

Commercial hedging and the decline of radio

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

There was a day, not too long ago, when radio was a powerful medium.

Through the radio we heard the news and listened to hockey games. We heard comedy shows and radio plays. Through the radio, the world made Elvis Presley a star.

But radio has gone downhill over the years. First, it took a blow from television, but it made it through that one OK. Now, radio is taking a blow from itself.

"[Radio] used to be more of an active listening experience, and people were moved by it, people talked about it in social gatherings. Radio announcers and personalities were an important part of the community. Now it's become more of a background 'muzak' kind of thing — it really has changed," says Doug Barron, a DJ at CKDU, Dalhousie's FM radio station.

Barron is one of four DJs now working at CKDU who used to work in commercial radio. He came to CKDU looking to do something different from what commercial radio allows.

"I guess I've always been a fan of alternative radio — radio with some variety and different styles of programming," says Barron. "I was influenced a lot by campus radio when I was younger. It's basically what got me into it in the first place."

"Radio should fully involve the community," states Barron. "Radio should serve the community not only in representing it information wise, but also in reflecting the arts and culture of the community — music and artists that are indigenous to the listening area. That should be their focus. And offering people a voice and a chance to become involved in the programming."

Barron hosts the Sunday evening show *Everything and More* on CKDU.

"It gives me a chance to take in all my old vinyl records and as well explore brand new stuff."

Barron is happy with the work he is doing at CKDU and is dubious about getting back into commercial radio.

It would be fun to start a new station and maybe do something different, but the way radio stands right now, it would be pretty hard to see anywhere where I could fit in and be happy," he says.

Barron was also sceptical about the recent cooperative formed by five of Halifax's major radio stations. Two weeks ago, SUN FM, Q104 and KIXX Country joined forces with C100 and CJCH. The

five stations broadcast out of the same building on Agricola street.

"I feel pretty strongly that it is going to drastically water down the quality of radio that has already been deteriorating locally over the past ten years. It's really a bad, bad thing," says Barron. "It's going to make the radio stations sound even more alike and become even more of a commercial and a corporate entity, with less spontaneity, less local coverage, less local music, fewer people on the radio, and more canned programming."

Nick Barrington, another DJ who

came to CKDU from commercial radio, has a similar view. Barrington described commercial radio as being "desperate for listeners", and eager to merge with the competition "rather than do something imaginative."

"[I came out of] the desire to do the sort of radio I had in mind when I started in the first place — talking about what I want to talk about, not being a mouthpiece for someone else," says Barrington. "There was a creative aspect to commercial radio at one time when I was involved in it."

"[But] it's been musical wallpaper for years now. That's how they define their role."

Barrington, although pessimistic, still believes in radio's potential as a meaningful media outlet.

"I still think it can be the best medium there is if it is used right," Barrington maintains. "The way the commercial stations have been adopting it to sell rather than serve...they're signing their own death warrant. I'm surprised the [Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Council] doesn't pay more attention to it."

Wormwoods Cinema and the truth

BY PHIL E. LEWIS

Despite the fact that Wormwoods Dog and Monkey Cinema closed its doors to the public last week, co-owner Meredith Hutchings is confident that the theatre will re-open soon.

Although rumours about the end of the independent film outlet remain plentiful, the owners insist the closure is only temporary.

Hutchings and an undisclosed silent partner have decided to leave the independent movie house and move on to other things. However, Hutchings said that she has already spoken with a couple of prospective buyers.

Wormwoods was started by Hutchings' late husband and a silent financial partner. Upon her husband's death in 1993, Hutchings inherited half of the cinema. Recently, the silent partner has decided to move on to other ventures.

"I am not in a position to run the theatre, so we decided to sell the business," Hutchings said.

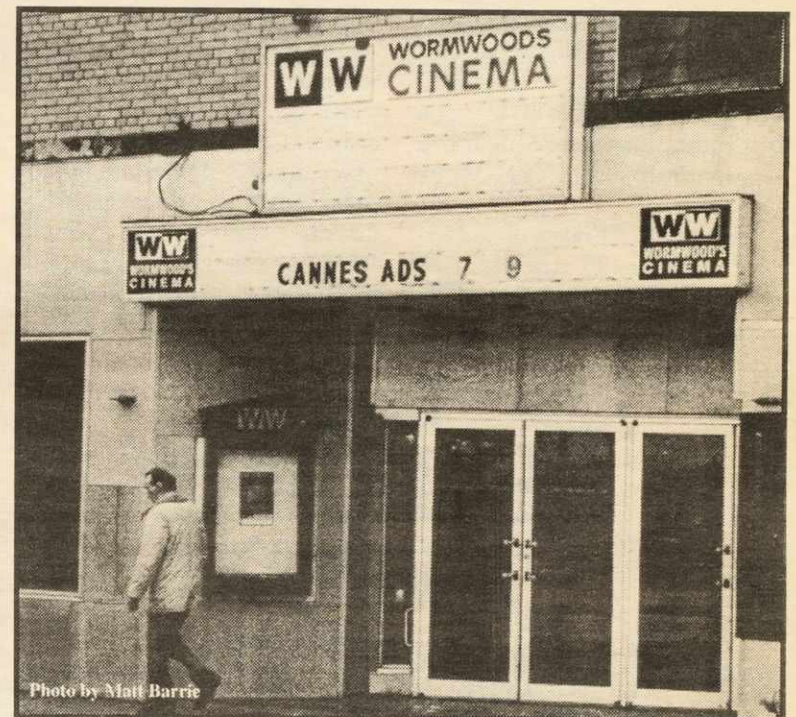
"However, Wormwoods will continue to operate as the heart and soul of the East Coast independent film industry for a long time to come."

Wormwoods is the largest independent film outlet this side of Quebec. The theatre garners wide recognition every year during *The Atlantic Film Festival* in September.

Hutchings said that the success of Wormwoods had not been affected by the recent opening of the Empire multi-plex and IMAX cinemas.

"Wormwoods is a very viable business. Those theatres are servicing a different clientele than we are. The people who frequent Wormwoods are looking for something that the mainstream theatres cannot offer them," Hutchings said.

The larger theatres provide customers with movies that have a heavy financial backing to attract publicity. Wormwoods is the only theatre in metro that offers the public smaller independent films.



This gives Canadian film-makers a great opportunity to showcase their work.

"Wormwoods will remain a strong part of my life and others who like to see good quality

films," Hutchings said.

While the owners assure that the theatre will re-open, due to the nature of the closing, it is uncertain how long doors will be locked.

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