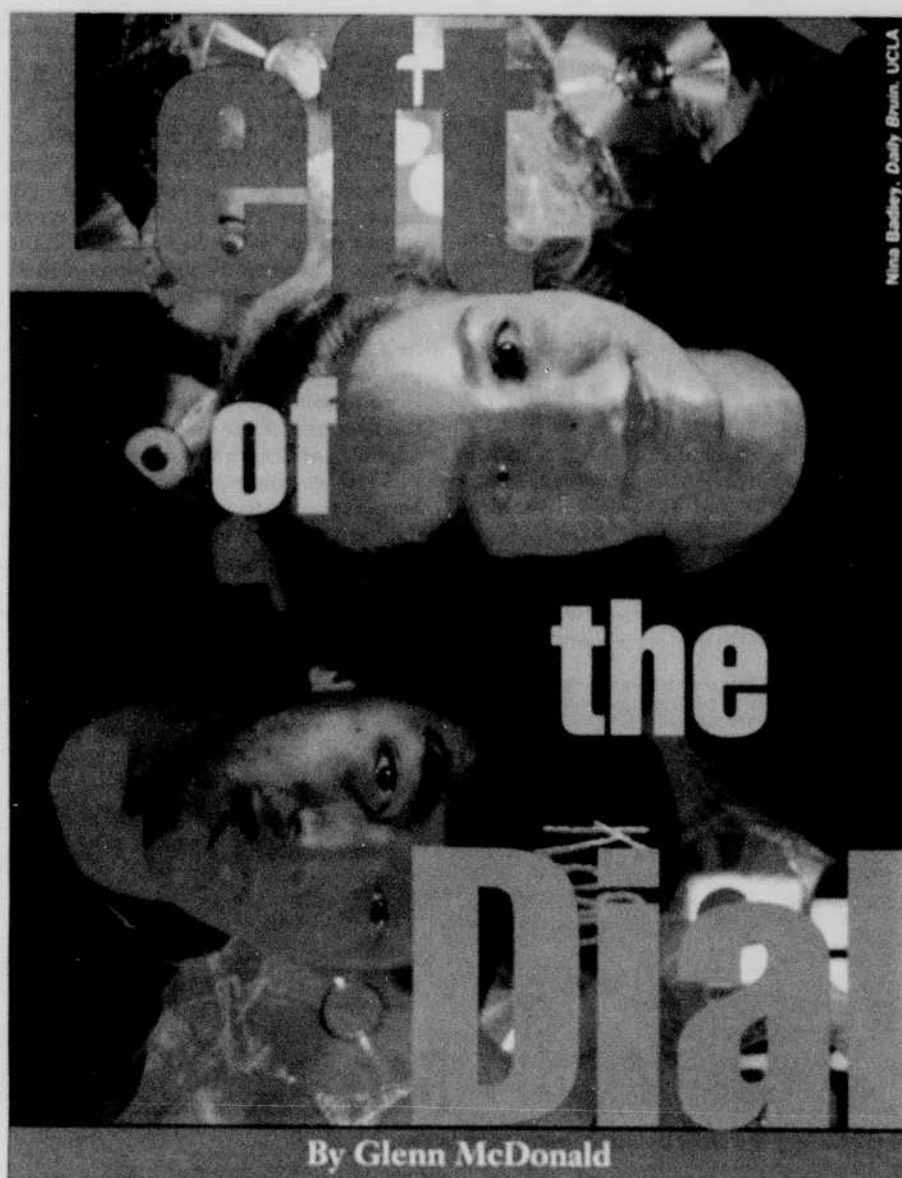




With the music industry closing in, is college radio spinning out?

College radio is dead. At least, the college radio we used to know. In their age of innocence, from the early '70s until about five years ago, campus radio stations were isolated castle keeps of noncommercial, no-format programming. A station's library of music was informed less by the music industry's current releases than by the private record collections of the volunteer student DJs. A typical set might feature John Coltrane, followed by Black Flag, a Lenny Bruce monologue, then a Patsy Cline medley.

There was a certain outlaw spirit — a sense of freedom that came from knowing the labels didn't like you, the FCC didn't know about you and the university was picking up the tab.

Those days are over, probably forever. The artists that college radio had supported throughout the desolate '80s became suddenly, violently popular in the '90s — R.E.M., Public Enemy, Nirvana, U2. The music industry closed in immediately, and college radio had to grow up fast.

Welcome to the jungle

"The record companies were saying college radio was a place where you could get your next big band," says Scott Frampton, editor in chief of *CMJ New Music Monthly*, a college radio trade magazine and new music's most reliable litmus sheet. "That didn't happen for a long time, and now it is."

CMJ, which charts more than 500 play lists from college stations coast to coast, monitors the changing landscape of radio vis-à-vis the music industry. "There's greater pressure on promotion people now to make a record work at the college level," Frampton says. "Getting 'numbers' is now very important to the label."

Mike Deitch, West Coast college radio promotions director for Atlantic Records, deals with more than 300 college stations on the left-hand side of America. "Labels are putting much more importance on college radio," he says. "Here at Atlantic we've expanded — we have an entire [college radio] department now, a more cohesive focus. That's true with most labels."

This new attention from music labels isn't particularly welcome in some circles. There's an old-school ethic of independence that runs deep in college radio — and more than a little accompanying attitude toward the major labels.

"They're kinda pushy," says Dave Ciancio, Michigan State U. senior and programming director at WDBM, the student-run campus station. "But in fact, they basically have to kiss our butts, or they get nothing. You shouldn't take shit from them, because we can be like, 'Screw you — we won't play your record.'"

Program director Jodin Trocheek of Ohio U.'s ACRN sees things differently. "We have a good relationship with the labels," he says. "They know we'll give everything a listen — whereas some stations will say, 'Oh, that's a major label. Sorry, Atlantic, we're too cool for you.'"

Sympathy for the devil

It's important to note that Ohio's ACRN is one of the few commercial col-

*Then one fine day
she turned on a
New York station
Couldn't believe
what she heard
at all*

*She started listening
to that fine,
fine music*

*Her life was saved
by rock and roll*

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND,
"ROCK AND ROLL"

lege radio stations in America — fully formatted, self-supported and entirely reliant on ad revenue. What's more, it is the only outlet in the market for "modern" or "alternative" rock. ACRN's staple artists, played on regular rotation, include Pearl Jam, Nirvana and Stone Temple Pilots.

Michigan State's WDBM, on the other hand, is noncommercial and gets its revenue directly from student fees. It also competes in a market that already has a firmly entrenched commercial "modern rock" station. Accordingly, WDBM incorporates more specialty programming: blues shows, jazz shows, reggae shows — even an '80s new-wave retro program.

Considering their respective markets, it's not surprising that Trocheek and Ciancio, both student programming directors and canny, career-oriented radio people, would hold such different opinions. In fact, they are on opposite ends of the central debate in college radio today — how to respond to the popularization



"West Coast, East Coast, dance hall — we play it all," says Michigan State U. DJ Jason Staten. No Manilow?