

Amping up the sound of 'Random Radio'

By Vivian Belik

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Mike Thomas/Yukon News



Bill Polonsky is part of a group of volunteers who resurrected a community radio station that is being broadcast from a small room in the Frostbite Music Festival's office in Shipyards Park.

There's a scene in the 1990 movie *Pump up the Volume* where Mark, the high school outcast played by Christian Slater, first broadcasts an illegal FM radio signal from his parent's basement.

With just a transmitter, a microphone and the fake radio moniker, "Hard Harry," Mark causes a sensation by playing alternative tunes by the Pixies, Sonic Youth and Henry Rollins all punctuated by his biting, sarcastic commentary.

Walk into the relaunched CJUC 92.5 "radio closet" in Whitehorse and you get the same feeling that something covert is going on.

There's no Christian Slater, the bandwidth is not pirated, but the whole operation is so barebones and informal that it seems subversive just by its nature.

CJUC is hidden away in a tiny bedroom above the Frostbite Music Festival headquarters in Shipyards Park.

The second-floor room is barren - two chairs, a computer, a radio transmitter, a mixing board and a single microphone its only furnishings. The freshly painted walls are blank.

The only bit of colour comes from the flashing red and yellow lights on the transmitter and a red and white 'keffiyeh,' a scarf made popular by the Palestinian solidarity movement, draped along a windowsill.

A stereo in the corner softly dribbles out music from CJUC, The Juice, or as it is more affectionately known by locals, Random Radio.

Not yet fully operational, the station sounds more like an iPod that's been left on shuffle than a community radio station with its usual set of eccentric on-air personalities.

The community radio station was officially started in 2003 by Robert Hopkins (who is rumoured to have gotten his start in pirate radio) who developed and arranged all of the open source software for



-19°C

Cloudy

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CJUC.

But since then, CJUC has kept a pretty low profile, broadcasting out of the Polarcom building on Second Avenue and Strickland Street with no advertisements or radio personalities.

Volunteers who had a radio show created playlists by choosing from the almost 40,000 songs uploaded onto the CJUC internet database.

If you tuned into the station you might hear Jimi Hendrix sandwiched between the Ramones and Frank Zappa, or entire segments dedicated to punk rock, electronica or spoken word.

After Polarcom stopped providing internet to Yukoners in May, CJUC folded its operation and went into hibernation looking for a new building to broadcast from.

First there were talks about putting the station at the Yukon College. But when those talks fell through and the room at the Frostbite building was discovered, CJUC happily relocated to its new digs on the river.

With a new broadcast space the station is hoping to revamp its sound and image.

“We’re interested in the whole DIY (do it yourself) movement. We’d like to think (of this type of radio station) as the bastard child of punk rock,” said Bill Polonsky, who became involved with the station when he moved to Whitehorse five years ago.

“This station will democratize radio in Whitehorse.”

Polonsky is no stranger to community radio, having spent 12 years hosting a late-night psychedelic music show on CJUV in Victoria.

However, unlike the University of Victoria’s campus radio station, “which has a massive budget,” CJUC is still finding its legs and is doing things day-by-day, said Polonsky.

Last week, they didn’t have a bank account and the week before that they didn’t have an internet site.

The informal group of volunteers is hoping that by Christmas they will have an organized schedule of radio shows and hosts.

And they’re keeping the doors wide-open to whomever is interested in having their own music or talk show.

“We’re looking for a diverse group of people,” Polonsky said.

The group is specifically looking to involve youth, political activists and “people with great record collections,” he said.

Unlike other campus and community radio stations, which require potential hosts to submit a sample of previous radio work and undergo a rigorous set of radio workshops, The Juice will be more accessible to the community.

“You can do whatever you want as long as it falls under the National Campus and Community Radio regulations,” he said.

“But if you’re, say, sexist or homophobic, we don’t want you on the radio,” Polonsky quipped.

Right now it’s mostly youth, store owners and taxi and delivery truck drivers who are tuning into CJUC.

But the group has no way of actually tracking who is listening. That would cost money to assess, and money is in short supply, Polonsky said.

Run entirely on volunteer hours and donations, the group will likely hold benefit concerts and on-air fundraises to pay for rent and new equipment for the station.

The Juice broadcasts on a 50-watt FM mono signal that can be heard in downtown Whitehorse, Takhini, Riverdale and parts of Porter Creek. But the operators are hoping to raise money to boost their signal.

“A couple bands in town have already told us they’re interested in playing a benefit show,” said Polonsky.

It’s an example of the strong relationship the radio station hopes to build with local musicians in town.

We want to play as much local talent as possible, Polonsky explained.

“If you’re a basement band and know how to record your own music then you can put it on the air. It’s a gold mine,” he said.

“I wish I had this when I was growing up.”

Check them out online at <http://www.cjucfm.com>.

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