

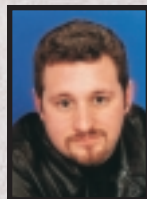
wbru gets a fresh coat of paint



In an industry where voicetracking and automation have replaced talent development, **WBRU** is making a conscious effort to train people. The station was founded for the express purpose of teaching students the art of radio. One look at the list of former **WBRU** staffers that have blossomed in the entertainment industry sums up their commitment to excellence: **WPLY/Philadelphia** night jock **Ben Harvey**, former **WEQX/Manchester** PD **Josh Klemme**, former **WXRK MD** and **WEQX PD Alexa Tobin**, **Annie Shapiro**, who is now at **FUSE**, **Christine Pawlak MD** of **WBTZ/Burlington** and her predecessor at the Buzz, PD **Stephanie Hindley**, former **WBRU PD Tim Schiavelli**, **Mike Green** formerly of **WBCN**, **Blink 102.7's Allison Stewart**, **CNN** correspondent **Ralph Begleiter**, **ESPN's Chris Berman**, **Elektra's Becky Bass**, who's working with **Ric Ocasek** – the list goes on and on. Which brings us to current PD and **WBRU** alumni, **Seth Resler**. After stops in the programming departments at **KPNT/St. Louis**, **WBCN/Boston** and **KNDD/Seattle**, Resler found himself back at 'BRU as PD after the departure of long time programmer Schiavelli. We checked in on Resler and **GM/Brown University** senior **Cate Brandon** as **WBRU** enters its next phase of evolution.

A Crash Course on **WBRU/Providence**:

Seth Resler, Program Director: The first college radio station in the country, **WBRU** started with two kids in a **Brown University** dorm room in 1936, graduated to **FM** in 1966, and took on its rock format in 1969. The introduction of **WHJY** brought direct competition for **BRU**, which was an eclectic rock format: **Bruce Hornsby** into the **Clash**, etc. Assisted by a loan from the University, the station stayed on air and added full-time sales people to the staff. Current **GSM**, **Randy Hershoff**, formerly of **WAAF/Boston** came in and turned **BRU's** financial situation around. In the early '90s the program director position transformed from a part-time student position to a professional position. Over the years the bookkeeper, traffic manager, and chief engineer all became professional positions as well. Everybody else—including management, deejays, promotions department, music director, production department and news department are all students. The department heads are elected every year by a body known as **Station Membership**, consisting of students who have shown commitment to **BRU**—and passed a three hour test on the station's composition, its history, and knowl-



95.5
WBRU

L-R: GM Cate Brandon, Promo Director John Feuerstein, Midday Jock James Elsworth, Promo/Sales Coordinator Michelle Walker

Promo Director John Feuerstein and Late Night Jock Sarah Rose backstage at the Summer Concert Series Show with Guster.



edge of the market. The Station Membership meets a couple times a year to discuss issues affecting the station, including the elections. Above that, there is a Board of Directors—composed of alumni and the student general manager—which approves budgets and gives legal and business advice to student managers. The Board has venture capitalists, FCC lawyers, NPR news anchors, and music industry insiders, including BRU alum **Stephen Hill**, who is the Vice President of Music Programming at BET. The radio station is a non-profit organization designed to teach students about the radio industry in particular and business in general. As far as they know it's the only voice in the country like it – full-blown commercial, pulls down competitive ratings in the market, and does a couple million dollars a year in business (re-invested back into the station, no stockholders, no CEO).

WBRU is like no other “commercial” station in the format, if not radio, period.

SR: This station is stranger than any other because there are discussions and issues that come up here that don't come up anywhere else. One of the big issues is the conflict between being an educational workshop and being a viable, commercial entity. Do we voice track? If we're voice tracking a shift, that's taking away an opportunity that a student could be using to learn. We have students who are going to make mistakes, which is probably not the right thing to do from a commercial standpoint. For us it's the right thing to do because that's how these students learn.

Who are your biggest competitors?

SR: The big competition in the market has always been 'HJY and WPRO. Hot 106 has

crept up in the last couple of years as Hip Hop has been on fire. There have been other direct competitors in the market but they haven't made much of an impact. There was The Edge awhile back. FNX is doing some stuff here, and 'BCN bleeds into the market, but 'HJY and 'PRO have always been the big boys. This station is very D.I.Y. I spent the morning picking up trash after the Guster show last night. Right by my side was the general manager, the station manager and the promotions director. That's the kind of radio station it is. Everybody pitches in and does what needs to be done. Twenty students and I painted the walls this weekend. I imagine I wind up doing a lot of things most program directors don't. But, it's also a more laid-back atmosphere. These students don't get college credit for it. There is no Communications major at Brown. They only get paid for it when school is not in session. Some of them do it because they want to go into broadcasting. Some students do it because they want to learn Pro Tools, some students because they want to learn to be disc jockeys, and a lot of students do it just for fun. Not everybody here wants to go into radio, but some of them do it for business experience. We've got a great news program. It's won the AP Awards for years on end. We have an in-house news department, whereas most radio stations don't anymore, especially Rock radio stations. We don't farm a lot out. We do all our production in-house.

What's your experience at 'BRU been like, Cate?

Cate Brandon: It's been amazing so far. I started out as an intern and was elected to be the Promotions and Marketing Director last year. I've been here all three years I've been at

school. I love being General Manager; it's a huge responsibility but a great experience and a lot of fun.

Is radio something you want to pursue once you're out of college?

CB: Definitely. I'd like to do something with marketing or producing. I'm a Political Science major so that's totally different. We don't have a Communications major at Brown, so BRU has been my communications education.

Seth, you've come full circle since your Brown University days...

SR: My mom was in here the other night and I showed her around the place. She said, "Let me get this straight. You drove all the way across the country and back to move five feet – from that chair to that chair."

[Laughs] Who do you think you've drawn the most experience or most insight from in your career?

SR: It's hard because I learned different things from every one of them. I learned the basics from Tim. Then I went to St. Louis, and **Allan Fee** was not like anybody I'd ever encountered. He was an amazing guy at making things happen. He would say that all the time – "Make it happen." His GM would come in and say "We need to do this," and he would just say, "Done." He had no idea how he was going to do it, but he'd always manage to get it done. I'd always been the guy who said: "Oh, well, you could do it this way or that way" and give a whole big spiel that nobody wants to hear. All they want to hear is, "Okay, done." So I became a guy who gets things done. Then I went to Boston and learned a lot working for **Oedipus** and **Steve Strick**. Oedi is one of the

L-R: Station Manager Kate London and GM Cate Brandon after the BRU paint job.

GM Cate Brandon Paints while Adema visits the studio

L-R: GM Cate Brandon, Sales Account Exec Barbie-Jo Fratus, News Anchor Kate Papp, Traffic Coordinator Robin Hamm

most passionate music people I've ever met. I learned a lot of history from them and that radio station. **Phil Manning** is a solid programmer all the way around. He understands marketing really well. I intend to rip off a lot of ideas from there because that station runs like clockwork.

What are some of the main differences in Tim's managerial style and the philosophy that you want to invoke there?

SR: We're a little more Rock-based now. One of the things I've said is that we're getting harder not because of what we're going to add, but because of what we're taking out. I'm referring mostly to the Gold library. Matchbox 20 and Goo Goo Dolls have fallen by the wayside. The cool, Alternative stuff that may be a little Pop-leaning, like Coldplay, definitely has a home here. I don't see it becoming a Heavy Metal radio station; I see it becoming a cool Alternative station. This station has always had a history of stepping out on records and we're going to continue that. We're going to champion bands. We want to break records. We want to work with labels and managers and retailers and booking agents to break records. I've always thought that any idiot can put a record on the air, but to really step up and do the things that need to be done to see a band break through is much harder. That's one of the things we did a lot in Seattle. We really tried to make the records we put on the air come home. I want to do that here too. [Case in point: Providence Soundscan Rank for Brand New's "Deja Entendu" = #21]

Promotionally, how will the station differ from the past?

SR: We're going to be more aggressive promotionally. The Summer Concert Series has always been a great benchmark for this radio

station. The city is very involved with these things. We just did our first show of the summer with Guster — huge turnout, 8,000 people. We're going to become more involved with the Tweeter Center. A lot of people think of the Tweeter Center as a Boston venue. I don't think it is. It's located halfway between Boston and Providence. If a band comes to the Tweeter Center, they should be doing stuff with Providence just as much as Boston. I'd like to see more bands come to Providence. I'd like to see Providence become a regular stop on tour routes. I get frustrated when bands play New York and Boston and don't play Providence. There's a huge market here filled with music fans.

Cate, what are your day-to-day responsibilities?

CB: My responsibilities are the same as any general manager at any radio station—I oversee the day-to-day running of the station. I'm also in charge of all the personnel, especially managing the department heads, including all of the "professionals" — which is what we call anyone who is here and paid full-time. In addition, I create and oversee all of the budgetary and legal issues. Those are my main duties, but I'm also involved in marketing and imaging the station.

That's quite a bit to run through as a college student. It's a great way to educate yourself and experience as much as you can before you leave college.

CB: It's an awesome experience. I'm doing a real-world, full-time job as a college student, in addition to my regular studies. There are different levels of commitment available here, but for a lot of students this is a full-time job. It's amazing how much time and energy students give to this place, especially since none of us are getting paid.

What are you most excited about this year?

CB: The general excitement around the station right now. I think everyone feels like they are a part of a great institution that is getting even better under their watch. We've added a bunch of very dedicated and proactive student and professional staffers and recently updated a lot of our technology. We're excited about all the new things we're going to get to do as a result of these changes.

SR: The sense in the building is that it is kind of a start of a new era. That's one of the reasons why it was very important to me to put a fresh coat of paint on this place and make it look different. One of the things I can't wait for — we have a little foyer as you enter the door of this radio station — I want to get a graffiti artist to do a huge mural so that as soon as you walk into the place you get this vibe from the radio station. That kind of excitement transfers throughout the building.

What was your first week back like?

SR: It's strange, because there are people here who remembered me, a lot of the sales staff, etc., a lot of the professionals. But a lot of the students either had never heard of me or had only heard of my name and didn't know who I was. The place looks exactly the same as it did when I first got here eight years ago coming in as a freshman. There's still a lot of my handwriting on the walls or stickers that I put up in the men's stall or things like that. It's nice because of all the radio stations I've ever worked at — and I've worked at some great radio stations — this was my first and I think everybody's first radio station holds a special place in their heart. You just feel like you can pour your blood, sweat, and tears into a radio station, invest yourself in it personally. It was nice to come back to a place where I could do

Promo Director John Feuerstein and Promo/Sales Coordinator Michelle Walker

Hanging out on the BRU Fire Escape L-R: Jock Josh Honeyman, Decibel Magazine founder (local music magazine) Gil Lantini, PM Drive Jock Mike McLenathan, PD Seth Resler

Seth Resler and current National Sales Director Mark Stachowski (circa 1998)

that. It feels like giving back to the radio station that gave me a lot. I met with a lot of the different department heads my first week. A big concern of the students with me coming in was: Who is this guy? What's it gonna be like? It takes a very special professional to work here because you're working with students. Even the best programmers would struggle with it. One of the reasons they brought me in was because I had come from this environment and I understood it, I knew what it meant. I knew that while getting good ratings was absolutely part of the mission and bringing in the sales dollars was part of the mission, probably the most important part of the mission is providing the students with an education. Everybody who got into the music business got into it because they fell in love with a place like this. This is what people imagine. In a lot of ways it's almost like the extreme opposite of a Clear Channel radio station. These are people who are here simply for the love of radio.

So who are some of the student "players" at WBRU right now?

SR: Andy Yen is our Music Director. This is also a student position which turns over every year. It's an elected position. With all the students here, I want to empower them. I threw Andy into it right away and said, "Here's a list of label reps - go call them." I want him to be very communicative with the record labels. Same thing with John Feuerstein, our Promotions Director. On several occasions I've said, "Here's the local, go do it." He's great; he's gotten it done. Our promotions staff has already turned out hundreds of proposals. One of the locals said the other day, "Boy you can

tell that Seth's at 'BRU because I got four calls from the station this week." And I added, "Yeah, and none of them were from me."

The airstaff - how does that system work?

CB: There's a long training process to prepare jocks for being on-air. No one gets put on the air without an enormous amount of practice. Freshmen interns come in, and they train for a semester; learn how to do board work, sit in with jocks, and have weekly meetings where they learn about different aspects of being on-air. They're trained in production. Then they do overnights for a semester and then, if they're good enough, they get day-cleared. Our afternoon drive spot is our premier shift and is usually held by a senior. Our jocks are very young this year, but they're doing a great job. It's amazing to see how good they've gotten in such a short time.

Seth: It's nice because, as opposed to having 40-year-old guys pretending they're still in the demo, we actually have people who are in the demo. I send the jocks in with a mission to go talk about the music first and foremost. I've learned a lot of things by listening to these jocks on the radio because they know things that I don't know. They're very street; they know what's cool.

What happens to WBRU on Sundays?

SR: It's interesting and, again, unlike anything you've ever seen at any other radio station. On Sundays we have the *360 Degree Black Experience In Sound*.

CB: 360 is basically an Urban format, but with much greater breadth of music—everywhere from Gospel to underground Hip Hop.

SR: It has huge ratings. Twenty percent of 18-34-year-olds listen to this radio station on Sunday. They turn on the radio and leave it on all day. It was originally started in 1972 as a way to target minority students, have them come in and take advantage of the resources that we had to offer them. It's grown into such a big community program. By no means is it just African American students anymore. That's one of the things that makes 'BRU so special and so integral to the community. It's something very special that we do. It's one of the reasons that people love this radio station. This radio station has a very unique place both in the history of Rhode Island and in the history of the music business. I never know how much people know about what this place is really like.

CB: Nobody understands how we work. Either they don't realize we're students at all or they think we're the stereotypical college radio station—you know, broadcasting the local football game to the 15 people who can actually get reception.

SR: It's hard to explain to anybody who hasn't been here. Anybody who has ever been the least bit concerned about the FCC's deregulation and about corporations coming in and voice tracking everything, sucking the life out of radio, would absolutely love this radio station. WBRU embodies everything people love about radio.