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Radio Playtime

By Dave Mandl

At last, a radio station worth listening to. **Dave Mandl** tunes in

'Imagine a radio station like no other. A radio station that makes public those artworks that have no place in traditional broadcasting. A radio station that is an archive of the new, the undiscovered, the forgotten, the impossible. That is an invisible gallery, a virtual arts centre whose location is at once local, global and timeless. And that is itself a work of art...'

[IMAGE]

>> left to right - Mick Richie, Jim Whelton 'xentos jones', Magz Hall, Knut Aufermann, Sarah Washington, Simon Lucas and Ed Baxter. Photographers- Mick Richie and Magz Hall

Hard as it would normally be to take that kind of breathless self-hype seriously, in this case I believe every word of it. The paragraph above comes from a press release announcing the long-awaited launch of Resonance FM, a new radio station licensed to the London Musicians' Collective. Broadcasting as of 1 May at 104.4 FM in central London (and live over the web at [<http://www.resonancefm.com>]), the station is the follow up to the venerable contemporary music organisation's month-long radio experiment of the same name in the summer of 1998. Anyone who heard that now legendary series, which was created as part of John Peel's Meltdown 98 Festival, will know that almost any amount of hyperbole is justified. The first incarnation of Resonance FM brought together what was surely the largest and most densely-packed assemblage of world-class radio artists, DJs, and obscure musical geniuses ever heard in one place (not to mention a spoken-word programme curated by King Mob and a music show presented by students at the Highbury Quadrant Primary School). Now, thanks to a test programme recently initiated by the UK's Radio Authority, the LMC has been given the chance to relaunch the station for a full year.

The LMC is one of fifteen groups around the UK that have been granted temporary licenses to run low-power, non-profit stations under the Radio Authority's Access Radio initiative. (If the programme is deemed successful, the Radio Authority is considering licensing many more such stations, creating 'a nation-wide new tier of small community-based radio services.') Resonance FM's approved transmission radius is only five kilometres, but with studios at Bankside, the station's signal will reach most of central London. In keeping with Access Radio's stated goal, the LMC has reached beyond its own deep pool of radical music-makers, producers, DJs, and curators, seeking as much involvement as possible from the outside community. Earlier this year, the group distributed a public call for participation, encouraging volunteers to help out with everything from administration to engineering to programming ('Everyone surely has at least one programme inside them,' the statement said). The station plans to provide a platform for local community organisations and 'dispossessed' groups – the more social and cultural gaps bridged the better – and in particular hopes to inspire large numbers of young people and students to get involved in making radio art.

Given the abysmal state of radio in general, it's almost unsporting to make comparisons, but Resonance FM's planned programming should set the station apart from just about anything else on the airwaves. Slated for its first 13-week season are shows assembled by infamous punk cartoonist Savage Pencil (Edwin Pouncey), Xentos Jones of the manic media-barrage outfit Die Trip Computer Die, members of the UK's Sonic Arts Network, uncategorisable Hong Kong performance artist Xper.Xr, the proprietors of London's Kosmische Klub, and folk-music maven Mike Gavin of the London institution Ray's Jazz Shop.

Also planned are several original soap operas, concert recordings from the LMC's vast archives, and a programme devoting a solid twelve hours each week to a different musical artist, with planned subjects including Phil Ochs, Magma, and Harry Partch (see). Expect all manner of oddball radio art and, in LMC head Ed Baxter's words, 'plenty of weird shit.' Oh boy.
Resonance FM [<http://www.resonancefm.com>]

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