

No Static at All

WDCV'S GENERATIONS ROCK
THE ITUNES ERA

By Michelle Simmons

THE BEAUTY OF COLLEGE RADIO has always been its eclecticism. While you'll hear plenty of Top 40 tunes, you're also likely to get a polyglot of jazz, Europop, bluegrass or underground hip-hop in the mix—sometimes all in the same show.

WDCV-FM officially hit the airwaves on Oct. 31, 1973, on radio dial 88.3. Often educational, sometimes anarchic—but always engaging—the station has consistently delivered on its promise: to be The Voice of Dickinson College.

"It was very early, maybe the second semester of my freshman year, that I decided I wanted to get onto WDCV," recalls Frank James '79. "One of the great things about it was that you were wide open to the things you could play. No one was telling you what to play."

James, who now blogs about current events on National Public Radio (NPR), experimented with genres during his three years at WDCV. In the beginning he spun mainly R&B, adding jazz to the rotation after taking an introductory course with Truman Bullard, professor emeritus of music. "It was such a fascinating course," he says. "I learned so much about the history and what the musicians were doing. It was really my academic work going hand in hand with my extracurricular time."

Growing Up on Air

For David Brower '89, now program director at public-radio station WUNC in Chapel Hill, N.C., part of the thrill of working at WDCV was discovering new artists. "I was music director for a while, which meant I had the best job at the radio station," he says. "I could check out all the new records that were coming in. The music industry was thriving, and they were putting a lot of money into bands. There was a lot of activity, a lot of buzz, a lot of people paying attention to what college radio was doing."

Brower also moved the station in a new direction. "We made a playlist, a rotation schedule," he recalls. "Someone couldn't come in and play Steely Dan for two



Brett Hollander '07, host of WBAL radio's "Sportsline," Baltimore's top-rated sports talk show, honed his skills during his four years at WDCV. "At Dickinson, we had to learn how to do everything," he says. "When you're doing Division III sports you do your own research, your own prep."



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image of a real person other than someone in a dorm room listening to what I was doing on the radio and it mattering to them. That really resonated with me.”

Brower has garnered awards from the Associated Press and the Society of Professional Journalists and won the Edward R. Murrow award. But what he learned from Tracy that Sunday morning continues to shape his view of broadcasting.

“No matter how large the audience, radio is still a one-to-one medium,” Brower says. “You’re always talking to one listener at a time, whether you have 26 million or 300 listeners. It’s one person in their car, one person with their earbuds in, one person sitting in their living room at night.”

Cogan Fellow Frank James '79, a co-founder of NPR blog *The Two-Way* and former journalist for *The Wall Street Journal* and *Chicago Tribune*, spoke on campus in February about the changing media landscape. (For more on his Cogan fellowship, see Page 38.)

hours in a row. ... We wanted to be kind of edgy. We wanted to explore new music, and this was the medium to do it.”

As the music got edgier, so did the DJs. Former training manager Lacey Smith '08 recalls her George Carlin moments while explaining to new DJs how to keep the station on the legal side of Federal Communications Commission regulations. “I was charged with repeating the various words that you cannot say or play over the air,” she says. “It was necessary to avoid the heavy fines, but it was hard to [present] the deluge of obscenities to someone while keeping a straight face.”

Sound Experience

WDCV provided not only experience in management and DJing but solid reporting. Brett Hollander '07, who spent four years at WDCV covering Red Devil sports, recently joined WBAL radio in Baltimore as host of “Sportsline,” the region’s popular sports talk show. “I’ve always known what I wanted to do with my life,” he says. “I grew up hearing about communications schools, journalism schools. But one of the attractions of Dickinson was that ... I basically got to call as many games as I wanted over the course of four years. That allowed me to get good at my craft.”

Perhaps WDCV’s biggest fan has been Davis Tracy, former director of the Counseling Center, who began quietly influencing DJs and music directors long before he became the station’s advisor in 1995. Brower remembers, “Davis called me up one Sunday morning [during a show], and it was the first time I had an

JOY VERNER’S ‘GENERATION JONES’ DOES IT OLD SCHOOL

It’s five minutes to noon, and Joy Verner is frantically digging through her canvas tote for her Melissa Etheridge greatest-hits CD. She finds the case, flips it open, gently plops the disc into one of the three CD players arrayed before her and presses the forward button to “Similar Features.” The song begins, exactly at noon.

“I’m old school,” Verner says, adjusting her headphones. “I use only CDs. Most students plug into their laptop or iPod. I’m still pretty prehistoric on that.”

Verner’s day job is as assistant to the vice president for student development. But on Wednesdays, from noon to 1 p.m., she is host of “Generation Jones” on WDCV, a quirky show that features women artists from the ’70s to the ’90s, punctuated by stream-of-consciousness commentaries on her busy life.

Verner clears her throat several times, flicks a switch. Her smooth contralto fills the air.

“WDCV, 88.3 FM at Dickinson College,” she begins. “That was none other than Melissa Etheridge. She’s the feature of this hour, simply because I was running late and had to do a couple of things, and my bracelet is jingling in the microphone. ... We’re going to be featuring things from a compilation. See, that’s a sneaky way of getting in different eras of music when you’re on a tight timeline and you changed cars this morning, and the disc you really wanted

Navigating the Digital Age

Today, broadcast radio—as with other traditional media—competes with a wide array of platforms: iTunes, social-networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, YouTube and satellite radio.

Hollander, the youngest talk-show host at his station, notes that anyone going into broadcasting needs to cultivate multimedia skills. “The jobs are so few and far between in radio broadcasting right now,” he says.

David Brower '89, a 20-year public-radio veteran, points to his American-studies and English double major as key to his success. “Knowing how a good story is told ... is far more important than knowing what buttons to push and how to manipulate audio,” he says.



to feature today is in the other car. Does that ever happen to you? If you identify with me, raise your hands and get down with Disappear Fear. Generation Jones—the hour of power for old people.”

Verner removes her headphones and turns to her visitor. “Generation Jones is the generation between boomers and Generation X,” she explains. “I was going to call my show ‘Old Lady Music,’ which just isn’t going to work. All I had was what I had bought, which doesn’t really represent an era or generation—it just represents me. One day I did only Indigo Girls, and for two shows I did only disco, which I got from the [Waidner-Spahr] library.”

A former speech-communications major at Edinboro University, Verner started in radio as an undergraduate and did a stint with local Christian radio station WJTL. In the early '90s, while pursuing her master's in counseling, she interned at Dickinson and hosted her first WDCV show. She went on to work at LaSalle University, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission and the City of Harrisburg. When she returned to Dickinson in 2008, she knew that she wanted to get back on the air.

Verner shifts to the mic. “WDCV. Yes, we’re still here, Generation Jonesers. Right now, we’re going to ride that wave with something from the best dance album of 1994. This is a little something to get you moving in your office chair, ‘cause the day’s halfway done.”

Already, the hour is winding down. “We have to get another Melissa in for sure; I’ve only done two. We’ll do one more song and end with Melissa,” she says, cradling the CD in her hand.

“Radio is my wellness, like my Qigong class. I’m not going to buy equipment; I’m not going to DJ weddings. This is a fun thing to do, just to see if I can still do it. Where else but on a college campus can you say, ‘Can I do a radio show basically playing my stuff?’ And they’re like, ‘Yeah, whatever.’”

—Michelle Simmons

Joy Verner, assistant to the vice president for student development, channels Generation Jones for her listeners every Wednesday at noon, using her own CD collection. “It’s whatever I owned in 1994—that’s the joke,” she says.

Former international-studies major Lacey Smith '08 (below), who will begin a master's in comparative literature this fall at the University of Colorado in Boulder, says that her four years at WDCV prepared her for nearly anything. "I can't think of a single job where the ability to speak professionally off the top of your head on a variety of topics—and with a bit of humor, too—would not be useful."

"The person who would have been just broadcasting is also now the cameraman. The cameraman is now also the broadcaster. ... Most places want you to blog; they want you to shoot video."

James, a 30-year news veteran, wrote for *The Wall Street Journal* and *Chicago Tribune* before co-founding The Two-Way blog for NPR. "One of the fascinating things about the Internet is that it has everybody sort of playing in the same sandbox," he says. "Once there was a print sandbox and a broadcast sandbox. Now we're all basically in the same sandbox, and we're all trying to figure out how to get the most compelling content in front of people."

In an age of media saturation, however, college radio remains a primary conduit to mainstream success for independent artists. "That's the great thing about WDCV," says Smith. "Our heavy rotation always reflects what's new, what's underrepresented ... particularly when it's local and has an innovative sound. You won't get that listening to one of the mass-market radio stations."



Trent Bailey

For many DJs, the Internet allows radio to be simultaneously local and global. Shaun Lawson '12, for example, taps into his East Asian-studies major as well as his sense of whimsy to host The Glorious People's Listening Show, a postmodern mash-up of '80s pop, political hip-hop and Soviet-era and communist-China propaganda songs.

"I've always thought of radio as an international, intergenerational, universal medium," he says. "People interact without meaning to. They'll overlap and run over each other all the time, and the whole medium runs on personality and content."

The station now streams its shows live on the Internet and has expanded its programming to include hosting broadcasts on Britton Plaza and staging weekend concerts.

Showcasing Students

"We've also worked to improve our public affairs by working with classes and my department, Instructional & Media Services, to showcase student podcasts created in courses," explains Brenda Landis, WDCV co-advisor and college multimedia developer. "Our newest focus has been reconnecting with the community, since our listeners are not only on campus but all over Carlisle."

Although Tracy retired from Dickinson this year, he will continue to co-advise for another year while working part time with the Counseling Center. Thanks to his efforts, WDCV receives grants from the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters to support its outreach and programming efforts.

For Brower, who's spent two decades in the sound booth, radio serves a purpose that no other medium can claim.

"There's still a very strong desire for good radio, for people looking for the companionship that radio provides," he says. "There's a real romance to the magic of broadcasting, of one person sitting in a room with a microphone. You have stories, whether they're being told through music or through information and news programming. There's a simplicity to it; 20 years after I've graduated, I'm still enraptured by it all." 🐦

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