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Home

GTA

Business

Waymoresports

A&E

Feature Sections ▾

Today's Features

- > [Condos](#)
- > [Homes](#)
- > [Travel](#)
- > [Wheels](#)

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Stock Quote

Ticker Name



- > CAREERS
- > STAR CLASSIFIEDS
- > NEW IN HOMES

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[E-mail Story](#)

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CFNY-style '80s spirit reunites at Government

[WILLIAM BURRILL](#)

Believe it or not, there actually was a time when The Edge had edge.

As anyone who has sat there wasted and staring at a turntable knows, what goes around comes around. So it is that '80s nostalgia is now all the rage on new stations such as JACK FM, but it is a modern-day pretender's version of what was the true '80s music pioneer, CFNY, which earned the nickname Spirit of Radio.

So this calls for a spirited reunion at the Government/Kool Haus this Wednesday, (\$65.50. 416-870-8000. Doors 8 p.m.). The reunion will dig up and dust off a whole whack of former jocks such as Craig Beesack, Don Berns, Alan Cross, Ivar Hamilton, Deadly Hedley Jones and Scot Turner. And there will also be live music from such actual '80s notables as the Pukka Orchestra, Nash the Slash, the Spoons, Images In Vogue, Martha and the Muffins, the Extras, and Carole Pope and Kevan Staples of Rough Trade fame.

The '80s was a time when other FM stations were packing their playlists with pretentious Styx-type prog-rock pap and castrated "hard rock" by such lightweight weenies as Loverboy, Heart and — spare me, please, Princess Diana — Bryan Adams.

The Spirit of Radio Reunion 2003, is largely the brainchild of David Marsden, former director of operations and programming at CFNY from 1977 to 1989. He came up with the idea when he realized that many current Toronto stations, such as JACK FM, are grabbing large audiences by playing '80s nostalgia stuff. "Most of the music now being hyped as part of the exciting '80s comes directly from the CFNY playlist," Marsden says. "That is only strange now due to the fact that those screaming the news from the rooftops at one time told us no one wanted to hear that music."

- News
- Ontario
- Canada
- World
- Opinion/Editorials
- Letters
- National Report
- World Report
- Obituaries
- Editorial Cartoon
- Today's Paper
- Corrections
- Star Columnists
- > ADVERTISEMENT <



- Special Reports
- > Search for Cecilia
 - > Municipal Election
 - > Broken Homes
 - > SARS Investigation
 - > Postwar Iraq
 - > Rugby World Cup
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 - > Contests/Events
 - > Crosswords
 - > Ellie
 - > Horoscopes
 - > Lottery Results
 - > Traffic Cams

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> TV Listings

Initiatives

- > Classroom Connection
- > Fresh Air Fund
- > Santa Claus Fund

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Marsden recalls that the actual working conditions at CFNY in the 1980s were far from swank. The station's signal was only slightly more powerful than a HAM radio and the equipment at the crappy Brampton radio studio that housed the Spirit was held together Red Green style.

"In the beginning of CFNY, while listeners were placing coat hangers out the window to receive the station, those of us working there Scotch-taped equipment back together to keep the station alive," Marsden laughs in an interview.

"The team created from these most stressful times had determination within every fibre of their bodies," Marsden recalls. They didn't actually know they were breaking new ground and making history at the time, but Marsden notes that, "the team of people who were part of CFNY during these (early) times ultimately was recognized as one of the strongest and most creative teams of the past several decades."

Marsden and his comrades had to overcome more than just crappy equipment.

"One night I was on the air when suddenly the vinyl record started skipping," Marsden remembers, laughing. "Turning around to fix the problem I found a mouse running around on the turntable. With each trip it would bump the tone-arm. EEK a mouse."

Of course Marsden dared not harm the rotating rodent because — for all he knew — Mighty Mouse may have been all that was generating the station's paltry power. But from the start, listeners caught the Spirit and the station's glitches became part of its garage-band charm.

"I am still amazed by the dedication the audience had to the stuff we were getting out on the radio," Marsden says. "I felt rewards from that every day, making the stress and struggle of keeping it going worthwhile."

By the way, Marsden has returned to the Toronto air — Thursday and Friday nights, 7 p.m. to midnight on 94.9 FM The ROCK.

It was 20 years ago tomorrow night that CKLN went live on the FM dial with a broadcast from the BamBoo on Queen St. W. And perhaps Toronto's most eclectic station is celebrating with a big bash at the new Bambu-by-the-Lake tomorrow night that is open to the public (\$10 a ticket). The blow-out will feature the type of music CKLN is now famous for, including the funky African hip-hop jazz of the Jungle Bouti Orchestra, Toronto ska legend Adrian Miller, plus sets from DJ Chocolate, DJ Nikki Red, DJ No Capitalista, Amita and more.

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