

A Pirate Radio Station with Waterford at Heart



In the Richard Curtis motion picture *The Boat That Rocked*, the late, great Philip Seymour Hoffman played a pirate DJ, broadcasting eclectic sounds to a changing world starved of alternative culture.

While Curtis' feature, set in sixties Britain, appears to be a world entirely different to that of today, the dilemma that faced Hoffman - to foster a community of music lovers- both personally and over the airwaves, at the risk of facing the heavy hand of the law - remains the very same for Kurt Jackson, the co-founder of Waterford's only pirate radio station, OpenTempoFM.

Opting for the term 'professional unlicensed radio station', rather than pirate radio, Kurt is a true anomaly in today's dwindling underground radio community. One that faces as much threat at home as it does abroad where, as recently as June of this year, London's Metropolitan Police stated, "We won't stop until every pirate radio station in London is destroyed."

OpenTempoFM, which enters the Waterford airwaves from Thursday evening to Sunday night, seeks to provide an alternative to the "dreary, fi st-pumping carbon copy pop music of today's X-Factor world."

Unlike the plethora of pirate radio stations that have come and gone over the years, OpenTempoFM strives to cook up a diverse programming menu, from vinyl-only DJ broadcasts, a Polish language show and Waterford's most comprehensive local sportscast.

"The concept for OpenTempoFM grew from a conversation with a few of my friends. Some of us had been involved in radio broadcasting in various forms", Kurt explains.

"I had previous experience in another pirate station, MetalHertzFM, while we had most of the equipment needed to get on air. We were all motivated by one factor: the need to provide alternative sound across Waterford City."

From these humble beginnings, the project expanded organically as new faces came on board. "The operation is completely voluntary; we try to keep cash out of the equation as much as possible, from the decision to go advertisement free, to our unpaid DJ's."

According to Kurt, an absence of money hasn't equated to a lack of volunteers. "Roughly forty faces pass through our secret studio every weekend and every one of them are a joy to work with, from our late night house disc jockeys to The Saturday Sports Show sportscasters."

Despite the relentless professionalism of OpenTempoFM productions and its contribution to Waterford City, the station crew live in constant fear of radio closure.

“A confiscation raid could happen at any point, though probably while we are not on air. It’s a fear that we have to live with every day” Kurt states. “It is something we generally try not to think about and just get on with the show.”

The almost inevitable threat of closure is a prospect that OpenTempoFM refuses to dwell upon, leading them to detail the station’s newest venture, ‘Plus Stream’, one that focuses on OpenTempoFM’s online audience.

“This service allows local music and sporting events to be streamed through the OpenTempoFM website without effecting normal programming. It’s an innovative service, one that promotes local musicians and sporting talent. The response has been great on both our streams, with hits from as far as Australia and Canada.”

Nearing the end of our conversation, Kurt arrives at the core of what OpenTempoFM has become, almost three years into its existence. “Above all, it’s amazing what OpenTempoFM has done for those involved. It gives those who are unemployed a purpose- something to look forward to. On the other hand I’ve seen introverts transformed through talking about their love for music on air. It’s an honour for us to be able to provide this opportunity to people through what we love, our hobby.”

While the hazy days of sixties Pirate Radio are long over, there is something truly admirable in OpenTempo’s willfulness to shave against the grain. Cutting through the red tape to mentor some and entertain the rest.

Intrigued? Tune into OpenTempoFM every weekend on 105.1FM or visit www.opentempofm.com to check out their uninterrupted daily stream.

Robbie Byrne