

College radio fights to outlast its competition

BY ANDREW AMSLER

Managing News Editor

Hunched above a sea of sliders, mixers, blinking buttons and dials, he leans close to the soundboard as if the slow pulsating sound of reggae is emanating from within.

Like a painter works his pallet, Curtis Bergesen pokes and prods each slider and dial until the perfect sound levels are obtained — this is his art form.

“Greetings friends, enemies, aliens and lesser organisms,” he says. “You’re tuning in with me, Curtis B., on the show that is ‘Mixed Vegetables.’”

The frequency of WVUD broadcasts an eclectic assortment of DJs, representing genres from classical to Hip-hop, but it is hard to imagine a show as unusual and enticing as “Mixed Vegetables.”

The name is a commonly coined phrase and brings to mind the frozen food aisle of the grocery store, but “Mixed Vegetables” takes on a much different connotation when used by Bergesen. It represents his show, which features mainstream bands like 311, down to small-time groups like the Giant Panda Guerilla Dub Squad, a Rochester N.Y., reggae band that played at the East End Café last week.

However, according to Bergesen, the name has an even greater meaning.

“A lot of what I am today is from other people,” he says and “Mixed Vegetables” captures that.

A recent university graduate, Bergesen says music is his passion. But some of this is being lost in frequencies nationwide as more student radio stations are finding their numbers of listeners dropping.

Part of this may be due to the downloading craze in the last five years, he says, or the onslaught of corporate providers like XM Radio, but the downfall of college radio is more of a missed opportunity than anything.

“The opportunity for students to further their broadcast or radio career is something that is available to everyone, but only a small fraction of people at the university actually take advantage of [college radio],” Bergesen says. “It’s a shame, because college radio is a dying breed of creativity.”

Whereas commercial radio stations attract more listeners and play between 1,000 and 2,000 songs each year, he says college radio airs anywhere between 10,000 and 100,000 songs from every genre on an

annual basis. When Curtis B. is on the air, he plays at least four songs between each segment and carries with him a heap of CD cases.

So many, he says, that he cannot keep track of them, aside from scribbling down notes in a black composition book about what he wants to play before each show.

But the song variety is not all college radio has to offer. While most people outside of campus frequencies tend not to have interesting radio personalities, Bergesen is a testament to the quirkiness and raw creativity that is the lifeblood of student radio.

Although he likes to focus mainly on his love for music, it is Bergesen’s outgoing, sometimes abrasive personality, that makes him truly unique. Diagnosed with ADHD, Curtis B., is prone to say nearly anything on the air, whether it makes sense or not.

“I say all sorts of crap that nobody knows what I’m saying,” he says. From random outbursts of “funk kung fusion” or the occasional Spanish phrase, to longer and even odder phrases like “Clarice strikes again, William Ryker, aka Jean Luc Picard, aka pistachio grandma sandwich of Klondike goodness and American nightmares dot org,” Bergesen sometimes leaves listeners asking “what the hell was that?”

And it is the wild, spontaneous flow he says college students like. However, “Mixed Vegetables” is one of the few programs on WVUD that appeals to the student body.

In fact, most DJs at WVUD are not college-aged students. Instead, they are community members, some who had their radio shows for decades. If and when a student tunes into 93.1, he or she is more likely to hear something that is not of college-aged interest.

“They’re going to keep playing their non-college-age music, and most of them have been doing so for ages,” Bergesen says.

But that is only half the problem, he says. “Not many kids know we have a radio station — period.”

For these reasons, Bergesen says WVUD is more of a non-commercial radio station than the voice of the university.

Getting students involved and listening is not just a problem here, but throughout the country.

At Boston University’s WTBU, station manager Jeff Katten has similar problems.

The trouble is not getting students involved, he says, but actually

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WVUD shows offer more than just music

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being able to broadcast. The station, which is entirely student operated, is not faced with an aging DJ lineup.

Instead, the station has never really been able to broadcast, he says. The antennas that transmit WTBU's signal are small and outdated to the point where "you can really only pick up a signal if you are right next to them."

For this reason, students are missing out on the variety and experimentation that college radio has to offer.

"There's a lot more passion that comes from college radio," he says, "and I fear we're missing out on that."

But this may all change, Katten says. WTBU is working closely with several other college radio stations in the area, of which there are dozens, to build a community of college radio that could rival commercial stations.

"College radio has evolved a little bit and been pushed to the side," he says. "We're trying to reinvent ourselves."

Bergesen does admit that there is some



THE REVIEW/Jessica Sitkoff

Curtis B. hosts "Mixed Vegetables" on WVUD Monday afternoons.

hope for college radio, largely because it is not commercial-based.

"If anything, college radio stations will probably outlast commercial radio stations,

which is basically like anything else — the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer," he says. "People are buying out radio stations left and right."

This was evident less than a month ago when Y100, a Philadelphia alternative music station, was replaced with The Beat, a Hip-hop program. The same also happened in Washington, D.C., recently. WHFX, another prominent alternative station, was dropped and an all-Spanish broadcast took its place.

"That's the best thing about college radio," Bergesen says. "We don't have money to answer to."

He doesn't do this as a job, but as a passion.

"I don't get anything out of it," he says. "I haven't met any women who have heard my show and are in love with me."

But as he gears up for life outside of the university, "Mixed Vegetables" is the one thing he will miss in Newark.

"Being on the air is my one true creative output."

Letters to the Editor

Crucial information for radio listeners

I am writing in regards to Andrew Amsler's article on college radio because there was some crucial information missing from the article.

WVUD is the University's college radio station. It broadcasts on 91.3 FM and live on the internet at www.wvud.org.

Mixed Vegetables radio show airs weekly on Monday from 2 - 4 p.m., and on Wednesday from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

Thanks,

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