

By and large, Buenos Aires' commercial radio is in a pretty sorry state. Up and down the dial, stations fill the airwaves with repetitive play lists, and obnoxious talking heads far more concerned with juvenile banter than playing good music. As listener attention spans shrink and audiences looking for something more than the usual pop palate abandon terrestrial radio altogether, the opportunities to hear something worthwhile are becoming increasingly rare.

Despite these difficulties, a small cadre of DJs continues to toil away in the hopes of spreading their musical gospel to those willing to listen. Banished to odd hours, given little promotion and receiving even less recognition, these music selectors are battling to keep the spirit of radio alive. One of the key members of this little secret society is Soledad Rodríguez Zubieta, who operates under the DJ moniker SRZ and is the driving force behind three distinctly different weekly programs that explore music outside the commercial mainstream: Daylife and Soulful on Metrodance and La Hora Señalada on FM Rock & Pop.

"I was always attracted to the radio," says SRZ. Her first experience on the radio was an amateur show in her hometown of Banfield that she put on with a couple of friends. "It was an amateur show, but now I see how it was the beginning of all this. It was really eclectic, perhaps closer to what I play now on FM Rock & Pop." Not surprisingly, her days as a music fan go back even further, to her teenage years. "I always liked to research and investigate new music," she says. Although her first love was grunge rock, SRZ claims that her first serious musical relationship was with bands like Massive Attack and Portishead from the mid-90s trip-hop scene in Bristol.

While many music devotees are content to practice their fandom at home while slaving away at a regular job, SRZ committed herself to finding a home in the radio industry. Even after completing a degree in psychology, she found herself a job behind the scenes at Metrodance. "I started working there but what I always wanted was to pick music, either for the station or specific segments. That was what interested me the most, what I enjoy the most." Her efforts paid off because within a short time SRZ was given her first program, Daylife. Airing on Saturday mornings at 9, the show offers a break from the usual high-energy Metrodance sound. "Daylife is a downtempo show, but I try to do something more eclectic. I like to look for something acoustic and mix it with something electronic. It is a place for all styles of music, but a downtempo version of those styles."

Soon after the successful launch of Daylife, SRZ was offered another show, La Hora Señalada on FM Rock & Pop. Every Saturday at 9pm, the show puts a spotlight on up-and-coming rock artists, while also taking the time to sprinkle in a few rare classics. Recent shows have featured tracks from indie rock stalwarts like Bright Eyes, Built to Spill and Spoon, alongside cuts from budding new rave acts DJ Medhi and Whitey, and choice classics from bands like Depeche Mode, XTC and Bob Marley.

Recently SRZ began broadcasting yet another show, Soulful, which airs on Sunday mornings at 10 on Metrodance. As a showcase for urban beats, R&B, hip hop, soul, funk and reggae, the program is a clear departure, not just from the usual Metrodance sound, but practically the entire Buenos Aires radio spectrum. The idea of breaking new ground is something that drives SRZ, who says, "I just love the idea that it's the first — the only — show on the radio devoted to this sound." She does acknowledge that doing a show largely based on black music successfully is not easy in a city with virtually no black population. SRZ admits, "It's weird because there is not a direct audience, a pure audience. But I think we're building it." She continues, "I try to search for things with more electronic production so that the usual listeners won't be turned off. I try to avoid things that are too hip hop, too hard... I try to make the show super-current and keep it feminine and sexy, while playing things you don't usually hear in Buenos Aires."

Despite the challenge, SRZ thinks Buenos Aires is ready for Soulful, and says the response so far has been positive. "The scene has grown so much in just the past year. Now we have MTV Jams and VH1 Soul — this is something very new. A lot more albums are being released here and more nightclubs are adopting this kind of music... some in a commercial fashion, others in a more experimental way. It's a good time to include this sound in a radio station that looks to present a modern view of music."



Doing three shows a week is no easy task. Although SRZ claims that she only spends about five hours each week putting the shows together, she also admits, "I listen to music all day long and take notes that help me when I'm preparing the shows." While her younger days were spent blowing her paychecks on new music at the local record shop, SRZ has moved almost exclusively online in search of the latest sounds. "The sources I'm using now are blogs," she says. "It's where I find the freshest music, the newest music." She claims to have an entire regimen of online stops, the most important of which is the Hype Machine, a blog aggregator that tracks which artists and songs are getting the most blog attention. For additional inspiration, she also checks out streaming internet radio, citing the show "Morning Becomes Eclectic" on Los Angeles radio station KCRW as a particular favorite.

While it may seem odd for a DJ like SRZ to be checking out a radio show in Southern California for inspiration, she claims that foreign sources are a necessity for Argentinians in search of new music. "Here in Buenos Aires, you don't have good sources. You don't have good radio stations. There is no digital media." As a result, almost all of SRZ's online resources are based in the United States and Europe. But despite the difficulties for Buenos Aires music fans, SRZ has seen some positive developments in the local music scene; in particular, promising new club nights have begun to appear, such as "Zizek with experimental hip hop and cumbia, and Compass with indie pop and rock."

SRZ has also been doing her part to improve the state of affairs in the local club scene. While most of her DJ work happens on the radio, she has been a guest DJ at Zizek, Compass and a variety of other parties. For a while she even held down a regular spot providing the soundtrack in the lounge at the ultra-posh Hotel Faena. Her first foray into club DJing was two years ago at Phonorama, a party famous for its inclusion of so-called "no-DJs", usually journalists or other music industry folk who are not usually seen behind the decks. Free from the pressure to display some sort of technical prowess, SRZ explains, "I think I felt comfortable with the name 'no-DJ' because I feel like I'm more of a selector than a DJ."

Her DJ work in the clubs may be more about the selection than the technique, but SRZ claims to be "obsessive" about the sound of her radio shows. This probably stems from the fact that both Daylife and Soulful are recorded and edited ahead of time by SRZ, who assembles the shows on her laptop with careful attention to detail. What is even more surprising is that for all her hard work, SRZ does not even speak on the air. Although she has complete control over the musical content, the only voice that appears on Daylife and Soulful is a processed and computerized vocal that occasionally pops in to say the name of the show, the station and yes, SRZ's name. La Hora Señalada is a little different, as the program is hosted by another DJ, albeit one who credits SRZ for the musical selections.

"It's weird. It's all very weird," she says. "It's like I'm a ghost. I'm a music selector, but I think (talking on the air) is probably my next step." Rather than clamoring for more attention, the admittedly shy SRZ is largely content with the simple fact that her eclectic and cutting-edge music choices are making their way on to commercial radio airwaves. "There are no other girls (working as music selectors) — not even one," she says. Even without a speaking role, SRZ is providing a small glimmer of hope for those left cold by the creatively barren radio dial. For more info, including playlists from her radio shows, check her out online at www.myspace.com/mysrz.

STAY TUNED WITH SRZ

***Daylife** // downtempo & alrededores

Sat from 9 to 10 am

***Metrodance 95.1 FM** // La Hora Señalada
New rock, indie & alt-classic // Sat. from 9 to 10 pm
FM Rock & Pop, 95.9 FM

***Soulful** // Urban beats, black roots & sexy R&B
Sun from 10 to 12 pm // Metrodance 95.1 FM

SRZ RECOMMENDS

***LCD Soundsystem** // Sound of Silver

***Beirut** // Gulag Orkestar

***New Young Pony Club** // Fantastic Playroom

***Dean & Britta** // Back Numbers

***Various Artists** // Urban Africa Club