

Unofficial Channels Hollow Earth Radio

Hollow Earth Radio is a proudly esoteric station based in Seattle, Washington, that has bent and stretched freeform style since 2007. It's a completely volunteer powered non-profit set-up with a charming mission creep that sees the team there working on live broadcasts (including a show from a carriage on Seattle's light rail), programming events such as their own Magma Fest, and running a gig space from their station premises. All this in addition to broadcasting a dizzying range of autonomous 'you do you' shows.

The station is now rejigging the usual narrative whereby ever-expanding digital platforms replace traditional radio, choosing instead to fundraise \$25,000 so they can broadcast over FM. Director Garrett Kelly insists this costly, red-tape heavy move from URL to call sign (theirs will be KHUH 100.3 FM) is worth it to increase local community engagement. "Access to local media is a justice issue in Seattle," he says. "An FM channel means that people who don't have reliable access to the internet can still freely access our broadcasts via the radio dial."

Positioning the station as "part of the struggle for collective liberation" means that, unsurprisingly, there is a huge focus on amplifying marginalised voices. Regular Hollow Earth shows include *Black Living Room*, what DJ Amir Islam describes as a "super-unapologetically black" jazz focussed slot, and *Yonic Boom*, run by women in Seattle DIY music. Kelly cites a previous slot from local latino rapper P Supremo, who shared perspectives on his life in the federal prison system and once recorded a live show via the pay phone in a halfway house, adding "I want to hear first hand, live reporting from protests and events around the city. I want to hear social commentary about the nitty gritty of local politics and issues in a way that hasn't been watered down."

The station broadcasts from a shopfront on Seattle's gentrification frontline, so its political aims are necessarily explicit. This process sees grassroots creative endeavours used as cultural products to help sell low-income neighbourhoods as 'vibrant' or 'up and coming', driving up rents leading to the displacement of communities of colour. Hollow Earth DJs sign an anti-oppression pledge and local groups deliver anti-racism training to volunteers. "We hope that by promoting local artists and offering our space and airtime to the affected communities we can aid in strengthening the neighbourhood's cultural identity and community resilience to gentrification."

Hollow Earth has some way to go to reach its fundraising target, but remain confident. "Ultimately," says Kelly, "the real reason I think the public should be clamouring for these airwaves is because they belong to

□ hollowearthradio.org
by Beynon

Bites

Bonfire

Of Insanity

Devon crew **Bizarre Rituals** embrace full-spectrum chaos via their themed parties, diverse label roster and multimedia aesthetic

"Beaches, Dartmoor, party science, weird drugs bought from the internet, art, hypnotism, houseplants, heartworn highways, JG Ballard, Neal Stephenson, Italo horror, comics, discordianism, witchcraft, feminism, tattoos, the tundra, chow mein calzone..."

The list of inspirations offered by Devon based party crew Bizarre Rituals might smack of blithe eclecticism, but what distinguishes the collective from their peers is their lack of curatorial snobbery and willingness to share the subcultural wealth. Citing "RVNG Intl, Yerevan Tapes, Dada and The KLF" as models of multimedia mischief, they are untainted by the air of monochromatic cool surrounding crews in London and Manchester; instead they remanifest the colourful chaos that gripped UK clubland when rave first took a hold in the late 1980s. Underscoring the communal aspect of their operation, Brain Rays, Tofuti Klein, Cape Khoboi, Stogie Houzer, ursula, Yamaham, French Tony and Tommy Williams address my questions as a single entity.

"Parties are for sharing," they maintain. "They make up an essential aspect of our creative output, as each

one offers a huge creative opportunity to collaborate and explore new ideas together. From coming up with a theme, designing poster artwork, creating animations to promote the night, decorating the venue, to creating new music for the dancefloor. The parties offer a platform to grow what we're doing and they provide a safe place that's welcoming, fun, ridiculous, high energy and warm. Everyone's encouraged to do what they want and play the music that they love. It's eclectic and brilliant."

Bizarre Rituals is also a fully functional record label. 2015 saw the release of *Music For Abandoned Beach Parties* by Brain Rays and *Cabin Fever* by Baconhead. The former is a six track journey into soulful slo-mo house, three of its tracks exquisitely voiced by Nigerian born singer/actor Theo Ogunlipo. Brain Rays is the side project of Bizarre Rituals co-founder Ben Hudson, also one half of hiphop duo Baconhead, whose warped lyrical schema and lurching beatwork on *Cabin Fever* recall the work of Prince Paul, Sensational and El-P. More recently they issued Tofuti Klein's heartstopping *Dragon's Disco* single, whose title track is an exercise in streamlined



Clockwise from left: French Tony, Tommy Williams, Cape Khoboi, Chris Mayoh, Tofuti Klein, Stogie Houzer, Yamaham, ursula, Sihhmyr, Brain Rays

ambient funk oddly reminiscent of Steve Winwood's synth-drenched masterpiece *Arc Of A Diver* and the glossy, ennui-laden Roxy Music of *Avalon*. The label's releases exist at an angle to the voguish sounds emanating elsewhere in the UK and the collective's Devon location is to a considerable extent responsible for their freshness.

"Hopefully we could take what we do to many places and it would work just as well, but there's a certain relaxed vibe to BR that you wouldn't find had we grown together in say, London. So the location does influence us on some levels. Some of the crew have recently returned to, or moved to the West Country from London. Many of our friends and family no longer live in Devon but most appreciate an excuse to return for a visit and our parties present a regular opportunity to do so. People down here are in some ways less caught up with what might currently be in vogue or what to expect of a club night. This means we can be more playful and take ourselves less seriously than many of our big city counterparts."

Though their playfulness sets them apart from more po-faced contemporaries, Bizarre Rituals

are just as dedicated to the finer details of their multidimensional craft. In our email exchange initiated late in 2015, they outlined the thinking behind Brain Rays & Stogie Houzer's *Enter The Fug* mixtape, which is "supposed to chart the psychological journey of a mind altering experience... the visual aspect and John Carpenter-inspired imagery and characters have become really key... The idea that it's no longer just a selection of tracks, but there are clues to an otherworldly storyline."

The mixtape's release as a free download was heralded by a video teaser featuring beings with glowing eyes piloting a clapped-out banger through country lanes. This all-too-brief road movie – a blazed echo of Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty's fabled KLF film masterpiece *The White Room* – indicates the collective's penchant for the conceptual.

"Having ideas behind what you're doing helps to drive things along and shape the aesthetic as well as offer crucial boundaries," they note. "It also helps with communicating ideas and strengthens the vibe of the crew. Quite a few of us have as much of a background in visual arts and other fields as music,

so that probably has an influence. Working as a collective is much easier if there is a shared aesthetic – all our parties have themes, and residents shape their DJ sets around this, it also gives people the chance to dress up weird – which is a great leveller."

2016 looks set to be another industrious year for Bizarre Rituals, with more parties, further releases and a continuation of their homespun aesthetic. "Things are pretty exciting at the moment. Our latest releases are the Tofuti Klein and a track by Livework Unit. We have an Americana record coming from Cape Khoboi and a mixtape from psych-punk band Howard Hughes. We're due to start working on a film soundtrack. Also, it would be really nice to reach out to other crews like Manchester's Space Cassette."

"We recently met someone on a dancefloor in Plymouth who told us he'd moved here in 1994 because of the rave party scene," they add. "The implications of ongoing austerity in the UK are pretty frightening, but a side effect may well be an increase in people looking for, and making, their own cheap fun, keeping the love alive." □ bizarrerituals.co.uk
Joseph Stannard