



David Morrison photo

CHLY: BUCCANEER RADIO

By David Morrison

Last summer I read an excellent book about the pirate radio scene in this country. Besides bearing a strong local focus regarding subject matter, authorship and publication, *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada* (New Star Books, 2010) is a thought-provoking anthology of stories illustrating the myriad possibilities that radio as a medium of communication and entertainment can offer. Although it does of course deal strictly with, as it were, ‘off the grid’, unlicensed broadcasting, often with specific agendas and aims, the book serves to provoke a whole new school of thought concerning the potential of radio in general.

What is clear, especially in commercial radio, is that the surface of what can be achieved in the medium has barely been scratched. Seriously, some of the inspiring programming concepts discussed in *Islands of Resistance* are simply amazing. Most of all, the book highlights what *should* be

fundamental, yet is so often overlooked in the corporate radio arena, being that the true value of any kind of radio station to its community depends on its level of interaction with that community.

In the mid-90s a group of students at VIU, then Malaspina University-College, founded a radio club that, long story short, evolved into the Radio Malaspina Society and CHLY. Not a pirate station, of course, yet nonetheless enjoying a similar degree of autonomy, CHLY has down the years evolved into a treasured institution in Nanaimo and way beyond.

Staffed (almost) entirely by volunteers and (largely) dependent on donations to survive, the station exists on a permanent financial knife-edge. That it has remained on-air for so long is surely testament to CHLY’s value to its community, a sentiment expressed in a remarkable public response to the station’s

latest fund drive last fall. Amazed, I met with CHLY’s sole full-time employee, Program Manager, Dylan Perry, to find out more.

“It’s definitely surprising just in the short time I’ve been at CHLY how the fund drives have grown,” Perry begins. “This last one was the most successful ever. We do two a year – one in the fall, one in the spring – and while I’ve been there, almost three years, the fall fund drives traditionally do worse. Last year we had almost fifteen grand pledged, but we’re almost *double* that this year.” (I am unsure of the final figure as we go to press, but when Perry and I talked in December it was just shy of \$27,500.)

“The growth in terms of donations from the community has really ramped up quite a bit, but it’s hard to say *exactly* what’s behind it,” he continues. “I think it’s a combination of a bunch of factors, but I do think people might feel the quality of programming has improved over the last couple of years.”

One very evident factor as I see it is the intimacy of interaction

CHLY encourages and engages in with its listenership. US radio legend Himan Brown (1910-2010), a producer of some thirty thousand programs in a sixty-five year career, hit the nail on the head when telling *Newsweek* in 1974 that, “TV just feeds you. Radio *involves* you.” CHLY is more than happy to involve listeners in its programming as directly as is achievable, a fact Perry emphasizes in the way he describes the station’s modus operandi.

“CHLY is ‘community access radio,’” he says. “Basically, the people that live in this community – Nanaimo and the surrounding area – can have easy access to a place where they can voice their opinions, their taste in music... and when we say the word ‘accessible,’ it really is. Quite often, even on a weekly basis, I will see someone come down to the station and within five minutes they’re on air talking about issues.”

Another obvious factor endearing the community to CHLY is the diversity, intelligence and depth of programming available to listeners. It is not so likely when tuning into 101.7 FM that you will

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encounter the music of Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift, Enrique Iglesias or anything else receiving heavy rotation on commercial stations. This has nothing to do with elitist exclusivity, but everything to do with supporting music and airing opinions that are not, or are very rarely, covered in the mainstream. There is a strong emphasis on local and alternative homegrown talent across the musical spectrum, thereby offering a platform from which independent artists can build a fan-base. World music and more challenging genres, too, are given plenty of airtime.

“In terms of freedom on-air, because we’re not driven by commercial advertising it allows us to not worry so much about what’s ‘popular’ per se,” Perry explains. “I would definitely say we push the boundaries quite a bit, and while we are not a pirate radio station, perhaps we are ‘buccaneer radio’?” he suggests with a chuckle, referring to my enthusiasm for *Islands of Resistance!*

The freedoms CHLY enjoys and appreciates stem from its formation from a radio society, which in itself presents a neat model for a democratic community!

“We are completely different (*to commercial stations*) from top to bottom in terms of our

licence and our mandate is, to the actual business structure of the society itself, to how we’re funded,” clarifies Perry. “In terms of the governing structure, there is no owner per se, as it’s a member-driven society. All the big business decisions are made by a board of directors voted in by the members, and the main difference is that CHLY is 99% volunteer-driven. We don’t have employees or any kind of corporate structure.”

Yet despite CHLY’s longevity and place in the community’s heart, the precarious financial position it exists within is a permanent one. Necessity being the mother of invention, even though to the public fund-raising is visible only twice a year, the hard work in attempting to generate vital funds never stops. To this end, if CHLY could receive donations every single day, they would gratefully accept them.

“We operate on something like the annual wage of one managerial position in a commercial radio station – the whole thing – and every cent gets soaked right up,” says Perry. “The money does not go far. There’s, rent, heat, maintenance, equipment and transmitter costs, publicity, the website... the list goes on and on. But to help we’ve changed the fund drives a bit. For the last two we added a new component. Traditionally we’ve done the on-air plea for

donations – and that still brings in a huge amount – but in conjunction with that we’ve also done what most non-profits do, where you go around and ask family and friends and co-workers to support the cause you’re involved in. That’s worked well, too, adding a good chunk of change to the drive itself.”

Note how Perry refers to CHLY as a ‘cause’. This is an interesting noun to choose, especially as this description reflects the mentality of every person I’ve ever met that is or has been involved in CHLY in some way. It is a passion for the volunteers, as they see their station as a vitally important service to, and forum for, their own community. It would seem from the support they receive that the community wholeheartedly agrees, buccaneer broadcasting spirit and all. ~

Listen to CHLY on 101.7 FM or streaming online at <http://chly.ca>. Support CHLY by making a donation to become a member of the Radio Malaspina Society. Further information can be found at the CHLY website (URL above) or by calling the Radio Malaspina Society on (250) 716 3410.

*More information on the book *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada* is available at <http://islandsofresistance.ca> and www.newstarbooks.com*

UNION BAY CREDIT UNION IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE....

Helmut Pastrick, Chief Economist for Central 1 Credit Union will be the Guest Speaker at this year’s 66th Annual General Meeting of Union Bay Credit Union. April 2, 2011 2:00 pm at the Union Bay Community Hall.

Central 1 Credit Union (formally Credit Union Central of B.C.) is the new umbrella organization for the Credit Union systems in British Columbia and Ontario. The system has about 2.7 million Credit Union Members with an asset base of more than \$65 billion.

Helmut Pastrick and the Economics Department provide a variety of economic analysis and forecast services for B.C. and Ontario Credit Unions.

Prior to joining the Credit Union Central of B.C. in 1997; he spent many years with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in B.C. responsible for analysing and forecasting the provincial market and economy.



Helmut is a former President of the Association of Professional Economists of B.C., a member of the Canadian Association for Business Economics, and the B.C. Economic Forecast Council.

Helmut is multiple winner of the B.C. Professional Association’s Crystal Ball Award given annually to the most accurate economic forecast.

Helmut is frequently called upon by the media to provide comments on economic events and his presentations are in demand by many organizations and groups including Credit Unions, trade and professional associations, and service clubs.

Union Bay Credit Union extends this invitation to its Members to come out and hear what Helmut has to say about this year’s Economic Forecast.

