

'Radio Active'

by Craig Mackie

Trans FM, November, 1980

I can think of the starting point and I can see where we are now, but the rest of this half decade is a high-speed collage of sounds and voices, images and faces, and perilous lows followed by awesome highs. There have been many times during the manic-depressive history of CKCU-FM when it seemed like the end was so close.

No matter what predicament the station encountered, there have been two forces that have guided the station throughout. The first is the dream and the reality of FM radio, and the second is the unfailing, indomitable spirit and imagination of the people who worked at CKCU-FM.

The story of Radio Carleton is fascinating simply for the people who have participated in this artistic communications experiment. But what has always made it exciting for me is the individual creativity that CKCU has inspired. I have never been, and I doubt if I ever will be again, associated with such concentrated creativity over such an extended period of time.

The group that brought CKCU onto the airwaves has long since departed. But the energy that spawned CKCU-FM has been regenerated many times over.

Yet the people and the programs mean nothing without ears to hear them. The listeners of CKCU-FM have given new meaning to the words radio audience. The loyalty, spirit and support shown by Radio Carleton's audience have been major factors in our survival. Often, when nothing seemed to be going for us, our listeners came through by phone, by mail and by their dollars. The relationship between CKCU and the people who listen is something I shall treasure all the rest of my life.

Perhaps, long after I leave CKCU, I'll have the time and space to remember this experience and to put it into some kind of perspective. But still being actively involved in it all, it's hard to choose a few memories to share with you. It's a five-year blur that sometimes seems like 50 years and sometimes seems like no time at all.

I remember Randy Williams. His fighting spirit and determination against all odds put CKCU-FM on the air. I remember Paul Munson, whose technical expertise in setting up CKCU-FM lives on today. I remember Jeff Green, whose mind created so many new sounds and whose style in radio production set new standards for creativity. I remember Andrea Thiel, whose verve led to new directions for public affairs programming. I remember Peter Lennon, whose Hunter-Thomson-esque light-speed energy kept Radio Carleton a financial reality.

Those were the people at the roots of CKCU-FM. Many, many others have brought their talents into the studios and offices of the station, all the while keeping the essential nature of the station alive as well as taking it in new directions.

I also remember the bitter disappointments that smashed the youthful idealism in the early days of FM: the CRTC, whose programming platitudes meant nothing when it came to allowing a truly free experiment in radio.

And I remember the soaring high as we went on the air for the first time.

Joni Mitchell's 'You Turn Me On I'm A Radio' played over the air at midnight on November 14th, 1975. We stood around the office guzzling champagne with the tears of joy streaming down everyone's faces. Everyone hugging everyone else, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

And I fondly recall the scores of live radio experiments: an entire studio under canvas outside at the Central Canada Exhibition; live music from the Festival For the Folks, from the Alex, and from Rooster's Coffee House; a debate on nuclear energy; coverage of the World Symposium on Humanity from Toronto, elections; and the first- ever campus radio network.

Space will simply not allow for me to indulge in this strange trip down memory lane to the extent that I'd like. There are hundreds of people whom I should thank and remember for their contributions to CKCU-FM. There are countless incidents which have come to mind during the writing of this article some funny, some sad, some which I would dearly love to relate to you. But the past is something which is individual to the person remembering. It now only exists in our hearts and minds.

Radio Carleton, above and beyond any other medium, exists for the stimulation of the ears and the mind. Fantasy and imagination are real worlds in radio. Unhindered by the visual, we can and have created any scenario of which the mind can conceive. In our audio history, we have blown up the Arts Tower, been taken over by T.H.W.A.R.T. (Three Hundred Wimps Against Radio Tyranny), and been controlled and overridden by GBS (Galactic Broadcasting System). We have asked our listeners to take us where their imaginations will go. That included everything from a chainsaw fantasy to hash-hungries.

Now for those of you who can't stand corn, stop reading. These past five years have been the most wonderful of my life. If I were asked to do it again, without hesitation I'd say YES!! I have been immensely lucky to have had this opportunity to share with so many people this remarkable experience. If you were there for part of the journey, then you know what I mean. If you've just joined us, stay tuned, because you're in for the time of your life.

The people at Radio Carleton are proud of the past five years and the accomplishments and successes we've experienced. But we have never been ones to lay back on our laurels. It's not in our nature. Instead, we will constantly seek out the unknown and the untried, exploring and experimenting to the limits of our imaginations.

So, this November 14th at midnight, no matter what you're up to, join us in spirit if not in person for a celebratory toast to CKCU-FM. When you hear Joni, we're five years old that instant. And although I can't be with you in person, thanks for your friendship, for your love, for everything

'Five Years of Radio Activity'
by Craig Mackie, Station Manager
Trans FM, November, 1980

For those who may be keepers of memorabilia, here are just a few of the important dates in the history of CKCU-FM:

July 15, 1974

Randy Williams is hired to prepare for an FM radio station on the Carleton University campus. He becomes the first FM Station Manager.

May 6, 1975

Radio Carleton's first public hearing with the CRTC, chaired by Harry Boyle. The hearing is held in Hamilton and attended by nearly one hundred CKCU staffers and supporters.

June 27, 1975

CRTC Decision 75-247 grants a special broadcasting licence to CKCU-FM.

November 14, 1975

11:00 am – Department of Communications (DOC) orders CKCU not to go on the air at midnight because the station's transmitter is interfering with sensitive experiments in the Engineering School.

4:00 pm – DOC relents, giving CKCU permission to go on as scheduled.

Midnight – CKCU christens the airwaves at 93.1 MHz with transmitter power of 4100 watts and a broadcast radius of 50 miles. Joni Mitchell's 'You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio' is the first music played.

November 22, 1976

CKCU's second public hearing with CRTC held in Ottawa, CKCU proposes to solve interference problem by moving transmitter to Camp Fortune. At the same time, CKCU proposes to go 24 hours per day. CFMO and CHEZ intervene, requesting that CKCU's hours be restricted.

December 6, 1976

CKCU moves transmitter and goes 24 hours for the first time. CRTC warns station that advertising will be an issue next year at licence renewal time.

November 15, 1977

On CKCU's third anniversary, the station is called to another CRTC public hearing to renew its licence. Contrary to rules of procedure, CHEZ is allowed to file a negative intervention less than 24 hours before the hearing. CKCU is given no advance warning.

December 28, 1977

CRTC issues a decision which denies CKCU's application for renewal. And although the station is praised for its excellence in programming and advertising, the CRTC accuses CKCU of "an excessive drive for professionalism". CKCU is given 6 months to prepare a new application. CKCU is ordered to cease and desist all advertising. Six people lose part-time jobs at the station because of this decision.

February 1, 2 and 3, 1978

Carleton Students' Association holds a referendum on the future existence of Radio Carleton: 88% of a record turnout vote in favour of continued funding for the station.

February 14, 1978

Students Association cuts off all funding including salaries, CKCU goes over budget.

August 1, 1978

After Williams resignation, Craig Mackie is hired as interim Station Manager.

September 12, 1978

Yet another CRTC public hearing for CKCU's licence renewal.

November 1, 1978

CKCU begins first annual public donations drive to support the station's operation.

November 3, 1978

CRTC renews station's licence for a period of 2% years. Advertising restrictions are reinforced.

November 15, 1978

CKCU's listeners come through with outstanding financial support for the station.

December 25, 1978

A happy Christmas made happier with Bruce Cockburn's own special.

April 7-14, 1979

CKCU broadcasts for an hour each night live from the World Symposium on Humanity in Toronto.

May 22, 1979

Ontario Universities Radio Network (first ever in Canada) goes on the air to cover the federal election. CKCU is the anchor station.

March 30, 1979

CKCU's first television/radio simulcast with CJOH. The program is Cheap Trick Live at Budokan.

September, 1979

TRANS FM is born.

November 15, 1979

CKCU's listeners come through again by donating nearly \$25,000 to keep the station on the air for another year.

December 8, 1979

CKCU makes the cover of Billboard magazine by airing bootleg records. Oops!

February 18, 1980

OUR (Ontario University Radio) Network comes back to cover the federal election with extensive coast-to-coast coverage.

June 5-7, 1980

Reality is cast aside as listeners and staff participate in Fantasy Weekend.

September 14, 1980

CKCU and Ottawa Cablevision begin regular weekly simulcast of No One Came.

November 14, 1980, midnight

CKCU-FM is five years old.

The future of CKCU-FM remains a question. it's up to you to help us make the answer positive.

Photo: THE ORIGINAL 1975 GANG OF NINE

Jeff Green, Al Thaw, Eric Dormer, Rob Braide, Chris Henry, Randy Williams, Sheryl Bennett, Craig Mackie