

Looking for an Asian-Pacific radio voice in Portland? Let 'APA Compass' be your guide

By Cielo Lutino

Special to The Asian Reporter

Cihiro Wimbush looked at KBOO's programming last fall and didn't find a single Asian Pacific American (APA) show broadcast in English. He thought he could help change that. Newly hired at the community radio station as its Public Relations & Outreach Coordinator, Wimbush spoke to Robert Jefferson, then head of KBOO's PM News & Public Affairs, and Chris Merrick, its program director, about the hole in the station's offerings.

"They got it," Wimbush says. "They not only got it, but they worked to make it happen."

It is "APA Compass," the only English-language APA radio show in the Pacific Northwest, Wimbush believes. While other APA shows exist — "Hmong Voice" and "Bhangra Beathouse" on KBOO alone — they air in native dialects, limiting their audience size. "There's a value to those shows," Wimbush quickly notes, "but English is a language that unifies across different APA experiences."

And it may simply be practical. "Being in a place like Portland, our audience is predominantly English-speaking," explains Claire Oliveros, a member of the collective that produces "APA Compass." She may be right: the 2000 U.S. Census reports that APAs



ON THE AIR. Above, the staff of "APA Compass," the only English-language APA radio show in the Pacific Northwest, pose for a photo after the first show. At right, Claire Oliveros (left) and Alifa Ahmed Shafi engineer the debut broadcast. To hear the show, tune in to KBOO, 90.7 FM, from 12:30 to 1:30pm on the last Friday of each month. (Photos courtesy of "APA Compass")

compose only seven percent of the Portland-area population

Wimbush hopes the show captures that seven percent, but he also hopes "that we're all listening to everyone else and not just to our own community."

Marie Lo, a professor at Portland State University who also helps produce "APA Compass," agrees, "There needs to be a broader discussion about these issues."

Her point is well taken. Although APA news can be found in local papers such as *The Asian Reporter*, which is printed in English, there's no parallel in regional radio. That's troubling if findings from a recent report by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) are applied locally — the organization found that fifty-one percent of almost 11,000 APAs surveyed in eight different

states said they get their news from ethnic press instead of mainstream media, which puts "APA Compass" in a potentially powerful position of influence if local APAs turn to it for their news.

Patti Sakurai, another member of the collective and a professor at Oregon State University, acknowledges the responsibility that comes with producing the show. "I know that I'm affected by the media and what I hear," she says, rolling her eyes and laughing as she lists the ways in which APAs are typecast. "We're delivery people, we do your laundry, we clean your houses, we're geishas."

A discussion of similar stereotypes of APAs took place during the show's debut on May 27, when the collective excerpted a clip from "The Tsunami Song." The song, which played on Hot 97 in New York mere



weeks after the South Asian disaster, snidely identified victims of the tsunami as "screaming chinks," "little Chinamen," and "bitches." Reporter Liz Rogers commented, "If we consider the song in light of the unequal representation and sympathies towards different racial groups in mainstream media, then those lyrics disturbingly reflect societal attitudes."

With its opening salvo, "APA Compass" made good on its promise to "explicitly foreground social and economic justice issues," as the collective wrote in its proposal about the program to KBOO. In fact, collective members welcome honest conversation about the difficult topics they raise. "The model that we want is one of

disagreement and people feeling like they can come to the table and offer diverse opinions," says Lo.

But the show won't be all politics. Its premiere included a profile of Blue Scholars, a hip-hop outfit from Seattle that features Filipino-American DJ Geologic and Persian-American MC Sabzi.

"There's a flourishing APA culture — artists, writers, musicians," says

Lo. "We're going to talk about this rich cultural heritage of interesting work being done that people in the mainstream haven't heard about — and lots of APAs don't know there's all this wonderful stuff!"

Lo knows from experience. She talks about the occasional APA student who takes her classes on APA literature and "who get really excited" at discovering "a history, a community" of other APAs. It was that possibility of encountering a larger APA community that motivated Sakurai's involvement with the show when she asked herself, "What would I want to listen to? What would really excite me and make me feel less isolated?"

To hear the exciting new show, tune in to KBOO, 90.7 FM, from 12:30 to 1:30pm on the last Friday of each month to listen to "APA Compass." The next show airs on June 24.

To learn more about KBOO community radio, visit <www.kboo.fm>. For more information, or to contact "APA Compass," e-mail <apacompass@gmail.com>.

All your protection under one roof.

**AMERICAN FAMILY
INSURANCE**

Peter Quang Lee Agency, Inc
1534 SE HOLGATE BLVD
(503) 282-5181 Bus
Portland, OR 97202
ple1@amfam.com



©1997 American Family Mutual Insurance Company and its Subsidiaries
Home Office — Madison, WI 53783
www.amfam.com
NA-07497 Rev. 1/03