

northwest

Invasion of the Podcasters

Queers pioneer new communication technology

by Rebecca Ragain

Daniel Spiro had never listened to a podcast until last fall. Now he produces one.

Nor was Spiro the last to hear about this relatively new form of communication. A podcast, so dubbed from the merging of "iPod" and "broadcast," is a recorded audio file distributed via the Internet. Listeners can play the files on their computers or download them to portable players such as iPods.

As a genre, podcasts seem to fall somewhere between audio blogs and radio talk shows. Although podcasts are generally less formal than mainstream media forms, many podcasters do maintain some sort of consistent programming, whether that is focusing on playing independent music or discussing politics.

At the time Spiro discovered podcasting, he was producing a public access cable show for Sister Paula Nielsen, Portland's "trans evangelist." He was immediately excited by the possibility that podcasting could increase the range of her show.

As it turns out, Spiro was spot on.

In March, he posted the first podcast to www.sisterpaula.org. By June, there was a noticeable increase in hits to the Web site, where the podcasts were drawing about 100 listeners. And Nielsen began to hear from listeners in Australia, England and Canada.

"The thing I really like about podcasting is that it's worldwide," says Nielsen, who has been broadcasting her public access show since 1987. "I'm very pleased with it."

Spiro counts himself lucky that he was able to tap into an established network when he started the Nielsen podcast. He attended a couple of Portland Podcasting's meetings (www.portlandpodcasting.org), where producers gather monthly to chat about the nitty-gritty details of podcasting. Anywhere from five to 25 people attend each meeting; Portland Podcasting co-founder Tim Germer estimates that there are fewer than 100 podcasts produced locally.

Spiro also tips his hat to Rebecca Nay of Tranny Wreck Radio, whom he e-mailed regularly for advice.

"She held my hand and helped me set it up," he says. "We both [Nielsen and Spiro] owe her a lot."

As for Nay, she learned her podcasting skills firsthand. When she started Tranny Wreck Radio (www.trannywreck.com) last August, she knew little about the technical aspects of podcasting. In fact, it took her three weeks to figure out how to put her first show on the Internet.

"I basically had to start from scratch. I only knew what the Internet was and what an MP3 was," she says.

Today, Nay estimates that between 500 and 700 people listen to her weekly program, a mix of interviews, music and comedy.

Though humor is an essential part of Nay's show, she's not just out to make people laugh. By talking about trans issues and interviewing trans people, she hopes to make Tranny Wreck into a



From left, Portland podcasters Daniel Spiro, Sister Paula Nielsen, Rebecca Nay and Cliff meet to discuss the technical aspects of the emerging media.

"gateway to the transgender community."

"I think I've got a good mix. Because comedy is such an essential part of my show, I think that draws people who might not give the show a chance otherwise," says Nay, pointing out that many of the issues that transgender people face also apply to the wider population. "A lot of people deviate from gender roles in one way or another."

A gay Portland podcaster who goes by "Cliffy" also uses humor on his program, CDP Podcast (cdp.podshow.com). Outrageous, scandalous, adults-only humor, that is.

"I have a lot to say, and comedy is a good way to go about it," says Cliffy, who has been known to call himself the "Chinese Talk Queen."

When Cliffy posted his first episode of CDP, dated July 2005, he was trying to find his voice. The early shows were "crazy," he says, but gradually he began to add some serious threads of discussion. He spends time scripting what he is going to say in advance of recording an episode, and he values the feedback he has received that indicates listeners are enjoying the complexities of his show.

During the past year, Cliffy feels like he has succeeded in finding his voice through podcasting.

"Even just talking to the mike, I feel released," he says. "It's the action of talking and imagining people listening."

Cliffy has also discovered that podcasting brings the gay community together, both locally and beyond. "I know people from Chicago and New York who I would never have met in my life."

He has been interviewed by John Ong (www.johnong.com), who podcasts from "the middle of the United States of America." Cliffy has even been a guest on *Eat This Hot Show* (www.eatthishotshow.com), which is co-hosted by Cliffy's hero, Ragan Fox (www.raganfox.com).

Nay's show has been broadcast on Sirius Satellite Radio's *Podshow*, when she filled in for one of the most famous "queercasters" of all: Madge Weinstein of Yeast Radio (yeastradio.podshow.com), co-founder of qPodder.com, "The Definitive Lesbian and Gay Podcast Directory."

Nay says: "A revolution is starting around podcasting, and I would like to believe that queer people in general are a part of it. It's a way to unite the queer community and educate everyone else." 

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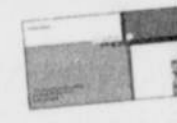
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