

Chip Luman, Chair, KRCL Board of Trustees

Cc: board@krcl.org

Dear Mr. Luman –

As a long-time listener and contributor to KRCL 90.9 FM, I'm writing to you today to express my concerns about the direction that the station has been moving musically over the past several years. There are a lot of great things about KRCL, such as evening & weekend programming, but the station has experienced a slow decline in quality alternative music, particularly during daytime hours; a decline that I can only attribute to a failure of effective leadership by station management.

KRCL's tagline is "Community Connection. Music Discovery." Unfortunately, as a member of the KRCL membership community, I honestly cannot remember the last time I discovered music by listening to KRCL.

Over the past 5 years, the daytime playlists have become almost indistinguishable from DJ to DJ; there is no sense of individuality, no sense of excitement about the music. Good live DJs can react to events of note happening in the real world, and pick the right music to help set the tone for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, this is not happening.

It is my understanding that these changes are being driven by General Manager Vicki Mann in order to position the station as a direct competitor to two local commercial alternative stations, rather than capitalizing on KRCL's ability to become a unique alternative where "music discovery" is a reality, rather than just a slogan.

Assisting in this process was a consultant, Sean Demery, hired by Ms. Mann to narrow and focus the station's music library. According to one of the program directors at Mr. Demery's previous employer, Radio Milwaukee, Mr. Demery's work at that station was able to attract some passive commercial radio listeners from other stations, but the process cost Radio Milwaukee many of its core public radio listeners and financial supporters, whom that station are still trying to regain.

I fear that the same thing is happening at KRCL.

The daytime DJs have been driven by the decisions made by Ms. Mann & Mr. Demery to play more commercially acceptable Adult Album Alternative (or "Triple A") music; essentially Easy Listening for the Rock-n-Roll Generation, with a smattering of inoffensive new artists keeping the station from falling into the Golden Oldies format. I have also heard from a number of volunteers that the daytime DJs are also only allowed to pick two songs of their own per show, rather than choosing their playlists live, obviously hampering their ability to react to react to the day's events.

What has me the most upset about the changes is that in the station's misguided quest for consistency, what it has actually achieved is mediocrity. Even more upsetting is that the changes were implemented without any substantial discussion or input from core listeners, volunteers, and staff. The daytime programming has become monotonous and boring, as if the playlists are being computer-generated.

In recent years, the station has been using an application called RCS Selector to pick and schedule the music being played now from a deeply reduced library of only 1000-1500 songs. This reduction in the size of the library is also evidenced by the repetition of many songs week-in and week-out.

My own music library has over 42,000 songs. Even given the approximately 4000 duplicate songs, I could put my computer on shuffle, and still go nearly about 3 months without hearing a repeated song.

The thing is, I don't want to just listen to music I already have. I want to discover new music so that I can expand my library even further. I want to listen to DJs who go to local shows, and play music by the bands that he or she just saw the next day. I want DJs who are excited to come to work every day and share what they've discovered with the rest of us.

I also want to hear deeper cuts of bands that have been around (or gone) for a while to show just how incredible they are, especially if those bands are not as well-known as their contemporaries. I don't care in what era music was released, or even necessarily what genre it is, but I want it to be different than what I hear all the time, and from what I can get from commercial radio.

Why play Tom Petty when you could play Tom Waits? Why play "London Calling" when you can play "This is Radio Clash"?

I truly believe that KRCL's listeners want to hear new music from new artists that they've never heard before, music that makes them think "whoa, what the hell was that I just heard, and where can I hear more of it?"

I want to hear music that envelops me, that educates me, that makes me think, and that comforts me when there is bad news. I don't want saccharine; I want real music. I want to turn on the radio and be challenged by the music I hear. I want music that speaks the truth. I want the musical equivalent of whiskey and sex and dynamite all rolled up into one mind-blowing explosion of musical genius that can help inspire a nation to stand up and fight for what they think is right.

Community radio is for the freaks and the geeks and the large social, political, and cultural communities that we have on the Wasatch Front who don't fit neatly into a little box. Community radio is for the music lovers who rely on their local station to discover music that they can't hear anywhere else. Community radio is about bringing a diverse group of people,

with diverse interests and views together, and alternative community radio is about giving the underrepresented members of our society a voice, musically and politically. Commercial radio can't and won't do that, and Utah does not need another commercial alternative station.

As a long-time contributor, I want to feel excited about giving my money to KRCL, and not like it's just another obligation. I want to feel like a valued member of the KRCL community, and most importantly, I want to hear music that inspires me to do something other than flipping to another radio station; something I've been doing far more often than I'd like.

It's time for a change at KRCL, and thus I'm asking you and the rest of the Board of Trustees to do what is necessary to not only make that change, but to ensure that it is successful going forward.

After all, while it may be well and good to have more general listeners, wouldn't it be better to have listeners who are enthused and committed to the station? Which type of listener is more likely to donate, not just once but on an ongoing basis?

Sincerely,

Steven L. Sheffield
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