

NOW WE'RE TALKIN'

By Helen Marketti

oWOW! Cleveland A CHAT WITH JOHN GORMAN

John Gorman is the founder, partner and chief content officer for oWOW! online radio station. John's name is familiar to Cleveland radio as he served as the music and program director for WMMS.

We have all had our favorite radio stations. The dial would be set to hear our favorite DJs, music and programs. The radio station became our link to the rest of the city and community. We were kept up to date on the latest trend, song, concert and interview. It seems those days of radio slipped through time and vanished. Corporations took over and radio as we once knew it was no longer.

oWow is seeking to recapture those days when radio was fun to listen to and you looked forward to live shows, interviews and play lists. Modern technology has opened doors and opportunities that were not available years ago which will help bring a slice of home to anyone anywhere.

"The idea for this type of station goes back a number of years as though we were peering into the future," said John. "There was always the thought that once technology improved, maybe you could go online and do something similar that you did on the air with radio.

"Our station can be heard all over the world but we are concentrating on the greater Cleveland, Akron and Canton markets. When you combine those markets, it makes everything much stronger," explains John. "We are online so we don't have to worry about transmission towers or anything like that so we are able to do much more with less. Our station is live and locally based. All of our staff lives in the Cleveland area. The music that we play is tailor-made for the region. We don't talk to record companies. We went out and found the music ourselves. Unlike terrestrial radio which has a pay to play policy, we play the music that we find which fits our station."

"How are bands such as Welshly Arms and Nate Jones among others going to break out unless they have exposure? In the early days, Cleveland was the break out market because whatever Cleveland was playing was then important to the rest of the country. It got everyone's attention. That is one of the things we aim to do again with oWOW," said John. "A friend of mine said that Cleveland has a higher musical IQ than the rest of the country and I firmly believe that we should take advantage of it. We play timeless rock and roll. For example, we can play something that Bonnie Raitt recorded twenty years ago followed by something that Grace Potter recorded last week. It doesn't sound like there is a twenty-year gap between the two songs. We have many great artists who are still making music but it's not being played on the radio. Bruce Springsteen has new material and we're playing it. Van Morrison has released a "DUETS" album that we are playing but no one else is touching it. There is a band, Lucero who play at least 300 gigs a year, we play their material because it fits for us. We also play music by a band named, Wussy. We are listening to everything that is being released. We listen to music from everywhere. We play a wide variety of quality music. It's a cut above your average pop star. Pop music has been completely changed and ruined by perfect pitch and a handful of producers who are producing everything which is why it all sounds alike."

Finding the right name for the station seemed to be an easy fit. "For some reason, I always liked the name "wow". When Jim (Marchyshyn) and I were writing a business plan, talking with potential investors and so forth, we discussed what we would be naming the station," explains John. "It kept going back to how someone feels when they see or hear something they like or remembering a happy time. You tend to think "Oh wow" because it's a positive expression.



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Adding the lowercase "o" adds an edge to the name. David Helton designed the logo." David Helton also created The Buzzard for WMMS.

"The word "Cleveland" is very prominent on the logo because we are for Cleveland, Akron, Canton and surrounding areas. Our secondary audience is former residents of the Cleveland area who live elsewhere. We have been receiving a great deal of responses from former residents who now live in LA, New York City, Philly and San Francisco. The music you grow up with stays with you for life."

oWOW! Cleveland started quietly in February of this year. "We had been working out of temporary studios while our new studio and offices were being built," said John. "I feel we are located in one of the coolest buildings in Cleveland. It's called the 78th Street Studios. It's near Edgewater Park and Gordon Square Arts District. The building we are in houses a number of art galleries, recording studios and Alternative Press Magazine headquarters, a couple of independent record labels and a restaurant. What is great about being in this building is that it's creative, local and regional. The art galleries are constantly changing their displays. When you are in a creative environment, it keeps the creative juices going. Our studios are located on the second floor where people can see the studios through the window. We are also going to have a performance studio."

Varieties of different programs that are part of the oWOW station have something to whet the appetites of its listeners. Murray Saul was well known for his "Get Downs" on Fridays during the early days of WMMS. John has managed to incorporate Murray's "Get Downs" in the programming for oWOW. "When Jim and I were working on putting this radio station together, one of the few people we shared our plans with was Murray Saul. Murray had suggested we include some of his "Get Downs". We have edited some of the material because Murray mentions typewriters and adding machines which are not really in existence any longer," laughs John. "I promised Murray we would put his "Get Downs" on the air. Unfortunately he passed away before we could make that happen."

"As we were putting our library together, I would call various contacts and ask if so and so ever did an acoustic version of their song. I was looking for different versions of popular songs," said John. "This came about from a conversation with a friend who said when you listen to an artist play an acoustic version of a well known song, you are hearing it stripped down to its true meaning and soul. That's when I got the idea to do "Naked Brunch" on Sunday mornings because you are hearing songs stripped down to the basics."

"Friday Night Live" is based on live concert segments from artists. We have built up a great acoustic and live concert library. We also have in our archives a lot of rare material, recordings that are difficult to find, never released or did not receive any airplay in Cleveland. Those songs are working their way into our regular programming. We want to have an element of surprise and not become predictable," said John. "Our criteria for adding a song to our play list are that it needs to match the quality of the other music we are playing. Right now, we are playing about four or five Cleveland area bands. It's not that we are specifically looking for "x" number of area bands, however. Every song is fair game on our station. We try to keep the genres open. More people like listening to online radio. Our listening audience is growing. We have a solid foundation that will continue to build. We hope for more competition. The reason for that is the more internet radio stations there are locally that are geared towards a different genre than us will actually help everyone. The advancement of today's technology allows you to take us anywhere. It's important for us to be the soundtrack of Cleveland."

To listen live, download the device app to listen anywhere, see playlists, and learn more about the on air personalities visit <http://owownow.com>