

RTRFM Policy 004

Programming and Presenting

Policy Statement 13 - Music

RTRFM is an independent and alternative community radio station based in Perth, Western Australia. It is our ethos to uphold the values of independence, connection, integrity and cultivation. This should inform the music we play on the station. We should also be informed by what is being played on commercial and publicly-funded radio, as well as the most popular and prominent songs on streaming and social media services. RTRFM must demonstrate a point of difference to these players, because we are **The Sound Alternative**.

We are not play-listed, so presenters are encouraged to prepare their own shows based on the values and mission of the station, within the parameters of their specific program. Nonetheless, presenters should ask themselves, whenever choosing songs for their playlist:

- Why is this relevant to our audience, which is primarily (though not exclusively) based in Perth, WA?
- Why should it be played on RTRFM, specifically?
- In the spirit of RTRFM's values (independence, connection, integrity and cultivation), am I curating a playlist that features a diversity of voices, female and gender-diverse representation, Australian First Nations artists and local talent (favouring the underrepresented)?

By asking oneself these questions, presenters will hopefully recognise a need for greater diversity within their playlist, or perhaps a focus on lesser-known acts, and even, potentially, an understanding and appreciation for what the scope of our broadcasting can achieve. The Music Director supplies a weekly "Sound Selection" to shed some light on songs that 'answer' the above questions. One weekly Local Feature Album and one weekly RTRFM Feature Album (which can be from anywhere in the world) are also provided.

We appreciate that, across the grid, there are numerous specialty shows that focus on specific nations/genres, which would impact the volume of local acts (or the presence of First Nations artists). However, we'd ask that all presenters keep the above in mind, to ensure that their own programs demonstrate a point of difference to other similar shows.

RTRFM must also play at least 25 per cent Australian music across the grid in a calendar month to meet our obligations to the [Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice](#).

In short:

- Please uphold the values of the station (and the parameters of your program) first and foremost. The Music Director provides resources to help all presenters.
- RTRFM should place a special focus on *local* artists from WA. (Recommended: 25% of your show.) Please make a point to expand the diversity of your playlist to prominently include women and gender-diverse artists (50%), and First Nation artists (5 - 10%). (Note the “Statistics” feature in the AMRAP editor, which displays these ratios for your show—but not your long-term average, which is of more importance.) This guidance is to help presenters in putting together a typical playlist, though it depends on the brief of their program, as some program briefs may require quite a different content bias. Please discuss with your Collective Coordinator and the Music Director to ensure you're meeting the program's brief, listener expectations and the goals of the station.
- Remember we are ‘the Sound *Alternative*’ and our music should provide a point of difference to commercial and publicly-funded radio.
- Complete your playlists in AMRAP (including the checkboxes and timestamps) so we can track station-wide and show-specific performance, adhere to Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice, and to provide points of reference for our listeners.

What is ‘The Sound’ of ‘The Sound Alternative’?

In 2010, a previous Music Director clarified the “Sound” of the “Sound Alternative”, and much of it remains relevant today. From that initial policy statement:

“We focus our attention on **independent artists**, and **music that is underground, obscure, boundary-pushing and otherwise unheard**. We **foreground music that is innovative, progressive and experimental**... The music we play is very diverse across the seven days a week and 24 hours that we broadcast. **We love our diversity, and it makes us distinct from our monolithic media adversaries.**”

RTRFM’s sound comes from a focus on music that is:

- **Independently created,**
- **Innovative within its genre** and/or
- **Interesting to both the presenter and the RTRFM audience.**

This section is particularly relevant for presenters on specialist shows:

“The key strength that RTRFM’s presenters bring to the station is their passion for music, and their immense knowledge of music history, music culture and the social and industrial conditions that surround its creation, recording and distribution. This innate knowledge provides our specialist programs with the **distinctiveness and high quality that is vital to radio programming that dedicates itself to a specific genre, style or idea**. The fact that these presenters are so dedicated to their chosen genre also allows them to stay on the pulse in terms of playing new releases and incorporating information about live events and even news and current happenings

into their programming. There are, however, certain approaches towards music that do not fit with what the station is about stylistically. Namely, **RTRFM does not play music that is commercially-oriented in nature**: music that is produced for and marketed towards a mainstream audience. The difference between the ‘sound’ and ‘vibe’ of RTR and other radio stations is abundantly clear when you listen to the music played on each. Both the delivery style of our presenters and the production style of our sweepers, station IDs and sponsorship announcements differs greatly from that of other stations, and the music we play is no different. The tunes that we play on RTRFM may at times have lower production values—they may be dirtier, more lo-fi, and less polished—but they are usually also less structurally and melodically generic, more musically innovative, experimental or different from mainstream or commercially-driven pop music. **Our listeners tune into RTRFM to hear music that is different from what they would hear on other stations, and it is imperative that we maintain this distinction.”**

There is, however, a caveat when it comes to “commercially-oriented” music. Please note:

“In terms of new music that fits within contemporary standards of taste and genre this is usually easy to determine. However, where this can become complicated is in determining what older music is appropriate; music that may either have been commercially successful upon its original release that is no longer charting and has retained a sense of cultural importance and relevance, or music that was not particularly successful or well-known upon its original release but has gained wider recognition through reappraisal and continued exposure.”

Playing Potentially Offensive and Harmful Content

We encourage our diverse collectives to seek out music from outside the mainstream, and indeed meet our mission to be ‘the Sound Alternative’. However, it is a privilege to present on RTRFM and be given a public platform to share music, and there is a responsibility that comes with this privilege, given our requirements as a public broadcaster and a community supported radio station.

It’s important that choices in music reflect current community standards and be considerate of the potential impact on listeners, as well as the timing and context in which they are played. This context may be defined by the specialty program on which you’re presenting, but that is not the only consideration you should make when evaluating what’s right for your show.

You should also be aware that the General Manager is duty-bound to investigate any listener complaints about music or content that has caused offence or harm. When playing something despite its potential for offence or harm, it is important you provide any approximate context to listeners for your playlist choices. To best serve listeners, and fulfil your obligations to RTRFM as a presenter, we ask that you adhere to the following:

- In the first instance, weigh the value of the content against the potential for offence or harm before playing it, and determine if there is a justifiable reason to be playing material that may offend or harm.
- Provide a clear warning in advance of playing content that may offend or harm so that the listener has the option of avoiding the broadcast. That may mean playing an ID warning for coarse language; other instances may require a spoken warning.
- Provide the above context to listeners before playing the material.

We appreciate interpretations and appreciations of music and content change, as can context and understanding; for example, some material may have been considered broadly acceptable until marginalised communities more widely conveyed offence and harm caused. This is why we ask you to consider the above when programming your show. Please also remember: coarse language/lyrical content isn't the only factor to consider here.

We also remind you that, if an investigation by the GM reveals a breach of the RTRFM Code of Conduct, appropriate action will be taken. With that in mind, we encourage you to use the Code for guidance on RTRFM's mission, values and principles.

If you ever have questions about what is (or isn't) appropriate, feel free to ask the General Manager. For questions about specific artist suitability, contact the Music Director. For queries relating to specialist shows, you are encouraged to ask your Collective Coordinator.

This policy statement was approved by the General Manager, Programming Committee and RTRFM Board in July 2022.