

# KEXP: A Healthy Ecosystem

Thoughts from Tom Mara, KEXP Executive Director  
May 3, 2012

Some of the most powerful music experiences occur when music lovers gather at a venue—as small as a coffee shop or as vast [as a field on top of the Columbia Gorge](#)—and revel in a band's performance. Watching artists engaged in their craft is perhaps the most powerful way to discover and enjoy music, but it's also the best way to build connections between music lovers and artists. I think Billy McCarthy of the band We Are Augustines said it best at a recent performance exclusively for KEXP donors, "A friend of KEXP is a friend of ours...and that makes us a community."

Music brings people together even outside of music venues, sometimes in unexpected places. I hear stories all the time about how wearing a KEXP t-shirt will spark conversations on the subway, or how a traveler will spy an orange KEXP sticker plastered on the wall in a café in Italy or a record store in London. Ben in the Belltown described his own experience connecting with fellow members of the KEXP Community:

*Seattle is my home, and only KEXP could bring about the following priceless moment: Last summer, driving with the windows down, I stopped at a red light and added a little volume to the radio. Suddenly, my stereo seemed a hundred times better, more dynamic, the stereo quality seemed to come from everywhere, it was louder than I knew I'd turned it. And then I realized what was going on. At least two other cars at the intersection were playing the same station, and together we filled the whole intersection with the sounds of the greatest radio station in the country, likely the world.*

Experiences like this can turn an ordinary day into a memorable event—it's *why* people power KEXP with their donations. Often the sounds of KEXP travel beyond a single intersection, filling neighborhoods all across the city. Running errands in Seattle one afternoon, I was tickled to realize that many of the stores I visited were playing KEXP on the stereo, providing a kind of "soundtrack to the city." This collective listening experience creates a palpable mood that permeates the city. One young donor even told us that he thought that KEXP "really gives Seattle its sense of place."



The KEXP Community bathed in sunshine during the *Concerts at the Mural* series at Seattle Center. Photo by: Brittney Bush Bolley

Of course, people share music in many significant ways, connected by more than just geographical proximity...KEXP reaches far beyond the Emerald City! We know that we don't have to arrive at the same intersection, dance together in the same concert venue, or even live in the same country to be a part of one very special community.

Everyone can take part in music experiences, no matter where they are in the world. For this reason, we have invested in state-of-the-art, high-definition video equipment so that we can share the 572 performances that KEXP captured last year, alone. These performance videos turn a computer screen into a private concert venue, creating music discovery experiences that are hard to find anywhere else. KEXP's creative curators ensure that you can share in the live music experience and discover music whenever—and wherever!—you choose.

Last month, KEXP crossed an astonishing milestone when these videos were viewed *50 million times* on YouTube! That's 100 million ears and eyes, all taking part in the KEXP musical experience. KEXP's Senior Program Director and *Afternoon Show* Host Kevin Cole believes deeply in the importance of a connected community. He noted that KEXP is more than a public radio station because we present all sorts of musical experiences. But he also noted that the station belongs to something bigger. "We're part of a music culture, an ecosystem [whose members] support each other."

We can see powerful evidence of how a healthy ecosystem can generate positive results for both artists and music lovers in the meteoric rise of Icelandic band Of Monsters and Men. Until recently, the band performing the song "Little Talks" in their living room (captured on video by KEXP) was the only recorded material available from the band.

When audiences discover music that resonates, enthusiasm quickly spreads. Now, what has become a somewhat legendary video has been seen by music lovers nearly one million times. Incredibly, before they'd even released their full-length record stateside, the band had sold out venues across the United States, and audiences everywhere already knew the words to their songs.

When they played their first "official" show in the U.S.—a KEXP South by Southwest Showcase at Mellow Johnny's Bike Shop in Austin, TX—they announced that, "It's fitting that we're playing for KEXP, since they helped us get our start." The band continues to credit KEXP's support with "setting the telltale ripple effect in motion." Last month, when the group made its first trip to Seattle, they showed their gratitude with a free private performance for KEXP donors before playing a sold-out show that night.

With so many talented artists across the globe, it's easy to see how one million views of exclusive KEXP performances can turn into 10 million, and then 50 million. As technology advances, we'll be able to provide more music experiences to even more people, and those numbers will continue to rise, which kind of boggles the mind!

None of this—the unexpected musical experiences, the tight-knit community of music lovers and artists, the technology that enables discovery worldwide—would be possible without you. In this vast musical ecosystem, *your support* is like the sunshine that instigates photosynthesis in plants, which, in turn, feeds animals big and small. YOU power the services that bring music into your life and the lives of others, and you give voice to the artists that we all depend on to keep our communities interesting and vital. With your gifts, you do important work and keep the KEXP Community healthy!

With much appreciation,

*Tom*

P.S. How has KEXP shaped your music ecosystem? I'd love to hear your story—[tom@kexp.org](mailto:tom@kexp.org).