CHSR