Call for Donna Allen Award for Feminist Advocacy

The Donna Allen Award recognizes feminist advocacy by a woman or group. This award honors Donna Allen, founder of the Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press in Washington, D.C. The award is bestowed by the AEJMC Commission on the Status of Women. Submissions should demonstrate how the nominee’s feminist media activism promotes the rights and freedoms of women and minorities across the world. Nominees need not be AEJMC members.
Deadline: Feb. 20

Call for Mary Gardner Award for Graduate Student Research

Graduate students who conduct research on women in journalism and mass communication are invited to apply for the Mary Gardner Award. This award is designed to fund research that has the potential to make an excellent contribution to the scholarship on women and journalism and mass communication. The award honors the late Mary Gardner, the first woman elected president of AEJMC. Applicants send four copies of a five-to-seven page description of the project and its potential contribution and the application’s qualifications for undertaking the project. A three-person panel judges the applications.
Deadline: April 15

Call for Mary Ann Yodelis Smith Award for Feminist Scholarship

Applications are invited for the Mary Ann Yodelis Smith (MAYS) Award which funds feminist scholarship that has the potential to make significant contributions to the literature of gender and media. First presented in 1995, it honors Mary Ann Yodelis Smith, a past president of AEJMC and long-time advocate for women in the academy. Applicants send four copies of a five-to-seven page description of the project and its potential contribution to the scholarship on gender and the media and a brief one-page description of the applicant’s qualifications for undertaking the project. A three-person panel, including a past recipient of the award, judges applications.
Deadline: April 15

Call for Outstanding Woman in Journalism and Mass Communication Education

This award honors a woman who has represented women well through excellence and high standards. Nomination letters must detail individual’s contributions to journalism and mass communication education.
Deadline: April 15

Call for Entries to 2006 CSW Awards

Please send applications, submissions, and nominations to:
Teresa Mastin, CSW second-year co-chair, Department of Advertising, Public Relations, & Retailing
309 Comm Arts Bldg., Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1212

Radio host Gerrie Blake brings “Women’s Voices” to listeners of KUNV-FM in southern Nevada every Sunday afternoon.

“Women’s Voices” Provides Musical Refuge in FM Landscape

BY ERIKA ENGSTROM

For two hours every Sunday afternoon, radio host Gerrie Blake casts a magical spell over the airwaves of the Las Vegas valley. If one could translate the beauty of an exquisite jewel into music, that is what Blake offers listeners on her show “Women’s Voices” on KUNV 91.5 FM.

As a volunteer deejay at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas’ public radio station, Blake, a formally trained illustrator with past ties to the art, music and literary scenes in New York and Los Angeles, has hosted “Women’s Voices” since 1989. The show is marked not only by its unique musical format, but also by a sort of women’s music “classroom” that Blake creates by providing listeners with album liner notes, record label information, and news and career histories of the artists she features.

Part of KUNV-FM’s weekend cultural programming, “Women’s Voices” serves as an example of the “second access model” of women’s radio, where publicly owned stations devote a portion of air time to women who produce programs about and for women, as described by Susan Carter in her 2004 article, “A Mic of Her Own: Stations, Collectives, and Women’s Access to Radio,” in the Journal of Radio Studies.

Begun in the 1970s by women’s collectives around the country, these feminist programs continue today on public and university radio stations around the country, in the form of magazine, talk, and music shows. Examples include “Amazon Country” (WXPN-FM at Penn State), “Amazon Radio,” (WPKN-FM in Bridgeport, Conn.), “Suffrage Station” (KTUH-FM, Honolulu), and “Estrogen Nation” (WRFL, Lexington, Ky.).
"Women's Voices" (CONTINUED)

which went off the air in 2004. One can find lists of feminist radio shows like these on feminist and folk-music sites such as Allwomenradio.com, offlinefemradio.org, and CreativeFemfolk.com.

Women's Music Defined

Originally, “women’s music” was defined as “music by women, for women, about women, and financially controlled by women,” notes Cynthia Lont in her chapter, “Women’s Music: No Longer a Small Private Party,” in Feminist Frontiers (p. 199, 1997). In that definition, women were involved in all aspects of performance, recording, production, and distribution. Women’s music was created in the late 1960s and early 1970s to counter the male-dominated mainstream music industry, which was based in patriarchy, where women’s experiences were subsumed under the male gaze, according to Lont. Thus, the impetus for women’s music was the symbolic annihilation of women and their experiences apart from men in popular music. The term “women’s music” referred to more than just the music, as Lont explains: “The soundscape and communities that produced the music were a tangible example of the power of women organized apart from the dominant culture” (p. 127). Unfortunately, notes Lont, “Unlike other subcultural music forms, women’s music has received little attention in either mainstream or music industry media” (p. 126).

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Today, radio programs like “Women’s Voices” literally serve as keepers of the faith – ensuring a place for women’s music and enlightening listeners to a whole world of music they otherwise wouldn’t hear.

A Musical Buffet

Indeed, Blake offers listeners a veritable musical buffet of genres and artists. One can hear the powerful voice of Annie Lennox, from both her solo and Eurythmics albums, the delicate beauty of Natalie Merchant from 10,000 Maniacs singing “Trouble Me,” the sweeping, “power country” ballads by the acclaimed band Sugarland, which includes male and female members, and the chanteuse-like jazz stylings of Diana Krall. New Age and Celtic music fans get treated to the many-layered instrumentalists of Loreena McKennitt and her driving, exotico-sounding “Night Ride Across the Caucasus.”

Songs reminiscent of Latin-inspired big band music, such as Pink Martini’s “Let’s Never Stop Falling in Love” (from their whimsically titled album “Hang on, Little Tomato!”) add a funky, fun flavor to the mix. Blake also includes experimental-type, spoken word recordings from avant-garde performers such as Laurie Anderson and her French artist Nico. Listeners are transported to the New York jazz club scene of the 1950s when Blake plays vocalist Blossom Dearie’s recordings (you can’t help but remember the delicate “doll-house” voice heard on the Schoolhouse Rock song “Figure Eight” from the early 1970s).

Listeners will also enjoy a musical history lesson as well, as Blake also features “classic” women’s music performers from the 1970s, such as Holly Near and Judee Sill. During one show, Blake heard about the song “The Kiss,” which Blake called “just divine,” but also learned it was from the album “Heart Food,” produced in 1973, the first release by David Geffen, and available in a limited, 5,000-copy edition on the Rhino label. In addition to songs by contemporary women’s music artists, such as Sarah McLachlan, Ani DiFranco, and Shawn Colvin, Blake includes new material by mainstream pop acts such as Alanis Morissette, the Meat Puppets, and the cartwheel-like instrumentals of Loreena McKennitt and Paul Simon’s “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover.”

For example, the played songs about HIV, such as Lisa Cooke’s “Three Times a Year,” to mark World AIDS Day. Other musical genres and environmental issues, such as Heather Levy’s “If Cars Were Banned,” anti-war protests, or, during election time, politics, Blake adds considerable time to gay/bi music programming as well: “I think I owe it to my gay listeners and for diversity’s sake. Besides, I like it!”

A Sense of Humor

Blake’s sense of humor comes across in her choice of upbeat, melodic “novelty” songs such as “When Cats Take Over the World,” by singer-songwriter Jamie Anderson, and “There’s a Viagur in the Water” written and performed by Camille West of the group Four Bitchin’ Babes. Humor and social commentary combine in Deirdre Flint’s self-produced upbeat, folk rock tune, “Sister Catherine Claire,” about “the coolest nun in the whole darn world” who taught her Catholic school students the rock ‘n’ roll “Our Father.” While the song is funny, it also has an underlying feminist message, as Flint sings that she’ll “come back to the banquet” one day when white smoke rises from the Vatican “declaring Pope Catherine Claire.” Incidentally, Blake was among the first two students to graduate from a Las Vegas Catholic high school.

While the female voice serves as the key characteristic of “Women’s Voices,” Blake is conscious of the songs she chooses to appeal to both men and women, songs that “are universal, relevant to both sexes.” Indeed, she estimates 90 percent of listener calls comes from men.

“Every one of these fellows thanks me for opening my eyes to the female point of view and the women’s perspective on heart and souls in a way male artists simply cannot or will not do,” she says. “I’m very happy with my male listenership.”

Newer artists receive airplay and exposure otherwise not available. The community radio nature of KUNV-FM allows Blake to create ties with local artists – and their families. For example, the group includes Las Vegas native Rachel Belinski, whose uncle is a long-time listener and sent Blake the group’s album, and whose mother was biomass her the story behind the album. Singer Janet Bates sent a preliminary cut of her anti-war protest song, “Women in Black” to Blake directly. Such personal connections to local artists allow Blake to incorporate new material and help promote women artists in a way that no commercial, mainstream station possibly could. Today, Blake’s station is known as the “booming,” especially women who are producing their own CDs, compared with just 10 years ago, says Blake. The Lilith Fairs of the 1990s helped bring women’s music to the forefront inspired a new generation of women to write and record their own music.

The Lilith Fairs were a turning point in women-making-music,” she notes. “And all these attendees saw women working together onstage, famous and not-so, all sharing their music, leaving vanities in their trailer: no ego-tripping!”

In her pursuit of finding music that “takes your breath away,” Blake finds herself “constantly amazed” at the wide scope of the music women are writing and performing. “I had no idea of the diversity of women in music when I took over the show because, until then, my musical world had been folk and classical and jazz, and I never had heard what was going on in alternative rock, for instance, and my ears were opened!” So I want to bring as much of that diversity as I can to my listeners and just keep learning and expanding, for me and for them.

An Endangered Species

Today in our world of governmental deregulation, media conglomeration, and station automation, community radio, with its locally based and original radio programming, is becoming an endangered species. Programs such as “Women’s Voices” and others like it across the country provide a welcome respite from the cookie-cutter radio world of 20-song playlists, and advance the progress of women in culture, the media industry, and society in general. These havens of creativity need our involvement, not only in terms of listenership, but financially, as public radio finds itself increasingly dependent on private support.

Regarding the future of women’s music, and its status on the airwaves, Lont rightly observed, “The question remains whether the message of women’s music has been heard by enough people to result in more changes than just the acceptance of a few women performers in mainstream music” (p. 126). Today, women’s broadcasters like Gerrie Blake continue the work started by our feminist foremothers to have our voices heard – in words and music that speak to all.

REFERENCES:


“Women’s Voices” (continued)

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The term “women’s music” referred to more than just the music, as Lott explains: “The aesthetic and customary norms that produced the music were a tangible example of the power of women organized apart from the dominant culture” (p. 127).

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Listeners are also treated to a music history lesson as well, as Blake also features “classic” women’s music performers from the 1970s, such as Holly Near and Judee Sill. During one show, listeners heard an entire album by the German band Kraan, and sent Blake the group’s album, and whose rock song “Figure Eight” from the early 1970s).

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