A Note From the Editor:

Zinesters,

I am very excited to announce that for the first time, listen has an official staff. You’ve probably also noticed our new glossy color cover, and that WMRE’s very own zine is now bound (a.k.a. stapled). Now I want to point out what Emory’s listen has over big names like Rolling Stone: in our very first infant issue of fall 2001, listen published an article about an Atlanta singer-songwriter destined to hit it big...an artist by the name of John Mayer. (This editor actually ran into Mayer skulking around downtown Atlanta her freshman year, and he was pretty rude to anyone who approached him.) In addition, listen has published articles on Hasidic reggae star Matisyahu and alt-country genius Richard Buckner a year before their names hit the pages of Rolling Stone. Also, WMRE brought local band Blame Game to campus last year, whom Creative Loafing named Best Local Band in their latest Best of Atlanta issue.

In addition to staying a step ahead, as an Atlanta magazine, we’d like to encourage you to support local bands. One of my favorites is A Fir Ju Well, who will be playing for free on campus November 17. They cite influences from The Flaming Lips and The Beatles to Pink Floyd, and are truly incredible live (www.afirjuwell.com). Another Georgia group is The Joey Allcorn Band: country done well, the classic honky-tonk non-pop way, which you can check out at Smith’s Olde Bar November 21 (www.joeyallcorn.com). And Atlanta’s new answer to The Allman Brothers is Delta Moon, a bluesy, jammy little band that puts on one hell of a show, at Blind Willie’s October 29 (www.deltamoon.com).

We at listen encourage anyone (and especially members of the Emory community) to submit articles, poetry, photos and art for publication. As always, listen to us at www.wmre.org (or channel 26 on campus) and enjoy our little zine.

Rock on!
Valerie
**November Concert Calendar**

2 The Giraffes  
(Drunken Unicorn)  
3 Project/Object  
(The Five Spot)  
4 Richard Thompson with Danny Thompson  
(Variety Playhouse)  
4 Adrian Legg  
(Red Light Café)  
5 Copeland, Daphne Loves Derby, Melee, The Spill Canvas  
(Masquerade: Heaven)  
5 Depeche Mode  
(The Gwinnet Arena)  
5 Laurie Lewis & Tom Rozum  
(Red Light Café)  
5 James McMurtry  
(The Five Spot)  
5 Switchfoot with Augustana  
(40 Watt Club in Athens)  
6 Joan Baez  
(Variety Playhouse)  
8 Gwen Steffani, Black Eyed Peas, MIA  
(Gwinnet Arena)  
9 Charlotte Martin  
(Red Light Café)  
12 LCD Soundsystem, The Juan Maclean, Caribou  
(Earthlink Live)  
15 Ben Folds  
(The Tabernacle)  
17 Kanye West  
(Philips Arena)  
17 WMRE/Spoke Localfest  
18 G. Love, Special Sauce, Blackalicious (Roxy)  
18 U2 (Philips Arena)  
19 U2 (Philips Arena)  
25 The Dandy Warhols  
(Earthlink Live)  
25 Drive By Truckers  
(Tabernacle)  

**WMRE's Third Annual Local Band Festival**

featuring:
A Fir Ju Well
The Whigs
The Selmanaires
God's America

November 17 @ 7 PM

Space is limited, so arrive early.
Gorillaz – Demon Days
(Virgin Records, www.gorillaz.com)
I’d like to show off a syllogism I learned in an Aristotelian logic class: Anything featured in Wired Magazine is hip. The Gorillaz were featured in Wired Magazine. Therefore, the Gorillaz are hip. Oh yeah, their music is good, too. And the girl monkey is cute. —David Ogles

Kanye West – Late Registration
(Roc-a-Fella, www.kanyewest.com)
Forget his public antics, Bush-bashing and smug camera-whoring, Kanye makes some highly original, hooky and club-friendly hip-hop here. He and producer Jon Brion drop the Alvin and the Chipmunks shtick in favor of less annoying and more re-playable Jamie Foxx samples and old-school synths. There’s a song here for every possible human situation – except maybe the GOP convention. —David Ogles

Black Dice - Broken Ear Record
(Death from Above Records, www.blackdice.net)
Black Dice’s third album surpasses Creature Comforts in its more raw and rough sound, while also providing more depth in its distorted synthesizer and guitar. The beats come through almost primal, and the vocals are reminiscent of tribal chanting somehow bringing the listener to a plane that is spacey or like beehive-like. —Leuwam Tesfai

Fiona Apple – Extraordinary Machines
(Sony, www.fiona-apple.com)
The sleaze ball executives responsible for delaying this release for almost three years should be shot. Apple turns in an intense but playful performance teetering on the edge of her pop sensibilities. Though there are some weak tracks, she carves herself a place as the sorority girl’s Bjork. Sort of. —David Ogles

Partyline - Girls with Glasses EP
(Retard Disco, www.partylinedc.com)
Reminiscing Riot Grrl’s heyday, Partyline’s first album provides empowering and witty lyrics sprinkled with kids’ club hijinkx. Some of the songs seem repetitive but they all make you want to jump on your bed. the album is filled with driving guitar and catchy harmonies. ex-applicators and bratmobile. —Leuwam Tesfai

The Juan Maclean – Less Than Human
(SubPopRecords, http://www.thejuancleane.com)
Funky and soulful, yet cold androbotic, The Juan Maclean is on the cutting edge of emotional electronica for our jaded, postmodern age. It’s very Kraftwerk-esque, but who isn’t? Check out “Give Me Every Little Thing,” the best electronic song of the year.—David Ogles
Just Dance Me In

Everyone has some absurd phobia. Some are afraid of spiders, some are spooked by small dark places, others are freaked out by heights. And me? I’m not afraid of eight-legged creatures, nor claustrophobic, and I love standing at the edge of tall cliffs. What fear remains? Drum roll, please: I am afraid of dancing in public. I know you’re wondering why a music geek would admit she’s afraid of something that jives oh so naturally with music. After all, concerts and dancing are like peanut butter and jelly, or dish soap and sponges. Then September 29, 2005 changed my life.

My friends know me as one of the queens of the free ticket world. I constantly win tickets to concerts and events from WREK (Georgia Tech’s radio station, 91.1) and WRAS (Georgia State University’s radio station, 88.5). One day in early September, I was browsing at Decatur CD to pick up something for my WMRE show (Foreign Substance, Wednesday nights from 9-10. And yes, the previous sentence was a shameless plug for my show.) Right, so I bought a French indie CD and entered the drawing for tickets to The Decemberists’ concert. After leaving the store, I promptly forgot about ever entering. Fast forward to September 28 when Warren Hudson, the free-spirited jovial owner of Decatur CD, calls me. “Are you Jessica Gearing? Well, you have two free passes to The Decemberists tomorrow night.” I almost danced in my room at that moment, almost, but people were there with me. Randomly winning tickets to one of my favorite American bands? Yes, please, I’ll take two!

I happily bounced across campus the next twenty-four hours, and finally it was time to drive downtown to The Tabernacle. Atlanta traffic is, perhaps, the bane of our existence in this city. You would think I would be used to it after eighteen years, but no; as thousands of cars inched along I-85, I cursed the highway’s existence. I dragged my soon-to-be boyfriend into the venue and waited with gleeful anticipation, alternating tiny shrieks with small jumps.

The lights dimmed and the opening band snuck on stage. My experiences this year with opening bands have been fantastic. September 29 was no different. David Gow beat out the opening rhythm, Scott Paterson jammed along on his guitar with Ailidh Lennon stoically providing the bass line. Then Adele Bethel began to sing. Adele Bethel is my new musical heroine. Her voice combined with Scott’s is surreal. I felt like I was transported to another world where rock-and-roll was completely organic, and unhindered, simple beats and guitar and piano chords emphasized the eerie low melodies.

Somehow, each band member’s character and energy carried the show. At first the music was too strange for me to easily embrace, but each person on stage had his or her own persona, which amplified the individualistic quality of the music. Unfortunately I could not easily see David, the drummer, but Scott maintained an aloof presence on stage right. Ailidh stood at stage’s left corner, bobbing her head to the music, picking the bass line, and staring into the audience, eyes practically glazed over, somber mouthed in perfect quintessential 70’s rock-mode. Adele, though, invaded the audience’s space. While she never left the stage, her intense dance moves seemed to be directed right at me, first, reprimanding me for not being lost in the music, and second, inviting me to revel in the phantasmal marriage of avant-garde and rock.

I stood, like I usually stand at concerts, head bobbing and foot thumping. You know, the “I am an indie kid” look. The music assaulted me, and Adele seemed to be pointing right at me as she sang. I was joyously lost in the beats and harmonies, but I refused to let my body loose. Then they sang “Dance Me In,” and it all made sense: the music, Adele’s dancing, Ailidh’s stoicism. I wish I could say that I let loose and danced like there was no tomorrow. But my hips did start to move, and my body found its groove. Sons and Daughters set me free that night.

All too soon the band left, clearing the stage for The Decemberists, which really was not all too soon, because The Decemberists are beyond amazing live. But the grin on my face after watching Sons and Daughters was massive. I immediately left the floor in front of the stage and bought their CD, Love the Cup, from a tall, dark and handsome Scottish man. He recommended buying their full-length CD, The Repulsion Box, if I liked it.

The point of this rambling article is, of course, to recommend listening to Sons and Daughters: they are an amazing band. The other point is that sons and Daughters liberated me from my public dancing phobia (for a while at least). So if you ever see me dancing across campus, it’s because there’s a Sons and Daughters song in my head (not on my iPod, because I’m too poor to own one). If you watched me this past week on WMRE, I was actually dancing on camera to one of their songs. How’s that for letting loose! And though I’m still afraid of dancing in clubs, David, Scott, Ailidh, and Adele gave me hope for a future of free-spirited social dancing.

God bless the Scots! — Jess Gearing
From India to America: Metallica was my Savior

I distinctly remember the moment when Rock and Roll punched me hard in the face and burned deep in my cortex its contract of servitude. It was in junior high, and like most every other ugly, awkward adolescent boy, I was arguably into whatever I’m guessing was cool to be into at the time; arguably. Since we had just moved from India and made Georgia our new home, we were constantly at the mall (which I know doesn’t logically follow, but our family never questioned that), to do whatever it is we thought needed to be accomplished. The good thing about the mall is that they had a Blockbuster Music store with listening stations that would play any CD you brought up to the station, and you could just sit there for hours listening to a bunch of CDs. I’m sure they hated having this service for “potential” customers, especially since they knew I wasn’t buying shit— but fuck them!

Anyway, at that time, Metallica had just released their “new” album, “Load,” which was the beginning of Metallica’s commercial success. I rented the album, and the next time we were at the mall, I went to Blockbuster and picked what I thought would be one of their early albums. I had only been exposed to them before this album, so I took matters into my own hands. The next time we were at the mall, I went to Blockbuster and picked what I thought would be one of their early albums, “Kill 'Em All,” and handed it to the guy behind the counter. I put some massive headphones on, and the first song, “Fight Fire with Fire,” started.

This was the start of the rest of my life. The song starts off with a pretty, melodic, and bright acoustic guitar part and after this very brief ten second introduction, the melody resolves and the lingering final chord oh so delicately decays into sprawling sinister feedback that fills the space of the headphones, and it’s this precise moment that changed me forever. Then the feedback immediately turns into one of the darkest, heaviest, and fastest metal thrashes ever that unmistakably made my stomach scared to be so close to my heart and lungs, which had momentarily stopped working, while all those sensory neurons in my brain started firing like mad, redirecting my bone marrow to start pumping lead into my system. I LITERALLY could not believe what I was hearing. It was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me at the time, and if that’s pretty lame, then fuck you. I understood then what the fuss was about.

Now, even though I don’t currently consider myself someone who particularly enjoys metal a whole lot, the sound of an angry distorted guitar turned to eleven sounds like a brother in blood ready to lay down on the tracks for me. That’s what I cherish most about rock-and-roll: it’s unselfish sacrifice for my peace of mind.—Vijay Ram

How an Indie Snob Learned to Love 99x

At 2:12 p.m., October 22, 2005, my indie cred was officially declared dead. Yes ladies and gentlemen, I have perpetuated the most heinous, unspeakable crime against underground culture: I listened to commercial radio, and I liked it.

As many of you know, Georgia State radio (WRAS 88.5) has long set the standard for “quality” playlists in Atlanta. However, as the Garden State soundtrack, MTVu, The Flaming Lips performing with SpongeBob Squarepants, and The OC have started to bring formerly underground (accessible) bands to the forefront, Georgia State music has gotten more obscure. During non-morning hours, there’s some pretty terrible stuff on the air. I can just imagine kids with ‘fro-mullets searching wildly through little-known blogs to find the newest noise-jam-synth-Joy Division-but-definitely-not-Interpole-sque single coming out of New York.

Luckily, the ad wizards at commercial radio stations have begun to catch on that indie music is, in fact, pop music, just pop music that no one has heard of, and that “alternative” music is actually just the niche-market for an extreme. The 99x (99.7 FM) iPod shuffle weekends are pure brilliance. ClearChannel and its competitors are starting to understand that the appeal of radio is a DJ’s unique taste coupled with a city’s local flavor. Commercial DJs are being given more freedom to pick songs out of their own collection, leading to transitions from Nirvana to Michael Jackson to The Rapture to the Unicorns (yeah, I know, The Unicorns on 99x) to the Cure. In a way, it’s even better than listening to your own iPod on shuffle; at least there’s a chance you’ll hear something totally new. And compared to the new WRAS, there’s a much better chance the new song is something you’ll actually enjoy.—David Ogles
Typical Influence

Hear me, pay attention, put your shoes on.
We are through being cool, Divided between Indie and Pop.
How can we compete with your reality?
Inspire us, breathe into us personality.
The stars say, “Look into my eyes.”
But I don’t even know myself inside,
Like a cat in a bag waiting to drown.
I want to be a lion.
Strive to be unique just to belong.
But I can’t change if it’s only in my mind.
Just a desperate attempt to fan the flame without the fire.
—Ben Katz

Beyond the Radio:
What Underground Music Stores Have to Offer

I started working at Criminal Records last August. My first week, I learned a very important life lesson: almost everyone needs help cultivating his or her music taste. I became familiar with the phrases, “I heard it on 88.5,” or worse, “I heard it on Star 94,” and even, “I don’t remember the artist’s name, John something.” This is sad, but true: most people aren’t aware of what they are listening to, they do not truly digest thoughtful lyrics and enjoy incredible instrumentation. Even though Criminal Records has a reputation for being a store that will reject you for having “bad” music taste, we sell a variety of music. We carry Dave Matthews, Bloc Party and even Hilary Duff.

Criminal Records, like college radio, is a “taste-maker.” It is a store that has the ability and resources to supercharge music palettes. But people have to be open-minded for us to make any kind of impact. So when a customer comes in who actually wants to listen to our opinion of music, tells us what he likes and asks what we recommend for him, we take it very seriously.

The main problem I have is that people often don’t realize what else is out there. If you have listened to a lot of bands and like pop-punk Yellowcard, for example, that’s fine. I have no problem with you. But if you haven’t listened to Death from Above 1979, please let us help you find something with a more original sound.

I’ve heard people claim there is no “good” music out, but I can think of five local bands gaining popularity whose lyrics and carefully crafted tunes could beat the shit out of a band like Lifehouse. The bands are: The Selmanaires, Blame Game, The Tom Collins, Dropsonic and A Fir-Ju Well, which I highly recommend checking out.

Often, people find an underground artist who has a more unique sound than usually heard on the radio. For example, Saul Williams is an amazing spoken word artist who also does hip hop. When he played at Criminal Records for free last year, about twenty college kids were drawn into the store that used to only know Kanye West and have since expanded their musical horizons.

All of this means you do not need to take what the music industry throws at you. You want good music? We can help you find it! By supporting independent record stores (where employees listen to all kinds of pop and underground music that comes out), instead of buying the first thing that pops up on iTunes why not checkout local bands with cheap albums and convenient concerts, and often whose sound is more original than a 99x play list. Try experimenting with different genres and listening to bands you’ve never heard before. Criminal Records has music posts that let you listen to almost anything in the store, as well as free CDs if you ask, and free in-store performances at least twice a week. In short: take advantage of free music, cheap shows, and tune in to WMRE on channel 26 or www.wmre.org to see what the rest of Emory is listening to. You just might be blown away by the world outside the common radio. (And on a personal note: please, never ever listen to Nickel Creek. Seriously, they are bad.)—Alexa Roman
Good Ole New Orleans
Until I was three, my family lived in Cleveland, Ohio. Do you know what’s in Ohio? Ohio State University, The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame...I can’t think of anything else. After that, for almost two decades, we lived in New Orleans. So New Orleans is the home of nearly all my memories of growing up. And do you know what’s in New Orleans? Everything.

Or at least, everything was in New Orleans. A couple months ago, a storm blew my city away, scattering us all to Houston, to Dallas, to Atlanta and elsewhere, where we waited and watched for our drowned homes to surface. Through this whole mess, I’ve personally been really lucky. My relatives are safe, I know where my friends are, and my house made it through in one piece. And as for silver linings, my family is getting to re-bond with old friends who have offered part of their home as refuge – in the Upper East Side. So if I have any losses to mourn or any anxious questions, they’re losses and anxieties I’ll survive. I’m thankful for that. But I sometimes feel like I’m grieving, or at least worried sick that I’ll have to grieve soon.

Grieve for what? I’ll start with the obvious. Everybody knows New Orleans is a historic epicenter of jazz music, and that the heirs of this tradition are still producing music there. A few months ago, on any given night, you had a pretty good chance of finding a Neville playing somewhere between the French Quarter and the Shipping District. (Whereas now, when Fats Domino he went home to the Ninth Ward after the hurricane, he found his gold records, but his picture with Elvis was unsalvageable.)

Growing up, I spent time at a local arts school in the Faubourg Marigny, which hosted music lectures. Big names played every night at Preservation Hall and Snug Harbor, and lesser-known artists played every night at the Apple Barrel or the Spotted Cat or d.b.a. or the Blue Nile. But these venues also hosted folk singers, zydeco families, blues acts, Brazilian samba bands, and even indie rockers. In tenth grade, I spent the evening of the Saturday before Mardi Gras with Modest Mouse and a local sleaze-rock band called Morning Forty Federation, which played songs like “Nin’ Ward” and “Chili Cheeze Fries.” In eleventh grade, on a Saturday in March, I wandered into a full-bloom Audubon Park and found The Old 97’s playing by the river. Other cities may have more exciting modern music scenes, but in New Orleans, you could find music without breaking a sweat; pick a downtown street to wander down and discover a handful of bands you never knew you liked.

But probably anyone could write about the New Orleans music scene better than I can, and most readers of this zine probably have an idea of New Orleans’ music heritage. So what else is in this city I loved? Well, centuries’ worth of porches and colonnades, narrow alleys and wrought-iron balconies, apartments right above stores, a hundred street corners that feel more like Europe than the New World, and the Mississippi River at its biggest, dirtiest, and most overwhelming winding right through. Delicately-scented Japanese magnolias peppered across the streets of February, brilliant fuchsia azaleas burst into April, live oaks with beards of Spanish moss served as backdrop for Christmas in the Oaks. We had t-shirt weather the day after New Year’s, and seafood restaurants with patios running right out onto Lake Ponchartrain – the same lake whose inexorable spilling-over destroyed those patios this August. Hell, there were all kinds of restaurants – venerable ones and upstarts, Creole or soul food or Vietnamese, mom-and-pop joints or pricier-than-appliance-shopping cuisine dining – all part of a simultaneously historic and evolving culinary culture that is probably the country’s best.

New Orleans was also home to all sorts of people, from old women calling everyone “darling” and high school students in Catholic-school uniforms who both party harder than you, to the scam artist who bets tourists twenty bucks he can guess “where you got them shoes,” chain-smoking fortune-tellers on the cathedral plaza, and kids who nail bottle-caps to their shoes and tap-dance for tips. New Orleans is a strange place to make a living. Slow, noisy streetcars with wooden benches go from nowhere to nowhere: terribly inefficient, yet terribly charming. And lumps of fried dough are served covered in confectioner’s sugar, washed down with really, really good chicory coffee. That’s my home. That’s my heart.

Nobody can say whether the city will come back to life. Even with levees patched and strengthened, trees replanted and buildings resurrected, who knows whether the residents and the businesses will return? Some won’t. It’ll be decades, maybe centuries, before oak saplings reach the size of the trees shading St. Charles Avenue or provide the town’s best climbing terrain in City Park. We residents are all hoping everything will work out – that everyone will remember and return, that the city will rise again more vibrant than before – yet are dreading that it won’t. Some three hundred years old, with corruption at all levels of government and pavement that cracked every few months owing to the shifting water table, New Orleans always did have a funny feeling of decay about it, which made you wonder how the city had lasted so long and how much longer it would. But in a city so replete with its own history that some say it’s stuck in the past, those who call it home have no choice but to make that history their present – and in turn keep it very much alive. I’d like to think if enough of us make sure to remember the way it was, at some point, New Orleans will find a way to keep on being itself. —Roula Abisamra
Payola is back. Or rather, the same scandalous practice that (along with a plane crash, a pre-teen-inbred-marriage, a jail sentence, a war in Korea, and a religious rebirth) ruined the career of pioneering rock-and-roll DJ Alan Freed. The original scandal marked the end of the first wave of rock-and-roll as the 1950s approached the 60s, but appears to have never really gone away. This summer, after an investigation by New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer produced buckets of damning evidence, Sony BMG confessed to using illegal payola practices to promote its artists and agreed to pay a 10 million dollar fine. Memos, emails, and other documents prove that Sony BMG gave radio stations vacations, concert tickets, operation expenses, sneakers, laptops, plasma tvs, and sometimes cold-hard cash to increase radio-play for several artists, including Celine Dion, J-Lo, Franz Ferdinand, John Mayer, Jessica Simpson, Beyonce Knowles, Audioslave, Train, Big Mike, Switchfoot, Good Charlotte, Maroon 5, Kelly Rowland, and Duran Duran.

Payola, a contraction of the words “pay” and “Victrola,” an old-fashion LP player, is the term for record companies’ habit of offering radio stations compensation to spin specific records. The practice, in one form or another, has existed in the music business even longer than radio. During the Tin Pan Alley era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, music publishers paid orchestra leaders or popular performers to perform their songs. Instead of hoping to sell CDs or records, the publishers hoped to sell copies of sheet music.

Payola quickly adapted to radio; during the 1950s it was quite a common and open practice. The first federal payola investigation was largely instigated by ASCAP (American Society of Composers and Publishers). During the first half of the 20th Century, ASCAP established a virtual monopoly on royalties from mainstream music licensing, but ASCAP began losing market share during the 50s, partly because of high fees for the music they controlled. So radio DJs began playing songs licensed by a competing organization, BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated). BMI licensed many of the “race” and “hillbilly” artists previously discarded by ASCAP, including most of the original rock-and-roll acts. Pissed because they were losing profits to “uncultured noise,” ASCAP urged The House Oversight Subcommittee Chairman, Oren Harris, to look into the recording industry’s illegal payola practices. ASCAP claimed payola was the only reason for rock and roll’s prominence on the radio, and that the no-good rock-and-roll music by a bunch of greasers and Negroes (I’ll spare you the word they probably used) was corrupting the nation’s youth. As NY Times journalist Lorne Manly explains, “A racial undercurrent coursed through the controversy, as the music in question often was rhythm and blues, considered to be black music.”

The investigation by Congress found that some of the most popular DJs, including Alan Freed and Dick Clark, were playing songs in exchange for money. In 1960, Congress made payola a misdemeanor offense penalized by up to a $10,000 fine or a year in prison, their rationale being airwaves are publicly licensed and, thus, radio stations should be as independent as possible from commercial interests of the music industry. Federal regulations now require a station that receives or is promised payment for airing material to disclose the fact that the material is sponsored and identify that sponsor when the material is broadcast.

However, the practice of payola didn’t vanish after the 1960 ruling, though it became less flagrant, at least initially. Changes in the radio industry, including programming decisions switched from individual DJs to program directors and the consolidation of the networks, made it easier for record labels to influence radio airplay on a larger scale. Instead of going directly to stations, record labels began employing “independent promoters,” who lavished cash or gifts, such as cocaine and hookers, at the program directors in exchange for airplay.
Every Spin has a Price
* An all-expenses-paid trip to see Celine Dion in Caesar Palace so her “Goodbye’s the Saddest Word” song was added to playlists of 13 stations owned by Infinity Broadcasting;
* Below are some of the payola rates found in Spitzer’s investigation:
  * $3,600 to increase J-Lo’s airtime to 63 spins a week;
  * A 32” plasma TV to ad J-Lo’s album to the broadcast playlist at a San Diego station;
  * Two pairs of Elton John tickets to get Bob Schneider’s “Big Blue Sea” into rotation at WDST NY;
  * $1000 for an Everlast song;
  * $3,500 for 37 spins of Good Charlotte;
  * $250 for “fly-away” contest to get Switchfoot on Austin’s KROX radio station;
  * $500 for a Robert Cray song;
  * $17,000 for 250 spins of Good Charlotte;
  * $3,600 to increase J-Lo’s airtime to 63 spins a week;
  * A m e r i c a n
  * Pair of Adidas sneakers for 10 spins of Killer Mike’s “A.D.I.D.A.S.”

exchange for airplay. These independent promoters acted as consultants to radio stations, paying up to $400,000 to “advise” the stations on which songs to play. By 1985, record labels were paying independent promoters as much as $80 million per year.

The only payola sanction levied by the FCC (Federal Communications Commission, the governing body in charge of regulating this sort of thing) in the last decade was in October 2001, when they fined radio stations in Texas and Michigan $4000 each for not disclosing payments they received from A&M records for playing Brian Adams’ songs. (But maybe they should have fined the stations just for subjecting people to Brian Adams songs.)

In 2004, Spitzer began a large-scale investigation aimed at uncovering illegal payola practices in the music industry.

Since he is the Attorney General of New York, some have questioned how the enforcement of a federal law falls under his jurisdiction. Spitzer rationalizes his investigation by claiming, “payola is corrosive to the integrity of competition. It is corrosive to the music industry. It is corrosive to the radio industry… instead of airing music based upon the quality, based upon artistic competition, based upon aesthetic judgments or other judgments that are being made by radio stations for Governor in 2006.) However, in July of 2005, Spitzer wrestled a confession and 10 million dollars from Sony BMG, most of which will be distributed to New York non-profit organizations (see “Every Spin Has It’s Price” insert). Spitzer considers the Sony BMG settlement only “the tip of the iceberg,” and his investigation continues to probe other major labels, including Universal, EMI, and Warner Music Group, as well as major radio companies like Clear Channel and Infinity.

The tactics Sony has used to gain airplay range from clever to ridiculous. In 2002, Sony sent DJs at WAMO-FM in Pittsburgh one Adidas sneaker with the instruction that they would receive the other sneaker after they played “A.D.I.D.A.S.” by Killer Mike ten times. Record companies go to great lengths to manipulate radio request lines. For example, Arista paid $250 per person to employ a team of young men instructed to call fourteen stations in the Northeast to request songs by pop-metal band Pacifier: “As we discussed, please be sure all callers are male, under 25 (or sound like it), and that the bulk of the calls are made between 6 p.m. and midnight,” said an e-mail from Arista. (Very brown.)

Calling the current payola scandal uncovered by Spitzer “the most widespread and flagrant violation of FCC rules in the history of American broadcasting,” FCC councilor Jonathan Adelstein encouraged the FCC to begin a federal investigation against the practice of payola in August 2005. In a public statement made on August 8, Adelstein gave the following arguments against the acceptability of payola:

“The airwaves belong to the public, not the highest bidder. The vitality of radio is sapped when music is selected based on bribes rather than merit. Radio listeners are deprived of hearing the freshest music, local artists and creative genius, because labels are pre-determining what they get to hear – and paying to get it played. We owe it to the American public, music lovers and creative artists – the ones hurt the most – to end this deception.”

Payola aside, radio stations play what gets ratings, and ratings come from large audiences. The two most common types of radio listeners are active listeners who scan the dial until they find a song they recognize and like, and passive listeners who leave the radio on the station that plays the most songs they recognize and like. In either situation, radio stations need to play familiar songs to get ratings. When people start to tire of a song, the radio station tries to find a different song that sounds enough like other songs it still feels familiar. Truly unusual songs are
Continued: Music so bad...

difficult for people to process and, as a result, are initially unpopular. This is why derivative artists like J-Lo or The Eagles are on the radio and Tom Waits is not.

What all this comes down to is, you’re gonna hear the same crap on the radio whether it’s paid for by the giant record companies or selected by fine-tuned marketing research. To think that payola is responsible for depriving listeners of fresh music, local artists, and creative genius shows a lack of understanding of the radio audience and the way stations operate. In fact, payola may have played a significant role in enabling rock-and-roll, a fairly new sound at the time, to initially gain airtime over lifeless Tin Pan Alley standards that previously dominated the airwaves. The real problem with payola is that only large record companies have the necessary funds to engage in it, and they are using payola to promote their middle-of-the-road, hackneyed acts rather than the fresh, inspired artists they’re (usually) too blind to sign in the first place.

Clearly payola is a bit shady, but would you expect anything else from the marketing machine of modern industry? As far as current marketing practice goes, payola seems pretty tame. Instead of one standard song on the radio, you get another that someone paid to promote. Payola is not nearly as deplorable as marketers who actively try to control the lyrics of songs (see my article from the Listen, issue fourteen), as nauseating as some prime-time television where plots are devised first and foremost to sell brands, nor as deceptive as “news” programs that “objectively” advocate whichever brand doled out the most cash before the cameras started rolling.

We live in the age of branded entertainment, where marketers will stop at nothing short of total cultural manipulation. In the context of the rest of the business practices in this brave new world, should we really worry about payola?—Caleb Warren
For ten dollars and a splitting headache, I saw one of my favorite indie rock bands, Minus the Bear, at MJQ Concourse on Ponce. For those who have never been to the venue, MJQ is quite literally a hole in the ground. Located across the street from the infamously sketchy stripper club The Clermont Hotel, MJQ hosts a variety of underground rock, techno, and rave music in a dark, dank little cellar underneath a parking lot.

Opening for Minus the Bear were These Arms are Snakes and two small bands from Nebraska, all of whom basically sucked. However, when Minus the Bear came on, the packed-in crowd started going wild. The band played all the songs off their new album, Menos el Oso, which, judging by the mixed response, most of crowd had listened to. I was hoping they would spin off some of their better-known chill beats and ridiculously good lyrics, songs like “Lemurs, Man, Lemurs,” “Absinthe Party at the Fly Honey Warehouse,” and “Hey, Wanna Throw Up? Get Me Naked.” This Seattle retro-rock quintet does not churn out conventional titles.

Minus the Bear’s instrumental abilities have been, in their past albums, a double-edged sword. Although their signature riffs and complex song structures initially reel listeners in, singer Jake Snider does not always perform with the musical feeling of his bandmates, forcing them to water down some engaging compositions for Jimmy Eat World-esque pop choruses. I was surprised however, that at the show Snider and his mates struck a compromise on Menos el Oso, allowing the instruments to carry the share of the melody while the singer’s dry vocals often took a welcome backseat.

The band opened with “The Game Needed Me,” a song with eclectic percussion beats, an overly vulcanized bass, and slap guitar riffs to complement the detached Pedro the Lion-style vocals. Perhaps my favorite song from the night was the closing melody, “Memphis and 53rd.” Conservative vocals and smooth, rhythmic instrumentals in this tune produced the band’s most downright pretty, mid-tempo effort of the night. Overall, Minus the Bear put on a surprisingly energetic show with fast, loud beats, uncharacteristic of their past albums. However, the sound and acoustics in the venue, as well as the lack of air conditioning, made the show a rather unpleasant experience. Go to MJQ for the music, not the acoustics; the “scene,” not the crowd; and bands like Minus the Bear, not fucking HANSON.—Alex Cook
Dammit, I Want DETAILS!

Whenever I see a facebook or myspace profile that reads “everything” under favorite music, I can’t help but think that person mean the opposite. Now, I’m all for embracing different genres and appreciating a broad range of music, but to say everything’s your favorite? I’m sorry, but you’ve got to hate on something, right? A sad cousin to liking “everything” is “everything but country.” While this shows an ultimate dislike, what does it say about your music taste? Is it obscure? Popular? Happy? Sad? See, I know nothing about you, except that you probably don’t like Faith Hill. To me, liking “everything” suggests an apathetic view of music. It’s hard to narrow down favorite artists and bands, but generally people have a rotation they listen to frequently. I go on kicks where I focus on a particular genre or two for extended periods of time. (Right now, it’s a British Invasion/Power Pop obsession.) But while I take these little vacations in musical exploration, I still have favorites (Belle & Sebastian, Rolling Stones, Elliott Smith, etc), I always come back to in between mod and punk rocker flings. I believe music is part of who you are, that my mix of current and old favorites expresses who I am at this moment. And, seeing how that changes on a day-to-day basis, simply putting an “everything” would hardly say anything about me, other than I’m either a) actually apathetic towards music, or b) too lazy to fill that out.

So, while you edit your profile, I’m going to jam out to The Troggs and The New Pornographers. There, don’t you feel like you almost know me? Or at least who I am today.— Andrea Gunadi

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by meghan mcneer

Top 5 Songs on Your iPod

Jess Gearing: Annie - Heartbeat, Deathcab for Cutie - I Will Follow You Into the Dark, The Decemberists - The Engine Drive, Jeff Buckley - Last Goodbye, Rilo Kiley - I Never

David Ogles: My ipod is broken. =(

Elise Wulff: various Beatles, showtunes & a cappella, Kenny Chesney, Counting Crows


Alex Sachs: The Fain - Agenda Suicide, The Unicorns - Sea Ghost, The Pixies - Bone Machine, A3 - MIA remix, Cassidy - Crack

Anneka Reid: Johnny Thunders & The Heartbreakers - Little Bit Of Whore, Exploding Hearts - Making Teenage Faces, Hanoi Rocks - Rebel on the Run, Guns’n Roses - I Used to Love Her, The Dead Boys - Ain’t it Fun


Maanasa Reddy: mostlyMinus the Bear, Motion City Soundtrack, Modest Mouse, Citizen Cope, The Postal Service

Lauren Baker: Rise Against - Generation Lost, Pavement - Cut Your Hair, The Cars - Since You’re Gone, NoFX - J aw, Knee, Music, The Cure - Wrong Number

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Getting to Know Maanasa Reddy & Elle Marino:

1. Your show in three words:
   Maanasa: Indie Rock Madness
   Elle: Pure Indie Pop

2. Date & time & title:
   Edit the Sad Parts, Emory’s Indie Rock Show! (Modest Mouse fans should appreciate our title)
   Saturday 8-10 PM (turn us on while you get ready to go out!)

3. Song/cd you’re currently obsessed with:
   Elle: Arcade Fire “funeral” and all Fall out boy
   Maanasa: The Get up Kids “Guilt Show” & Death Cab

4. Elvis or John Lennon:
   Both: John Lennon

5. Current bands that piss us off:
   Elle: Hawthorne Heights and everything Maanasa says
   Maanasa: Good Charlotte and Greenday

6. Three all-time favorite artists:
   Elle: Modest Mouse, Death Cab for Cutie and Bright Eyes
   Maanasa: Cake, Fiona Apple and The Pixies

7. Diamonds or Pearls:
   Both: We are spoiled… what can we say? BOTH PLEASE!!!!

8. Type of music featured on your show:
   INDIE (some euro electronic, Old school indie)
   Note: our shows go by the alphabet

9. Favorite Hollywood style:
   Elle: Gwyneth Paltrow and Kate Hudson
   Maanasa: Maggie Gyllenhaal and Sarah Jessica Parker

10. Anything good come out of the 80s?
    Elle: Me, but that’s about it.
    Maanasa: Same as above, but there were leg warmers!

11. Current Celebrity Crush:
    Elle: Pete Wentz (bassist of Fall Out Boy)
    Maanasa: Jake Gyllenhaal

12. If you could live any city in the world, where would it be?
    Elle: Dallas (It’s a Texas thing)
    Maanasa: London, Paris, Berlin (It’s Europe thing)

14. Favorite Soundtracks:
    Elle: Rushmore and Almost Famous
    Maanasa: Almost Famous and Run Lola Run

Parting Words: We’d like to inform you that our inevitable takeover coming!