

AUDIO

The shittiest radio stations have the biggest transmitters. I know. I park cars in Waikiki for a living. I'm subjected to Hawaii's radio in lethal doses on a daily basis every time I have to drive around the block to park a car. Ride shotgun alongside me in my AM/FM purgatory. ...

It's 3:30 p.m., drive-time. My index finger is permanently depressed on the seek button of the rental-car stereo. I'm an irritable spin-out-junky, cranking, fidgeting for an audio option to lull me in my Shonda Yarna existence, scanning through formulated, interchangeable playlists inserted strategically over the air waves by conglomerates who gobble up independently owned radio stations — around the free-world and here in Hawaii! — franchising their format with a food-chain mentality, yielding a product with all the spontaneity of a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

These Colonel Sanders of commercial radio spoon-feed us a special blend of spice-less R&B and meacant in cheese rock 'n' roll, served up via a freshly plucked Columbia School of Broadcasting graduate delivering this like some finger-dickin', alien-native used-car salesman — just biting time on radio until he can get a shot at being an MTVejay.

Or maybe it's some proser who tries too hard to sound like Old Dirty Bastard: "Yeaaaaahhh! that was the latest depe-both-trick, (fill in blank)Yeecaaaahhh! Yo! Check it!" I'm no ratings analyst. I'm only a valet parker who listens, Mr. Conglomerate Station Owner/Manager, but will you please listen to the swell! You are transmitting over the airwaves? Could you please shut off the autopilot for a minute, waves? Radio Personality? I can't believe I'm asking this but I'm desperate behind the wheel. ...

I continue to thumb my way over the radio waves by sound and touch. For a short time I'm comforted by the static and emptiness of in-between frequencies ... until interrupted by a beer ad. ...

"Aaaaahhhhh!" I feel like launching this Geo Prizm into the Aia Waia.

Then ... what's this? Do my decedent ears deceive me? It couldn't be. Who has the nerve, the spunk to play Jonathan Richmond and the Modern Lovers' "Dodge Vegeanant" during drive time?

It's the home of the his nobody else has, streaming out of Mauna at 90.3 FM, The University of Hawaii's ultra-experimental, 24-hour college-radio station and greatest-kept secret — KTUH, the radio blues.

No bullshit! Has the golden eger really handed?

"You heard correctly," the voice in the box answers. "On Nov. 12, KTUH finally received the go-ahead from the University of Hawaii's Board of Regents, after a frustrating 14-year campaign, granting the station a power increase, from a flickering 100 watts to a sizzling 3,000 watts. (In reality, it will still be eight months to a year before KTUH is operating with the actual 3,000-watt increase. The station still needs to file with the Federal Communications Commission for a construction permit; then it will open up bidding for the construction of a new broadcast tower atop UH's Social Sciences Building.)

I flip a disk in the middle of Kāhala Avenue spunking that little Geo toward the University of Hawaii's Mauna campus. I



Rasta men, vibrations, yeah! (From left to right) Crazy K and Big Bear hold down the afternoon Caribbean slot on KTUH. Eighth's guy Johnny S.G. is at right. On the cover, KTUH's jazz Brio signs the birth of his cool cash Sunday morning.

KTUH, home of the hits nobody else has.

Initiative smoke signals are being emitted. I must congratulate the captain of this visionary juggernaut of college radio, and shake hands with the band of revolutionary disc jockeys responsible for providing the public with unconventional radio enjoyment — just because they can.

An oval KTUH sticker is plastered in the center of the steel station door, on the second floor of Hemenway Hall. A sign underneath notifies soliticians: "Open door/slowly" and "Authorized personnel only." I tap the door synges open.

Ric Valdez

On my way over, I romanticized the commander of KTUH as a rugged, military, beer-wearing cut with a Castro-esque beard in Birkenstocks, but before me is a typical twentysomething UH student in crossstraps, belted shirt and walking shorts — no facial hair. The bill of this KTUH baseball cap isn't even deignarily flipped backward.

Frank McPherson (a religion major) is the station's general manager. He comes across as serene, which he is, but don't let his composed, "preppy," demeanor fool you. McPherson can be outright ruthless when need be. During one broadcast he played a little-known remix of a Metallica song. An applied metal-head purist called in; Frank let him vent, then proceeded to play the same Metallica remix three more

times to filling in when needed.

"When I became GM, I saw how close the power increase was, so that's all I've fought for," he said. "A power increase means that ... students living across the island who couldn't catch us before — and whose money funds the station — will now be able to listen in. KTUH will be able to do a better job informing the public ... about campus events and UH-related activities, as well as things going on outside of the University."

Entering the KTUH studio

is like walking into a friend's attic or basement being renovated into a comfortable den or playroom. You first enter a narrow corridor; the walls are sprayed with good-hearted graffiti, plastered with stickers of local bands and concert posters at forgotten local venues. This hallway leads to a few well-lit rooms: a studio where bands play live on-air, and another stuffed with hundreds of CDs categorized by genre (although most DJs bring their own CD collections to share).

Another room has recording and editing equipment designated for public service announcements. At the end of the hall is a larger, dimly lit catanock stacked from floor to ceiling with a motherload of priceless, individually wrapped treasures — vintage wall-to-wall vinyl. (They still know how to spin here.)

I don't know why it was 30 degrees inside the studio. Despite the cool climate, mosquitoes thrive.

The moment a fresh DJ steps into the booth (the hub of the operation), I witness an amazing interchange taking place. At that moment, just before the exchanging of the torch (when mixing-board headphones and microphone are passed over), I can sense, not anxiety, but a childlike anticipation — what a first-grader experiences before show and tell. It's the child's thrill of sharing with the class, compounded with an underlying awareness that he or she has been entrusted by the teacher not to let the flame smolder.

In our everyday lives, the average person doesn't have many opportunities to share the sound of spirit, be it personal musical tastes, human information or quirky anecdotes. At KPDU, this is possible. Benevolence flourishes.

The next staffer I meet is Greg Dehnert, promotions director for KTUH. I'm told he also goes by "G-Spot."

Dehnert DJs the popular "Underground Sound Show" (Wednesdays, 3-6 p.m.). Now, with a name like G-Spot and me confusing the provocative, rave-style music he plays with rap and hip hop, I expect Dehnert to be one flashy, funky, grooving brother.

In truth, he could have been any Jellies store clerk — a pale records junky in loose clothes, with an unassuming name: ... Soft-spoken, with an Andy Warhol-like drawl, G-Spot calmly informs me his show is not hip hop. Rather than explain, he plays me the difference — warning me up with the hypnotic thumpings of "Ready or Not" by Aphrodite and the ultra-mixed Simply Jeff. I'm sent into complete rhythmic samurai with Cashmere, and G-Spot makes his point audibly.

When I'm finally able to snap out of my trance, I realize initial unfamiliarity is not a surface trait you can purchase at Footlocker; it flows like a pulse from within. This thin white sound-boy knows his house, jungle and techno. Dehnert also understands that KTUH is not here solely for the benefit of UH students, but for all local listeners.

"We strive to address community and environmental issues. We want to help out," says G-Spot. KTUH helps sponsor the DJ's Against AIDS benefit, raising over \$10,000 for the Life Foundation for Student Education Against AIDS.

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