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Photo by Andre Ranieri
Lucy Lizzard plays "none of the major labels, but rather ... what you're going to see later on MTV" for KRVN's Modern Mono, which airs Sunday nights from 10 to midnight.

Lizzard takes show underground

By Matthew Rendall
Emerald Contributor

Where in Eugene can you find music so deeply underground you'd need an oil drill to bring it to the surface; records that would strip the transmission of Casey Kasem's turntable; songs the Moral Majority would never object to, because they can't think fast enough to understand the lyrics?

Here's a clue: You can find such alternative music being played on Eugene's school district radio station by a disc jockey who insists, "I still think 1965 was the best year for music, ever."

Give up yet? The program is KRVN's Modern Mono, and its impresario is Lucy Lizzard. As Lizzard explains it, her Sunday night show is designed to showcase music that listeners would not otherwise hear.

Her policy is "basically to play none of the major labels, but rather the minor labels and ... what's going on in the underground today — meaning, what you're going to see later on MTV," Lizzard said.

"It's people doing music by themselves, playing out their own records (and) taking more chances than the other bands."

In the past, this meant primarily punk rock. Lizzard has been following punk for a long time. "I come from a small town," she says, "and they had

one radio station. They didn't get serviced by a lot of big labels. So, when I was growing up I was listening to things like the Standells or the Sonics, that kind of thing."

At first, however, the punk wave of the 1970s splashed past Lizzard without catching her attention. Studying art history in London in 1978, she had no time for the city's guitar-toting anarchists.

"I was just too busy running around and hanging out in the National Gallery in London," Lizzard said. "I used to read my mail there, literally. It wasn't until the second time I went there that I saw any bands, and I saw some pretty weird ones."

Back in the states, but still intrigued by what she had heard in London, Lizzard tuned in some pretty "weird" records. "More than anything I got into the foreign stuff," she recalled. "Punk rock was a movement. It was a phenomenon. I think that everybody was communicating and really interested in what everybody else was doing."

When KRVN began to use disc jockeys from the Eugene community in the early '80s, some of them asked Lizzard if they could borrow her records. Lizzard agreed, but after they played them, she recounts, "they came back and they said 'No, we can't do this. We don't know who these people are.' At

that time I had never thought of doing radio at all."

Lizzard began to volunteer at KRVN, and also began to fill in on occasion for the disc jockeys of Modern Mono, which was then being aired on KLCC. When KLCC took Modern Mono off the air, she and the show's creator, Lenny Tone, revived it at KRVN, 91.9 FM.

Lizzard compiled a list of bands she wanted to play, and wrote letters to their record labels. "(I would) get promos in the mail a lot," she said. "These days I haven't had the time to do that."

While she still gets promotional releases, lately she buys more records as well. How big is her personal record collection? Lizzard would rather not say. There are, she explains, "too many thieves in town."

Despite Modern Mono's underground music format, so far the show has avoided controversy. Its late night slot, 10 to midnight on Sundays, may have something to do with this, as may its very raucousness.

"The way I always figure it," Lizzard said, "the people who are going to get the most upset usually turn off after the first ten minutes. I've never had a complaint. And if the station's had a complaint, they've never told me."

Program Director John Etheridge said Lizzard is fairly restrained in choosing material.

"Lucy blushes easily," he explained.

Not surprisingly, Modern Mono's listeners tend to be young. However, during fundraisers Lizzard gets most of her donations from people in their 30s. "But then," she added, "I don't play hardcore a lot either anymore. I think the audience has gotten older."

So is hardcore punk at its last gasp?

"I think everything that could have been done with hardcore has been done," Lizzard said. "It's really hard to find a band that's really good."

Well then, where is underground music heading?

"I don't know," Lizzard said. "And that's what makes it so cool. I have no idea. It could be something totally different. I hate going into the past. And as far as the future goes, I hope it surprises the hell out of me, instead of boring me to death."

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