

PEJ Editor Goes International

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At the risk of being accused of shameless self-promotion; I was interviewed recently by [Mickey Z](#), the New York City-based activist. I've had Zed on my radio show, [Gorilla Radio](#) a few times and he thought he would turn the tables! -
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Radio Active North of the Border Mickey Z. Interviews Gorilla Radio's Chris Cook Tuesday, February 15, 2005

For full disclosure, I will admit that an essential factor in my own subversive self-education was WBAI radio here in NYC. In other words, I'm not an objective listener to radical radio. Which brings me to Chris Cook...who broadcasts his show, Gorilla Radio, on CFUV, 101.9 FM (<http://cfuv.uvic.ca>) out of the University of Victoria in British Columbia. Why radio? Well, Cook explains, it's more easily accessible than television, and easier than writing for print.?

Gorilla Radio is a weekly one-hour show that features lively, provocative discussion between Chris and guests like M. Shahid Alam, William Blum, Helen Caldicott, Noam Chomsky, Laura Flanders, Sander Hicks, Julia Butterfly Hill, Naomi Klein, Kurt Nimmo, and yours truly. I figured it might be interesting to turn the tables, toss some questions back at Cook, and see what happens.

Mickey Z.: What role do you think radio can play today in waking people up and inspiring them to action?

Chris Cook: Radio is important. There used to be a guy here in Victoria who had a show at the University before I got involved there. If memory serves, it was called 'Bad News,' a play on

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the Chomsky title. I'll never forget the first time I happened on his program: He was basically reading various materials he'd found in alternative print. (We didn't have the Internet in "them days.") It was so heartening to hear someone speaking the truth you felt in your own heart, but had never had validated. That's the thing with media: The very fact that something is in print, or broadcast lends it credibility. And, hearing these messages, and knowing that you're not the only one who thinks these "radical" thoughts is very empowering. It helped me continue with my own work.

So, when you ask about radio waking people up; for me, hearing the dissenting view, right up front, over the airwaves, I thought: "There's a place I can go and do the kind of radio I think important. It's one thing to know things are screwed up; another to carp about it to your poor friends and relations; but until you can feel you're an active participant in addressing the problems, even if the effects are minute, or impossible to measure, you're doomed to victimhood and frustration. Just think, instead of shouting at your TV, you can do it through a microphone; and guess what? There are a lot of ears out there, dying to hear affirmations of what they too know in their hearts.

MZ: Tell me about your radio show and how you got started?

CC: I graduated from a college communications program back in the eighties. After several years working in the film industry in Toronto I burnt out. The stuff we produced was largely inane, commercial stuff; not particularly well done. So, I decided to leave the big city, see the world, and then go home to the west coast. I figured something would come up when I got there. When the answers didn't magically appear, I sat down and thought: What next? I remembered enjoying radio production at school, so I volunteered as an intern, the oldest in history I expect, at a local news station. Of course, it was a horribly right wing outfit, but they did read some of my stories, so it made it worthwhile for a few months. But, I knew I had no future in corporate news. Luckily, the local university has a radio station, CFUV. I approached them, and started producing a short news program, which led to Gorilla Radio.

When I first started the show, someone asked for a couple lines of description for the Program Guide. I wrote it up on the spot and have never felt the need to amend it: "Gorilla Radio is dedicated to social justice, the environment, community, and providing a forum for people and issues not covered in the mainstream media."

MZ: How do you decide on topics and guests?

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CC: I try to interview people that are doing admirable things; things for their communities, for the hard done by, for truth, justice, and the American Way. I don't necessarily try to be provocative. I want listeners to share in my outrage. There are some pretty gruesome crimes going on and a lot of them are walking away home-free, with their pockets crammed to the gunnels with public money. And all the murder and terror and suffering. It's just too much to keep shut up about.

MZ: What are you hoping to provoke with each show?

CC: There you've really hit on it. Why do I believe the things I do? I've been hip to propaganda as long as I can remember. As a kid, we lived in a pre-TV country. When we returned to civil Canada I started fiendishly watching the tube. I'd stay up late into the night, secure in my basement bedroom, eating up those old Republic Pictures war films from the Second War era. You have to dig some of these up, they're hilarious. Fucked up. But really obvious. Even as a kid who'd seen none of this before, or maybe because of it (?), I could see right through the racist, hate-bilging operation that was Republic. Once you've seen the lie, and stopped laughing about it, you can't let it stand unchallenged. Well, I can't. The hope is, once the truth is out, then the injustice masked will be addressed. And there's a lot of that going on. When I first came to your page Mickey, I can't remember offhand what you were talking about, but I'm sure it was something well-written, well-thought out, and well-intentioned. I support that attitude wherever I find it. And, thankfully I don't have to look too hard to find people out there, and especially from within the U.S.! Most of my guests have been Americans? I have been accused, typically, as being "Anti-American." It's a blanket statement in Canada, designed to dismiss anyone critical of U.S. Government policy, used by a certain element in this country: The Continentalists!

MZ: The "anti-America" label is more popular than ever these days. What does that mean? Do you hate jazz, the Grand Canyon, baseball?

CC: Yeah; there's a lot of strange stuff happening in my Canada. The slur, because it is thrown as one here, of "Anti-Americanism" really means: Shut your mouth! The term is aspiring to equal that other great gob-stopper, "Anti-Semite." The funny thing is; I love America. The great promise of the founders, the refutation of the monarch, something we've yet to accomplish here, and just the vastness of its history. And the Grand Canyon! America is fortunate to have wild places left. That's very rare, especially in a country as industrious as the U.S., and should be greedily protected by the people. Now! Though I've never been there physically, I feel I would greet it as an old familiar. That's true of all America. I stood on the roof of one of the Twin Towers, I think it was the South. I remember tripping around Manhattan, Central Park, the Statue of Liberty, Greenwich Village at night. And everywhere was something we'd seen a

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million times in the movies and on TV. In a sense, America belongs to the world. Hate America? I say: Goddess Save America.

MZ: Well, since you're answering my question more literally than I expected, what about baseball and jazz?

CC: We Canadians spend the long winter nights watching TV. And most programming is American. And baseball? You know, I tried to look into the origin of the game. It's very Masonic. But I couldn't find its author. Abner Doubleday is credited, but that's apparently not quite the case. Like much of America's history, the myths are so much greater in the public mind than the truth of the matter. I just wish the Blue Jays would get it together. I lived in Toronto in the days the team was up and coming. Heartbroken a couple times in the pennant race. Those damn Tigers! But the beautiful thing about baseball is: you don't have to pay to much attention to it. It's a pastime. Maybe the Jays will do something this year?

But jazz? What is it? The term conjures so many connotations, it's not something to be contained within anything as flimsy as a single word, or emotion. Even hearing "Jazz" evokes the images of dozens of giants. But for me, it means Black America foremost. And that racial history is somewhere we two neighbors part company. I certainly won't claim we gentle Canucks are not racist. The First Nations' unfortunate "contact" experience with our founders was horrible. And racism is still strong here; and institutional. But, the easy way race is accepted as shorthand, especially in the media in the U.S.. A Canadian news reporter, however shoddily equipped morally, would never lead a story, "Black woman found frozen in car." But, watching the Seattle stations we pick up here, racial identification is always within the first two lines.

MZ: Here in the U.S., we just endured a divisive election year in which even within the Left very clear battle lines were drawn. As I'm sure your guests discuss, there's plenty that needs fixing...but in all your radio interviews, have you heard solutions that sound like they might work? New ideas? Strategies? Something to inspire the inactive to action and push activists into direct action?

CC: Well, the whole world has endured America's last election. And worse, endured the results, these four bloody, tragic years resulting the previous one too. It's difficult to remain hopeful. These issues are mountainous. It's a matter of economies of scale. The elections in the States and Palestine and Iraq and the Ukraine, and some of the "Stans" have driven out

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hope of unfettered democracy being allowed to flourish anywhere. Look what happened to Chavez and Aristide. I try to ask the question, less frequently now it occurs, "What hopeful thing...?" But it's the fight that matters. There's only one strategy: fight injustice where you find it. If you need further motivation: You're fighting for your own life! I've talked to a lot of people these past years. It's been an enormous education. None of them, that I can remember, have ever mentioned final victory. Things are always going to be screwed up. So, you identify them and get to work setting it right. But there's a growing sense now, some people don't want things fixed, they feel they will profit by monkey-wrenching the works. And that's disheartening. When you can't trust the plumber, you'll never defecate in peace again.

MZ: What do you say to someone who wants to embark on a radical radio career?

CC: I'm still trying to figure that one out. I have a day job. But, the radio makes the day job easier to take. I know I can go through the daily motions of earning my bread and know I've got another facet to my life where I try to make a difference; if only at 2300 watts. But, to aspirants I would say; things are a lot more promising now than when I got started. Technology is expanding almost as quickly as network news, talk-radio, and the major newspapers are losing credibility. There is a profound hunger for the "real" story, and if that appetite can't be supplied by the NYT, FOX, and the rest?

MZ: Thanks, Chris...and don't hold your breath with the Blue Jays.

Mickey Z. is the author of several books and can be found on the Web at <http://www.mickeyz.net>

More from Mickey Z.