

# Local radio program goes national

Five years ago they were holding poetry readings privately in their apartments. Today Bill Tecku, Bill Olson and John Harris, all of Superior, will have their work broadcast to a much larger audience — the country — when their collective brainchild, "The Inner Ear," premieres via satellite on public radio in the U.S.

BY RICK-SHEFCHIK

Of the News-Tribune staff

Five summers ago could walk into a Superior bar named Zanuzowski's and hear poetry being read to the accompaniment of jazz music.

The men responsible for that unique cultural experience have come a long way in five years. Tonight at 7:30 p.m. on WSCD you'll get a chance to hear the result of their hard work and dedication to literature as popular art.

"The Inner Ear," a locally produced half-hour of literature and music, premieres today on at least 35 National Public Radio stations. WSCD will pick up the broadcast via satellite reception.

The show is the brainchild of Bill Tecku, Bill Olson and John Harris, all from Superior. The three have been responsible for the similar "Something for Your Head" program which has been heard on WDTN-FM for the past several years.

While most student-types in the mid-1970s were watching TV or listening to their stereos, Tecku and Olson were dabbling in poetry, both writing and reading.

"We had attempted to do poetry readings privately in apartments, and had experimented with our own tapings of sound," Tecku said of the group's early days. "We felt it was bringing poetry to the public in ways we felt we couldn't reach by reading in a class room or a formal poetry reading. We wanted to open up the audience to literature."

At those Zanuzowski "Cultural Nights," Charlie Cronk did mime, films were shown, and Harris played folk guitar.

"John had been a guitarist and folk performer for years. Bill had been writing and given readings, and I had given readings that spring and the year before in Copenhagen," Tecku said. "We all felt we were comfortable working together. It was a natural evolution."

Tom Livingston of WDTN gave them the go-ahead for their first program, and from 15-minute poetry read-

ings without concern for studio atmosphere, they expanded to the current half-hour "Inner Ear" series, which concentrates on one author, and is much more sound-conscious.

"After working together for a number of years, we wanted to develop it outside of a regional setting," Tecku said. "We heard about the NPR satellite in 1978, pursued that, and felt it was the thing to try something nationally."

He conducted a market survey in 1978 to find out what was already being done on National Public Radio, and what was needed. They developed an eye-catching brochure, produced by local artist Henry Taly, and they produced an audition program via closed circuit broadcast. Last March Tecku attended the NPR National Convention in Kansas City to contact prospective buyers.

After making personal contact with 45 station managers or programmers, they sent out their audition tapes, and then conducted a call-back operation with the use of Bombardier Corp.'s WATS line. So far they've placed the show in 23 states, and they hope to be on 60 stations by the end of the year. Just picked up WSCD in Duluth, Tallahassee and Houston last week.

"Listening to the quality of radio they were producing at the convention opened our ears to the quality we needed to achieve," Tecku said. "We had to be a little bit tighter, and more professional."

While Tecku and Olson do the reading each week, and WDTN's John Zeigler does the narration, Harris is ultimately responsible for the sound. Aside from his artistic guitar embellishments, he is the show's sound technician.

"We started with a \$40 hand-held Panasonic cassette player," Harris said. "Then we went to two Sony reel-to-reel tape recorders. Then I went to a semi-professional Revox tape recorder and six professional mikes. In the last two years I came by a professional mixer and a professional recorder."

The show is taped at Harris' American Artist Recording, where he also does work for some local advertising

agencies and corporations.

"On the premiere tape, we spent eight or 10 hours recording voice tracks," Harris said. "Then I edit that and put the beginning and ending voices on the program, and leave all the spacing where I'm going to put the music. Then I time the tape. I go through the program and re-edit and respace until the program comes to exactly 29 minutes."

"Then I put the entire program on another tape on one channel, and begin recording my music and laying that track down alongside the other. The voice track is just a phony track — I don't use it, it's just there to lay my music alongside so I'll know where its going to fit on the master."

Harris might be one of the few working musicians who has to draw his inspiration from, and play along with, a poem.

"I take it right from the beginning of the program," he said. "I listen to the first poem and decide what type of feeling is necessary for it, fast or slow paced, and what the emotional effect is — happy, sad, melodic or serious."

"Then I work up a melody, and I redo it endlessly until the playing itself is clean, noiseless, and there's nothing in it that would disturb the effect of the program. Every note is positive and there for a reason."

The total effect is arresting, entertaining, and at times hypnotic. There is a definite feeling that this is the way the poet intended his work to sound.

"We're not trying to communicate any message," Tecku said. "We're trying to get across the quality of literature. Our intention is to present literature to people who may not have any specific background in poetry or prose. We felt NPR was a public medium in which we don't have to be concerned with ratings, or how many people will like it. We wanted artistic freedom rather than to market our-



selves commercially.

The initial "Inner Ear" program will pre-empt the usual "Something for Your Head" show at 8 tonight, on WDTN, so Ear, Inc. is in the unusual position of having their premiere on two separate local stations in one night.

"Oly, John and I have been able to work together through the less exciting times of the last five years," Tecku said. "We worked through all our good and bad times better than we did five years ago. We're close friends and that's made a difference in the development. A lot of people would have dropped out before now."

Henry has been real helpful. Visual dimension is critical because most of the other radio programs don't have a good brochure to help them present the artist. Tom Livingston has always encouraged us, as well as others at WDTN. If we didn't have that kind of laboratory environment, we never would have gone on to develop the format we have today."

