

LISTEN AND FEEL TOGETHER

Last month I sat down with KEXP Senior Communications Director Kurt B. Reighley (a.k.a. DJ El Toro), who recently left us for Tucson, to discuss the events of 2016. In light of our conversation, I thought it best if he authored this reflection to you. Thank you for reading.

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Tom".

Tom Mara,
Executive Director

Like many of you, I consider much of 2016 a big letdown. I'm still reeling from the deaths of some of my favorite artists and the divisive, disruptive election. I fear for my nation's future.

Yet in spite of it all, I remain hopeful.

Throughout my life, I have experienced the power of music to help meet unthinkable challenges. Mix tapes made by older, wiser friends got me through the rigors of being an out gay teenager in a small Virginia town. Dancing to records spun by DJs at New York clubs like the Roxy and the Pyramid during the AIDS epidemic reminded me of all I had to live and fight for.

Yet nowhere have I experienced music's potential to uplift and inspire as fully as I have at KEXP. And believe me, that bar is set pretty high.

My first real DJ gig was a friend's memorial service in high school. My buddy and mentor Robert, who lived by the motto "all music is valid," tapped me to help him pick songs the first of too many such memorials to come. I thought some of our selections were too sentimental then; 30 years later, I still cry when I hear ABBA's "The Way Old Friends Do."

The special gift of music to unlock – and affirm the validity of – emotions that we'd often rather avoid remains a tremendous treasure to me.



It seemed fitting that KEXP hosted its annual *Music & Death* event on November 9. Even as many of us reeled over the outcomes of Election Day, music lovers met in the KEXP Gathering Space to openly share stories of their darkest hours, and how music helped them, lighting the path back to hope.

My colleague John Richards initiated both *Music & Death* and "The Mom Show," but at heart both of these are community events; crowdsourcing at its finest. Their strength lies in the remarkable anecdotes and songs that you bring to them, and in your willingness to listen and feel alongside your fellow music lovers.

Those twin impulses – listen and feel – inspired me when I took to the air immediately after *Music & Death* concluded. For my post-Election Day show, I drew heavily from your suggestions pouring in via email and text: Bob Marley, Brother Ali, Sky Cries Mary, Art of Noise, Neil Young ... even Chuck Mangione. You asked to hear more women, more voices from people of color and the LGBTQ community.

Thank you. Racing to keep up with your suggestions prohibited me from feeling too discouraged that night. You told me what you needed to hear, and I tried harder than ever to honor your requests. To lean on my community, and listen and feel with you.

Having spent much of my own life feeling inaudible and invisible, I know the crushing feeling that nobody – in Washington DC, your school, even your own family – cares about you. It can make you do drastic things.

So on that first night after the election, it seemed vitally important to reiterate that no matter how hopeless you feel, somebody is listening. Somebody cares. There is a song or musician ready to help shoulder your burden, and sharing that music heightens its benefits.

"Public broadcasting has a place in American society, as does great music," says KEXP donor Devon from Indianapolis. *"In the coming days and months, there will be trials. We need good music to help us through it and we need stations like KEXP."* So please, don't lose hope. Keep listening – and feeling – together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt B." with a stylized, cursive font.