



They Say It's Your Birthday

WRFL's class of 88
By Matt Dacey

Every year, Beloit College in Wisconsin issues a Mindset List as it pertains to that year's incoming college freshmen. A couple of the items from last year's list: "Earvin "Magic" Johnson has always been HIV-positive." and "Bobby Cox has always managed the Atlanta Braves."

As March arrives, people in Lexington and at the University of Kentucky celebrate the anniversary of the inaugural broadcast at WRFL, which happened on March 8, 1988. So what was the mindset of the original Class of WRFL, at least in regards to running a radio station?

For one thing, and this is quite startling in retrospect,

design to 8-tracks, that radio stations used to use to record and play promo spots. The production room was a mirror image of the air studio, and had all the same equipment as the air studio, as well as a couple of reel-to-reel tape recorders.

Today, the entire process of recording and editing a promo can be done using a single computer. In March, 1988, WRFL had yet to acquire its first computer. Promos were recorded in the production room on the reel-to-reel, spliced together by hand using a razor blade and special tape, and dubbed onto carts. If we wanted music with a voiceover, that

perpetually promote the station, because it puts a human face on WRFL for all passersby.

In 1988, the mindset was considerably different.

For one thing, the station was originally slotted to be built in the basement of Miller Hall. The University gave us a nice old office, with three back rooms. The front area was to be the reception area, and the three remaining rooms were to be the air studio, the production room, and a storage room. Looking back, it seems both quaint and ludicrous now. We would have run out of room for records sometime in 1989. Thank you, asbestos!

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WRFL did not own a CD player of any sort in 1988. There was some discussion as to whether or not we needed CD players, but since vinyl was the dominant format at the time, and it was still uncertain whether CDs would catch on, the decision was made to hold off on the purchase of CD players.

In the air studio, we had two turntables, a cassette player, and two cart machines. Carts are cartridges, similar in

involved cueing a record to just the right spot, then literally talking over the music.

The air studio itself is a primary focal point of WRFL today, located in the same spot that was occupied by Kopy Kat (UK's in-house version of Kinko's) in 1988. Anybody who happens to walk past in the Student Center can peek in at the DJ currently on the air, which is an ingenious way to

Not long after UK gave us those offices in Miller Hall, it was determined that construction of a radio station there wouldn't be feasible, and the presence of asbestos was indeed a primary reason. So we got the old storage room behind Kopy Kat instead, and the original plan was to maintain the business offices at Miller Hall, while the Student Center location would be strictly used for broadcast and pro-

duction purposes.

When the WRFL staff consisted of a handful of people, working diligently to do all the things necessary to build a radio station from the ground up, Miller Hall was all business. By the time the Fall 1987 semester rolled around, and the staff had increased in size to 60-plus, Miller Hall had become our de-facto hangout. During the day, it was a place to meet friends, eat lunch, make free phone calls, listen to music, and have a good time. We also had three IBM Selectric II typewriters, which allowed us to bypass the wait at the library and type our papers in a more leisurely (albeit less studious) setting. Even though there was no actual broadcast

equipment located there, we all called it “the station.”

There was some concern that once actual broadcasting commenced, the shenanigans at Miller Hall would gravitate to the Student Center, and would cause WRFL to sound less than professional. One of the reasons the original air studio was located in the innermost sanctum of the Student Center space was in an effort to keep ambient noise out. It was also felt that the DJ on the air would benefit from the relative privacy that space was intended to afford.

Of course, none of that happened. The day we started broadcasting, everybody quit hanging out at Miller Hall and started hanging out at the new station instead. Most of the

jocks kept the door to the air studio propped open, thereby eliminating the noise/shenanigan barrier. And we certainly didn’t sound professional.

But you know what? We sounded damn good. ■

The tower construction is scheduled for the week of UK’s spring break (March 15th), weather permitting. It’s quite possible that it will be pushed back a little if there are any complications.

It’s been paid for by several years of saving, as well as lots of donations over the course of the past 2-plus years. FreeKY fest was WRFL’s big fundraising push, which raised awareness of the need.

The new Tower means that WRFL listeners will no longer be alone in central Kentucky! For listeners in Lexington, the signal will be stronger and clearer than ever.

A Free Show planned in celebration on April 23rd. No Age will headline.
—Ainsley Wagoner

WRFL now

By Megan Neff, current DJ, music director, & student

Like WRFL, I am also 22-years-old. I have also followed the necessary Darwinian strategies of adaptation to survive in an age bent on unimpeded technological advancement.

The allegorical path is tricky, though. I have not been around to witness the full cycle of infancy, childhood, adolescence and now young adulthood of WRFL. I only know it



Megan Neff in the WRFL office.

intimately in its most recent capacity. The rest exists in my mind as loosely bound snapshots, in a series of anecdotes.

However, the capacity in which I’ve come to know WRFL, like my own position in the universal life cycle, is also poised for change. Perhaps it is also blinded by a similar breed of youthful idealism. But isn’t that what got this started in the first place?

The rich history of WRFL, plastered on the station’s walls, is impossible to ignore. A collage of yellowed newspaper clippings and show posters dating to the late 1980s cling to the walls, overlapping one another, vying for attention. An old on-air mixing board hangs over a door leading to U.K.’s Student Center: a symbolic totem denoting the passage of generations of DJs as eclectic as the station’s programming.

The on-air room mixes the old school with the new. Turntables and tape decks complete a 90-degree countertop, sharing space with a stack of three CD players, the “board”

and an iMac. Vinyl is played alongside mp3 players, prepared mix CDs and music stored on a vast 3.65 terabyte-deep server—a server that houses the latest Sub Pop release as well as archives for digitized vinyl and tapes. And speaking from experience, no technology is infallible, be it digital or analog.

CDs and the occasional tape constantly rotate in and out of playboxes focusing on the newest music around the world to the freshest tunes off Lexington’s streets. Bands have come, performed and gone. Local bands have formed and dissolved. Venues have been built and torn down to be rebuilt elsewhere.

The cycle is constant—365 days a year, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—allowing no time for stagnation. And it is at this point in the cycle that the individual might demand: WHY?

Because, simply, there is always more to discover. From my 10 months as music director, I can promise you there is more music than you would ever be curious to know. There is enough to fill your head to the point of self-combustion. Sometimes I can feel it going into my head only to leak out my ears and lie in helpless puddles around my feet.

Maybe that does not present the most appealing image, but the point is that the music world has a lot more to offer



DJ Anthony Taylor at the WRFL studio

than commercial radio’s repeated cycle of the latest antiseptic pop songs. And WRFL has, since its inception existed in order to seek out the music world’s most interesting, deserv-

ing, and at times more elusive, offerings to deliver.

With the upgrade to the new tower literally looming ahead this month, what began as a boldly self-proclaimed music revolution in the city of Lexington will extend its influence even farther across the central Bluegrass.

Scheduled to upgrade from 250 to 7900 watts, WRFL will drastically broaden its campaign of providing commercial-free radio to include Georgetown, Midway, Frankfort, Shelbyville, and Lawrenceburg.

The effort has included over 10 years’ worth of petitioning, lobbying, campaigning and fundraising that has called upon the efforts of past general managers, DJs and countless community volunteers to make this year’s landmark a reality. And by way of celebrating the upgrade in Lexington, No Age will headline a free show on April 23. More details on this will be announced within the month.

Ainsley Wagoner, current general manager at WRFL, offered up some poignant words on the upgrade and how it will affect the cultures in and around Lexington:

“Lexington has been privileged for 22 years to have access to WRFL’s cultural contributions and now even more people in Kentucky are going to be discovering their new favorite artists, inspired to start creative endeavors of their own, and realizing that they’re not alone in wanting something different. It’s very rare for a scrawny underdog like us to get this chance. WRFL is such a beautiful community, and the more people that know about it means the more people that can either be a part of it or start their own subversive movement.”

No, this piece as an allegory would not work.

Our lives will follow a circular path.

Strange as it seems, old age will creep up on me. I will slow down until the day that I, like everyone else, will die—though hopefully not before living the life-long dream of driving a flying car.

But WRFL’s signal, so to speak, the culmination of so much collective energy over the course of over two decades’ worth of music-loving diligence, will continue to grow and affect the creative wealth of communities spanning the state in ways unimaginable even to the idealistic mind of this 22-year-old. ■