Radio no go on local music

By Claudia Perry

Boston radio stations for the most part are indifferent to the local musicians that depend on them for exposure. Only WCAS and WBCN make any effort to play music by local bands. On the basis of WCAS' airplay, the Pousette-Dart band was able to sign with Capitol Records. The Cars signed with Elektra after their demo tape of "You're Just What I Needed" received considerable airplay on WBCN.

Randi Kirshbaum, weekend voice on WBCN and familiar to Washington DC's fertile local music scene, told The Tech that the interaction between clubs, bands, and radio stations worked as well as it can in a market as large as Boston. "Washington DC is an exception," she said, "and the station I worked for [WHFS] was an exception to the Washington market. WHFS' audience was small but loyal to the station and its advertisers."

Kirshbaum added that WBCN is the only FM album-oriented station that plays local music as part of its regular programming. Bands like Human Sexual Response, the Marshall and the Real Kids have been played on WBCN and reflect the listening audience's taste. Kirshbaum said that she doubted that WBCN would play much local folk and blues because the criteria for playing music by local bands is very simple. The tapes have to be of good quality and appeal to our audience, which favors mostly rock 'n' roll and New Wave. Kirshbaum said that there is little airplay on WBCN for folk and blues regularly. Unfortunately they are hindered by their low wattage and on-air hours from reaching a larger audience.

WBCN's and WCAS efforts comprise most of Boston's local music on the radio. WCOZ plays folk, rock and blues regularly. Unfortunately they are hindered by their low wattage and on-air hours from reaching a larger audience. WBCN recently reaffirmed their commitment to local music. This Sunday the popular Boston Sunday Review will be devoted to a discussion of the local music scene with two area personalities, Luna and James Montgomery. Most stations probably wouldn't risk losing a large audience by doing a show like this but WBCN has been consistently refreshing its programming style.

The fact that doing a show on two local bands is a gamble raises questions as to what radio stations are trying to do for their audience. Should a station try to help local artists or just play all the hits all the time? Some, like WBCN and WCAS do both with some success. But stations like these are exceptions here or anywhere.

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