

LIVING

s e c t i o n

BETWEEN THE LINES

Listening in, coming out

**Closets Are For Clothes and Radio Q
liven Ann Arbor's airwaves**

by Kathy Hines

"We're in the basement of the Student Activities Building. You'll know you're at the studio when you get to the part that looks like a dorm." The description of WCBN, a student radio station at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, is accurate. Its relaxed atmosphere and eclectic format are a natural home for Closets Are For Clothes and Radio Q, two gay public affairs shows aired each Wednesday at 6:00 p.m.

Today, Seth Persky begins his broadcast of Closets Are For Clothes with a candid description of how his show notes were blown away from him earlier that day. "I went running

down Fifth Avenue after them until they sunk to the bottom of a puddle. Don't say I never did anything for the show!" Seth reads announcements and news from a stack of damp clippings, magazines, and hand scribbled notes. The pieces are sprinkled with his own commentary on topics ranging from Newt Gingrich to Barbie fashion.

As Seth's commentary continues, David Meitzler is at work in the next room simultaneously engineering Closets Are For

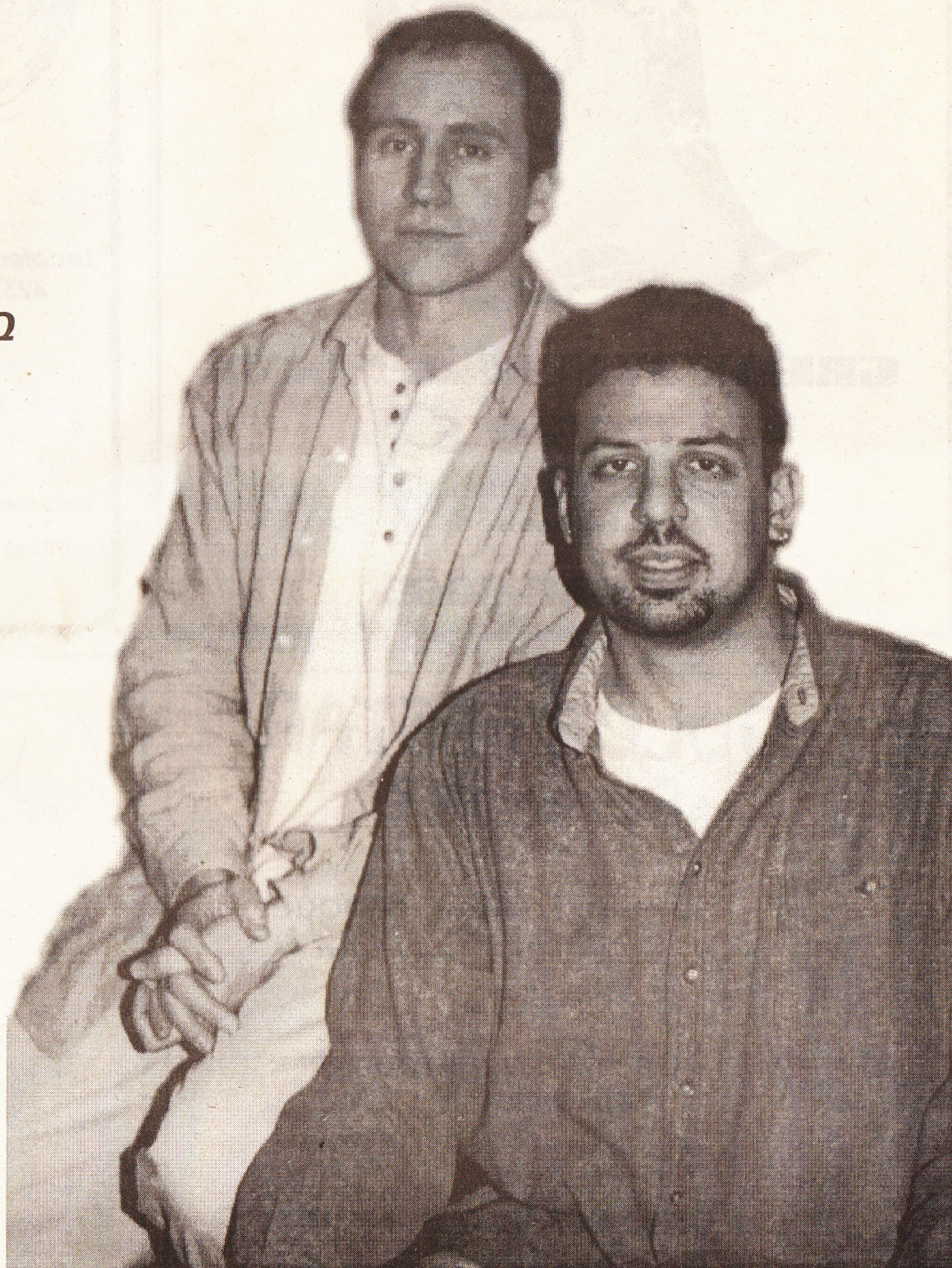
Clothes and preparing for Radio Q, which he will both engineer and host. His attention to detail is obvious as he cues up recordings, checks equipment, and takes a highlighter to his production sheets. One eye is always on the clock. "The timing is an art," he explains. "Two minutes can feel like forever when you have nothing to say or it can go by in a flash. Ideally we have thirty minutes of

material for thirty minutes of air time." In mid-sentence he picks up a cue from Seth, rolls his chair back to the controls and begins a taped news announcement of the White House's new AIDS policy.

Together,

David and Seth form the Gay Radio Collective. Their shows are part of WCBN's public affairs programming which airs each evening from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. Other public affairs shows deal with tenant issues, politics, or sports. The two agree that with so much happening in the community, the show could easily be longer if air time and staff were available. "We're actually very fortunate to have an hour each week and fortunate that we've had

"Someone can put on a Walkman and just sit there for an hour knowing that they're in touch with the community."



David Meitzler and Seth Persky form Ann Arbor's Gay Radio Collective. BTL photo: Ric Brown

such a steady schedule," says David. While the two plan their programming independently, overlap rarely occurs. Occasionally they do a joint show, as is planned for an upcoming interview with Urvashi Vaid.

WCBN (Campus Broadcast-

ing Network) has been in existence for fifty years. It began as a closed-circuit system to dorms and then moved to AM. Its current incarnation, WCBN-FM, is celebrating its 25th anniversary. The freeform station has a signal that can be reached in most of

Washtenaw County.

Because it's a student radio station, the university prefers that show content be student-focused. But, as Seth explains, "There isn't another show like this around. The fact is that everything that hap-

continued on pg. 43

NEW YEARS EVE PLANS? SEE PAGES 32-33



Radio Q host David Meitzler in the engineering booth at WCBN.



Seth Persky on the air with Closets Are For Clothes.

pens in Michigan is of importance to the students." Closets Are For Clothes began in the mid-1970s as a way of disseminating news and event announcements. "Sometimes this is a person's first contact with the gay community," Seth adds. "It's a big responsibility."

The two suspect that a significant portion of their audience is still closeted. "When I was coming out, I was afraid to even go to the library and look for books on the subject," remembers David. Besides providing information to Ann Arbor's active gay community, the shows allow people just coming out to tune in without worrying about privacy. As Seth puts it, "Someone can put on a Walkman and just sit there for an hour knowing that they're in touch with the community." In addition to providing news and interviews, on-site recordings help bring events to listeners. Last June, David was able to record Mel White's speech at the Capitol Commitment Ceremony sponsored by the Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project and Michigan Pride. Since then he's rebroadcast the speech twice.

All focus returns as the last few seconds of Closets Are For Clothes tick away. David runs through his mental check list one

last time. In a moment, Seth's closing music fades into John Williams Olympic Fanfare. After Radio Q's brief introduction, David begins playing a taped interview and sits back. "Mikes are off. We have nine minutes." Lyndon Kelly, one of the owners of Ann Arbor's Common Language

Bookstore, is speaking with Kerry Hart, author of *Nothing but the Fall*. "When we're dealing with a topic I'm not familiar with, I'd just as soon bring in an expert," says David. "I'm not a big reader of books or novels, so when there's an author interview Kelly usually does it. I can't think of anyone more perfect, except of course for Kate (Kate Burkhardt, Kelly's business partner). Their business is selling books so they have to know what's current."

Radio Q also sometimes features excerpts from This Way Out, an award-winning, internationally distributed gay and lesbian radio

magazine based in Los Angeles. Although This Way Out airs on over 80 stations in eight countries, the only other location carrying the show in Michigan is Traverse City. David picks and chooses highlights since WCBN's desire for focus on local issues makes it impractical to broadcast the entire show each week.

Closets are for Clothes
is broadcast on
Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m.
Radio Q is broadcast on
Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.
WCBN-FM 88.3

Both David and Seth have a strong desire for more community participation. They see the shows as tools for the community and welcome press releases, story suggestions, and guests from local organizations. "I'm a community organizer," says Seth. "I want us to work on getting more publicity and more participation from the community." Seth wants to give an accurate but positive image of gay issues. Recognizing that this may be the first contact people have with the gay community, he tries to balance reports on hate crime and discrimination

with more positive stories. He particularly likes to promote political action by telling listeners, "Here's something you can affect and here's how to do it."

It's difficult to gauge exactly who is listening. Audience feedback comes occasionally, but not as often as they'd like. They know that due to the timing of the show many people are listening in their cars or during dinner. A primary goal for the near future is to increase listenership through greater publicity. This will include resurrecting their slogan, "Tune in. Catch the Culture."

Eventually David would like to see a larger staff, but finding volunteers who are able to accept the commitment and responsibility of producing a weekly show is a challenge. David became involved with the shows in 1992 after reading a computer announcement asking for volunteers. Now he juggles producing Radio Q with graduate work at Eastern Michigan University, a job at an airport management firm, and working toward his commercial pilot's license. Though he's an Ann Arbor native, he's not sure where he might end up after his graduation this spring. Seth originally worked on Closets Are For Clothes from 1990 to 1992. In September, he returned,

expecting to stay for a maximum of two weeks. Four months later he's still here and loving it, despite a hectic schedule that includes being a full-time student at U of M's School of Social Work and a supervisor at a foster care agency. He expects to be involved with the show for at least one more year, until he finishes his degree.

A commitment to quality is as important as the time commitment. David explains that while production standards have increased during the years he's been with the shows, they still strive for a professional sound that other stations will want to rebroadcast. He's apparently been successful. Last March, one of Radio Q's features on Delta Lambda Phi, the gay fraternity for students at Eastern Michigan University and U of M, was picked up by This Way Out.

David also has plans for a Radio Q web page that will allow visitors to hear previous broadcasts simply by clicking on the screen. The station doesn't keep archives of the shows, but David—in his naturally organized way—has taken it upon himself to record all of the shows he's ever done. He keeps them lined up in his basement, ready to be pulled in case he ever has a need to rebroadcast one.

While other communities around the country have gay radio shows, Seth doesn't know of shows like those produced by the Gay Radio Collective. "Most places have one format. They do news or music. We like to do a little bit of everything." This creative programming flourishes at WCBN, where the slogan is "88.3—to the far left of the dial." Tune in. Catch the culture.

Contact Information:

David Meitzler
Radio Q
P.O. Box 4419
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106
radioq@umich.edu

Seth Persky
WCBN
Closets Are For Clothes
530 Student Activities Building
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109-1316
spersky@umich.edu

Related Information:

This Way Out (internationally syndicated gay & lesbian radio magazine)
PO Box 38327
Los Angeles, Calif. 90038-0327
(213) 874-0874
TWOradio@aol.com
www.qrd.org/qrd/www/media/radio/thiswayout/index.html