

## **UM Journalism Graduate Student, Nicky Ouellet, Wins Best In Festival For Radio Piece**

*Nicky Ouellet won [Best in Festival](#) in the BEA's student news competition for her radio story "[An '80s Cover Band With Global Dreams](#)," which features the [New Wave Time Trippers](#). Ouellet accept the award at the Festival of Media Arts during the BEA's April 17-20 convention in Las Vegas, Nevada.*

*In an interview with fellow J-school graduate students Sophie Tsairis and Jana Wiegand, Ouellet spoke about how she produced the story and how graduate school gave her a greater appreciation for radio.*

### ***For those who don't already know you, can you introduce yourself?***

My name is Nicky Ouellet. I'm a graduate student at the University of Montana's School of Journalism, studying [Environmental Science and Natural Resource Journalism](#). I graduate in May.

### ***How would you describe your project?***

My project is about one of my favorite bands. They're an 80's cover band based in Whitefish, Montana. And I was really drawn to them for an assignment that I had, to just incorporate music in some way into a radio piece.

They came to mind because they're whole...what's the word I'm looking for...like reason to form, their conception as a band...their mission...I was interested in them because the reason they came together was kind of a mix of the creativity of the music and love of being with their buddies and jamming out. But then they also balanced it with this really strong business drive. They have been in it to make money ever since they got together, and I thought that was a really interesting combination of the artistry, but also the business savvy.

### ***Can you elaborate on your process making this piece?***

Basically, it was just me working on this project. I had a Marantz kit that I rented out from my school--it's a monster of a device, really old, but like really perfectly functioning. I went up to Whitefish for a weekend and caught the band at one of their houses before they went on stage for an evening. I hung out with them backstage that night during the show. And then I came back down to Missoula to figure out what I was missing.

A couple weeks later, the band came down to Missoula to play one of their first shows down in this market, and I hung out with them before and after, again. And then it was into the studio for rounds and rounds of edits, and that was my story.

### ***What challenges did you face?***

Most of the challenges were really just keeping it tight and clean and focused. That's where Jule, my professor, came in and helped me kill all of my darlings, which was a really tough process because there were a lot of good ones.

But other than that, it was just a fun piece to work on. I just got to listen to a lot of really good music, dance with some of my friends and talk to these musicians, who I admire, and who I'm good friends with, as well.

***What was the most rewarding part of working on this story?***

The rewarding part of this project was finding a way to share this place that I really love, and this life that I really love, from the northwest corner of Montana, and make that accessible to people who aren't there. I thought about my parents a lot when I was making this piece, and my friends from college who maybe wouldn't see a slice of life like this from a ski town.

***How do you feel about winning Best in Festival?***

I'm very honored to be recognized by the BEA. This is one of my first audio pieces, and for it to receive national recognition like this is just totally overwhelming for me, and I'm really honored.

***Why did you choose this topic for your story?***

I chose this topic because we were assigned to do a piece incorporating music into an audio story. I wanted mine to be more than just a story about a band, and The New Wave Time Trippers immediately came to mind, as silly as that sounds.

When they first got together, it was half about creating music that they could all get behind and be really excited about, but equally about making money and finding a way to live off of their art. And I found that combination of goals, and the way that they were working to realize both of them, I found that combination really interesting.

***What do you hope the audience takes away from listening to your piece?***

I hope the audience takes away two things. One, is kind of a sense of this place that I really love, Whitefish, Montana. It's a backwoods ski town that is just filled with fun characters and good times.

But also the message that I think The Time Trippers kind of embody is that if you work really, really hard, you can accomplish pretty much anything you set your mind to. And I know a lot of the piece sounds kind of silly, but if they get serious about it, they will go global. And then all of us can revel in their music.

***How do you feel about going to the BEA festival in April to accept the award?***

I would like to thank the organizers of the festival for putting this together. I'm really excited to attend the different sessions that are going to be held and make connections that I, otherwise, wouldn't be able to make. I really excited to see what other students and faculty have come up with and talk about their whole process--I'm really looking forward to that.

***What originally drew you to radio?***

I guess when I started applying to grad schools, I knew that I wanted to be a writer, and that was a comfortable medium. But I also knew that grad school was like this two-year window to get really good at as many different media and aspects of the industry as I could.

I came in with a bunch of really good photographers, but no one was doing audio work, so it was kind of an easy niche to fill, within my class. And then I was just really drawn to it. I think it's an incredibly intimate medium.

You really get into people's heads while they're sitting in their car or washing the dishes. And when I listen to radio, you kind of lose sense of the thing directly in front of you and it's like this whole world of your mind and the storyteller are blended. And it's kind of escapist, but it's also really important because I think each story you hear on the radio changes the way that you see the world.

I don't know if my story about The Time Trippers does this, but when I listen to it, I'm transported to like, this happy place of blue lights and glow sticks and reaching for your dreams and being surrounded by people you love.

***How do you feel about working with [Jule Banville](#)?***

I love Jule. After taking that first class where I made this piece, I asked her to become my thesis advisor, so we work very, very closely now on what will become my defense, essentially. She is so driven. She has vision for her students' work, and she knows how to get you there. She listens to me. I feel really valued by her, and I value her, in turn.

***What projects do you currently have in the works?***

I'm working on the last two-thirds of my professional portfolio. The portfolio is a series of stories that looks at [how tribes manage natural resources on tribal lands](#). And so, one of the stories I'm working on now is an audio piece about the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota, and another is a written piece about the Flathead Reservation, just north of here.

***What are your hopes and dreams for after graduation?***

Hopes and dreams? Yes! All the things.... Yeah, I'm currently applying to fellowships and jobs that would get me more into radio work. I think that's where I want to focus for a little bit. I'm also really drawn to print, so if I can find one position that blends those two media, that would be ideal.