

Wave Farm Celebrates 20 Years of Transmission Art

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Transmission arts organization and community broadcaster the [Wave Farm](#) celebrates its 20th anniversary this Saturday with an event at the [Fridman Gallery](#) in New York City, titled, “[Wave Farm 1997–2017: Twenty Performances for Twenty Years](#).” From noon to 10 PM, 22 sound and transmission artists will perform, including Wave Farm artistic director Tom Roe and Jeff Kolar, whom [I interviewed](#) four-and-a-half years ago.

The Wave Farm is singularly unique in that it was founded to support the creation of art that uses transmission technologies and also operates a full-power non-commercial FM station, [WGXC-FM](#) (which, incidentally, just signed on to air [our radio show](#)), which can showcase that art and practice. The station is based in Acra, NY, sited on the titular farm, home to the Wave Farm Study Center. That’s where the organization hosts an artist residency program, research library, and site-specific installations by collaborating artists. Because the farm is in a rural area, the station primarily broadcasts out of a studio in the larger town of Hudson, about 18 miles east, and also broadcasts Tuesdays from the Catskill Public Library.

[Wave Farm Radio](#) is a [Part 15 AM](#) and internet station located on the farm that broadcasts transmission art and experimental sounds 24/7.

Over email I asked Tom to reflect on 20 years of community broadcasting. He corrected the record, noting that, “we have done radio art—more accurately, transmission art—for 20 years. We did ‘community broadcasting’ some during our micro radio period, and then later, when we got a full-power FM license we had to do ‘community broadcasting’ again because that was what we preached about (for) FM signals for our entire existence.”

The “micro radio period” he refers to is [free103point9](#), a micropower radio arts collective that had its maiden broadcast on March 7, 1997 in Brooklyn. So, properly, Wave Farm’s 20 years date back to that first transmission, after which it evolved into an arts non-profit, later launching WGXC’s FM signal in 2011.

The late 90s was a time before low-power FM, which meant it was difficult to impossible to start a new community radio station in many places, especially crowded urban markets like New York or San Francisco. As Tom recalled, community radio activists were concerned about gaining access to the airwaves, “and we thought there should be some concern about the content, once that access was allowed.” Hence the focus on transmission art.

What’s transmission art? Tom elucidates:

“We believe weird things like the 60Hz hum of electrical lights in a radio studio is not silence, and that the word ‘podcast’ is an advertisement for Apple, not a type of audio show. Our ‘community broadcasting’ now includes a [webstream/station](#) that just plays the sounds from inside a pond in the community (from the artist [Zach Poff](#)), and a [weather webstream/station](#) that turns weather sounds into electronic music (from the artist [Quintron](#)).”

Charting the changes over the last 20 years, Tom observed, “technology makes community broadcasting easier now than in 1997.” Technology allows WGXC to have its remote studios in Hudson and Catskill, as well as to broadcast town meetings live.

“We have a new box at a bar in Catskill where the artists can open the box, open a laptop in that box, press the on button, and then they are on the air,” he said. “We teach folks attending local town meetings or events how to pull out their cell phones and record or stream meetings. I used to joke that we try to make 1940s radio with 2010s technology.”

If you can't make it to the Fridman Gallery Saturday, you can hear it on [WGXC on the air in the Hudson Valley and online](#). The station is also having its [Fall Harvest pledge drive](#), so it's a great occasion to support this truly singular enterprise that serves both the communities of Hudson and Greene Counties and the global transmission art community.

Also in New York City, Wave Farm is partnered with Jeff Kolar's Radius for the [Sonic Arcade exhibition](#), happening through Feb. 24, 2018 at the Museum of Arts and Design. On the fourth Saturday of the month museum visitors will experience a microradio broadcast of Wave Farm's WGXC 90.7-FM programming via radios available at the exhibition. The exhibition features interactive installations, immersive environments, and performing objects that explore how the ephemeral and abstract nature of sound is made material.

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