

Unzipping WZIP-FM

That giant sucking sound comes from the left-hand side of dial

Whenever I hit a new town, the first place I go on the radio dial is the far left, looking for the college radio stations, generally a bastion of non- or at least less commercial music. It's often the best place to hear what's going on in the local music scene, and find out what's hip and (hopefully) happening outside of the mainstream.

So, when I first arrived and saw the overpass with AKRON garishly plastered way too many times across it (whose idea was that?), I hit the search button down to two-digit territory (88.1 FM)



MALCOLM X
ABRAM

and came across "WZIP-FM, the No. 1 Student-Run Radio Station in the United States!"

Wait, was that Nelly and Kelly's already old *Dilemma* being played so far left on the dial? Surely, it was an aberration, I consoled myself. No college stations would play this stuff all day.

But that shocker was followed by Avril Lavigne, More Nelly and Enrique Iglesias.

That's right, ENRIQUE IGLESIAS!

Since then, I've settled in Akron, discovered that Northeast Ohio loves Heartland rock and heard The Nuge's *Stranglehold*, more than is probably healthy.

But every time I hop in my car (I can't get anything in the house), I check in with the happy "ZJs" at WZIP, just to make sure I'm not missing something. And sure enough, day after day (except for Saturday's polka show and Sunday's gospel show) is filled with the same commercial stuff

Sound Check

other places on radio.

I've asked around and several people have told me that WZIP used to be more interesting and would even give a little air time to local bands.

Wow, those must have been the days.

I had a lengthy rant prepared, questioning the intent and integrity of the folks who run the station. But after some clandestine communications with a few people over at UA, the answer to all my queries was made as plain as the money in my wallet. Ratings. WZIP is a business just like any other and it wants to be on top, which it is.

General manager Tom Beck is simply doing his job by trying to get as many listeners as humanly possible. He's doing it quite well, even if he does seem to be ignoring the many possibilities college radio affords the students and the community.

WZIP is No. 1 one among Northeastern Ohio professional public radio stations and one of the consistently highest-rated college stations in the country and that's great for Mr. Beck and the staff.

So, let me be absolutely clear that the following statement only applies to myself and a few other folks in and outside of UA who have voiced their agreement.

WZIP sucks.

It has absolutely no sonic personality, the playlist is amazingly boring, even for Top 40, and other than mentioning the school by name a few times an hour and some PSAs, the connection to the city seems almost tangential.

Admittedly, I can seldom listen long enough to hear their periodic "Newz 88" updates, so perhaps I'm missing some fine young journalists at work. I hope that's the case.

By contrast, AAA (Adult Album Alternative) station WAPS (91.3-FM) The Summit, another public radio station,



The Balboas bring punky surf mus

commercial stuff, but it also has a concert calendar, links from its Web site to area attractions and bands and it drops in such local artists as Mike Farley and the Black Keys in the play list.

I'm not asking WZIP to play every obscure band that sends it a CD, but I find it hard to conceive that WZIP management couldn't cough up a few hours a week to allow some students to play music that's not sanctioned by Billboard and the major record label conglomerates.

I'm also not suggesting it remove the polka and gospel shows. I wouldn't want the polka music mafia after me and I certainly don't need trouble with the big deity upstairs. But, are there no hours of the day or night that you could let someone play Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, or Blackalicious, Queens of the Stone Age or Ace Boogie?

Will the ratings take a precipitous drop if Eminem and Michelle Branch aren't played between the hours of say, 10 and 12 on Sunday or Tuesday night?

I didn't know it, but apparently I've been spoiled by other stations such as Georgia State's WRAS, and UC Berkeley's KALX. It always seemed to me that college radio had the luxury of being less concerned with winning and