

Industry to 1990

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

3-25-77

# KUSP-FM Returns Radio Airwaves 'To The People'

By DALE POLLOCK

Sentinel Staff Writer

Back in radio's fledgling days, stations went on the air with a maximum of hustle and a minimum of cash, often equipped with a tiny transmitter and loud voices.

In the 50 years since then, radio has flexed its muscles, and competition is fierce between purveyors of rock, pop and "easy listening" music. But a small group of non-commercial stations have in effect returned to radio's roots, utilizing volunteer energy and shoestring budgets to return the airwaves "to the people."

That was the mission of KUSP-FM, 88.9 on the dial, when it was founded by the Pataphysical Broadcasting Foundation several years ago. Somewhere along the line, however, signals got scrambled, prompting a "mini-revolution" among the station's staff last June, and continuing through the summer.

The resulting shakeup was both traumatic and cleansing, according to present station manager Gretchen Goldstein, who took an active role in the restructuring. "I love the station. I've worked here many years, and didn't want to see the station endangered."

Now the KUSP's 60 volunteers have "direct input into policy making," according to Goldstein, through elections to the reconstituted board of directors, the first of which comes up in May.

Most listeners, of course, are neither aware of nor care much about the station's internal hassles. What keeps them tuned to KUSP is the unique blend of classical, jazz and ethnic programming that has attracted listeners as far south as Soledad and as far north as the East Bay.

"We have the freedom to play music not dictated by commercial interests," states Bruce Larsen, office manager for the studio's miniaturized facility. "It boils down to programming freedom, not having to worry about being controversial," affirms Goldstein. "It means playing the tastiest kind of music."

Whether your taste is Indian ragas, which drone over the air from 7 to 9 a.m. daily, or an international potpourri of Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Mid-Eastern music, KUSP promises a bill of fare that is never boring, and at times, downright esoteric. "It's a love-hate thing," explains Goldstein, referring to complaints from Bach lovers that they can't stand Himalayan folk dances.

The station's mainstays

quality seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and that quality is going up all the time."

Chief engineer Don Mussell also gets kudos ("without him we're nowhere") as does production director Corky Walsh, who has also been instrumental in boosting the size of the station's record collection. Some programmers supplement the station's holdings with their own specialized collections, but the library has made tremendous strides in the last few years, according to Goldstein.

The core of the station remains its programmers, since "disc jockey" is a foreign word at KUSP. The range of those willing to pump themselves up for three or four hours on the air is remarkable, whether it be readings from Sherlock Holmes from 3 to 7 a.m. Sunday morning, or "Mad Mikes Moldies," a collection of old 45 rpm hits.

"Programmers make their own decisions through a committee, composed of ethnic, classical, jazz, early and late afternoon and public affairs programmers. That's really the key to the

station," asserts Goldstein. "These people decide and make their own programs."

Despite 10,000 people listening at any one time, and an abundance of donated time and energy, KUSP is still dependent on money to stay on the air. There isn't the competition that other AM stations feed off of ("I like to think that it's the other stations who are competing with us"), so KUSP is thrown back on its own resources.

Over 30 local businesses provide the station with monthly program grants, and about \$500 a month dribbles in from subscriptions. That leaves a large chunk of the station's \$2,300 monthly budget unaccounted for, which brings KUSP to the threshold of its Second Annual Radio Auction.

The first year's event, albeit a financial success, brought on many of the organizational problems that saw station founder David Freedman depart. But as Goldstein notes, "We know now what the problems and tensions are, how hard this is, and how much you do have to ask of volunteers." The auction, to be held in the

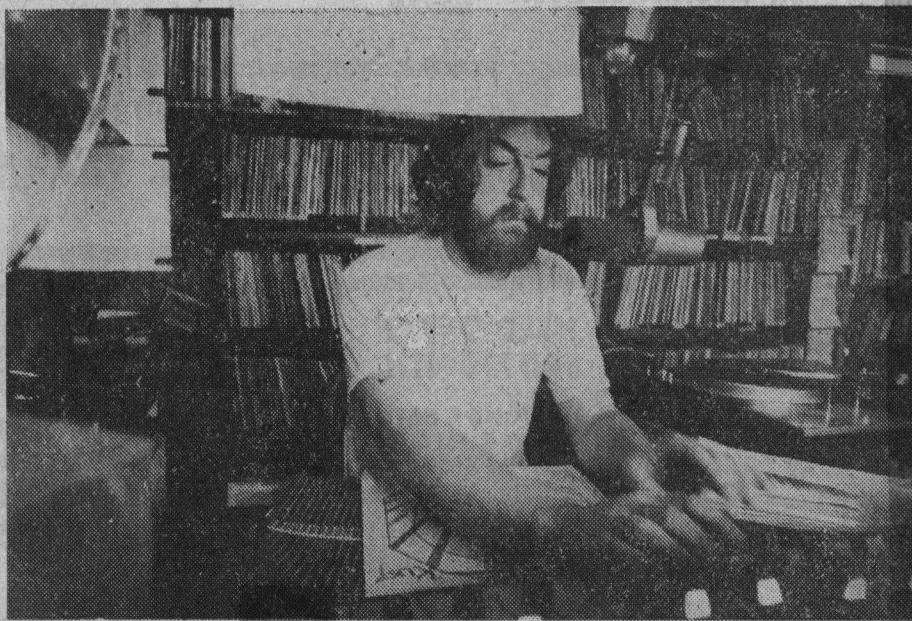
third week of May or first week in June, is expected to raise \$17,000, of which \$10,000 will be a net profit to KUSP.

The increased funds will go towards a nightly news shows, more community specials and public affairs, and increased live broadcasting of local quality music. These shifts should not provoke a change in KUSP's fundamental philosophy, however.

"After the change in management," recalls Goldstein, "we asked all the volunteers to write down what they thought the station should be. They all wanted it to continue as a music station, and not be overtly political."

"But we don't exist in a vacuum," Goldstein reminds, and anyone who has ever listened to KUSP can affirm that statement. The energy positively crackles, penetrating the invisible vapor.

"The volunteers are really what keeps us on the air. It's a shared effort, not just staff. What comes over the air is what the station is. That's why we're all here, basically."



Production director Corky Walsh cues up another disc at KUSP.

remain classical and jazz, which might surprise some community residents who still perceive of KUSP as a hippie rock station, or "a lot of young kids spinning disks," as Goldstein puts it. Instead, much of the listenership is older, and highly eclectic in its tastes. "We do stuff you never hear elsewhere in the United States," avers Goldstein.

All the programs, staffed solely by volunteers, are run through program director Lance Linares, whom Goldstein praises to the skies. "He's responsible for the air

REFERENCE

~~ARTS BRANCH~~  
~~LIBRARY~~  
~~1005 COQUEL DRIVE~~  
~~ARTES, CALIFORNIA 95003~~