Students’ Love for Art Inspires Innovative Programming on Columbia’s WKCR-89.9 FM

By Jo Kadlecck

Philipp Kuecuekyan, CC ‘03, was sitting in his film studies class last spring when a friend asked if he might want to use his interest in cinema as a talk show DJ for WKCR-89.9 FM, Kuecuekyan, a native of Berlin, Germany, hadn’t thought much about the medium of radio before and didn’t feel completely confident with his interviewing skills. Still, the idea intrigued him and he agreed at least to try.

Today, Kuecuekyan is a host of “Film Focus,” an independent film show that airs Monday nights from 9:30-10 on the student-run radio station and includes reviews, interviews and previews. Kuecuekyan has scheduled and interviewed directors such as Jacque Rivette (“Va Savoir”), Griffin Dunne (“Lisa Picard is Famous”) and Ang Lee (“Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”) as well as actors like Marissa Tomei, Mira Sorvino, and Mathieu Kassovitz.

He’s even exchanged on-air insights with Columbia film professors Richard Peña and David Sterritt and New York Times critic Janet Maslin. In fact, Kuecuekyan’s interviews have built such a following that he’s now inundated with inquiries by publicists and filmmakers alike. “I have so many requests, I don’t have time for them all,” he says.

Not bad for an undergraduate film student who wasn’t sure he could pull off so much conversation in a non-visual medium. And though he easily spends ten hours a week preparing for his thirty minutes of air time, Kuecuekyan doesn’t earn a dime or an academic credit for his show. What he does gain is an insider’s view of the New York film scene, growing confidence in his skills and access to international filmmakers and actors.

The secret of his success? Kuecuekyan is part of a team — and a history—of equally enthusiastic undergraduate students, who, since 1986, have sustained the five shows that make up the art department of WKCR-89.9 FM (www.wkr.org).

WKCR radio began at Columbia in the 1930s as a radio club and secured its FCC call letters—KCR for King’s Crown Radio—shortly after WWII when the FCC began codifying the formalities of radio stations. Soon, WKCR formally embraced the FM convention and aired Columbia classroom events, classical music and broadcasts of the United Nations. But in 1968, the station redirected its mission to present non-commercial programming of relevance to the entire New York City area. WKCR’s identity evolved into “The Alternative” and has in the past few years gained a worldwide audience—thanks to the Internet—of listeners who tune in for programs they cannot get on other stations. Enter WKCR-Arts. In addition to “Film Focus,” other shows include “Art Attack.”

(Continued on Page 10)