fter graduating in 2010 with no less than four degrees from McNally Smith College of Music, the last place Veronica Rodriguez expected to land was in the fast-paced, high-tech world of radio broadcast. “Radio wasn’t what I pictured for myself when I left college, but I love it — I’m glad I ended up here,” she admits. Veronica initially enrolled in the Associate Applied Science Production degree program in 2006, but thanks to her strong determination — and a healthy number of general education transfer credits, which she earned at another institution — she was able to complete the A.A.S. Production, A.A.S. Recording, Live Sound Diploma and the Bachelors of Science in Music Production degrees... all within four years.

From Club Gigs to Radio Stations

Just after college Veronica was making her way up the ranks of live sound around the Twin Cities when a broadcast engineer job listing caught her eye. She sent her resumé, received a call back, and after several rounds of interviews, she was offered a job with Clear Channel Radio, one of the nation’s largest broadcast media and advertising vendors, which reaches 237 million listeners monthly. Now working as an assistant engineer, she’s part of a 5-person team that serves all the technical broadcasting needs for eight radio stations owned by Clear Channel. “I don’t work for just one particular station, like KDWB [pop] or Cities 97 [adult contemporary],” she explains. “I work for the

FINDING SUCCESS OVER THE AIRWAVES
Paul Allen chats with KFAN broadcast. The Vikings on-air announcer Rodriguez en route to a remote location back to the Clear Channel facilities, so I’m able to connect wirelessly, to get an ISDN line for multi-channel audio, conventionally gratifying, and though she’s been with Clear Channel for only a brief while, she’s made a big impression with her co-workers. “We were at an away game in Green Bay, and I remember looking to the right and left, seeing all the press boxes, and all I saw were men,” she recalls. “I wasn’t surprised, because there aren’t many women back in the Clear Channel facilities, so I’m able to connect wirelessly, which has been great.”

Besides engineering for special events, Veronica also plays a critical role in KFAN’s Minnesota Vikings NFL radio coverage. The station is contracted to broadcast all of the team’s games, both home and away, which means Veronica is frequently flying around the country to stadiums she’s never been to before, making sure each broadcast goes smoothly without any technical glitches. It’s a demanding gig that she enjoys. “I have to be prepared for everything, and I don’t know what the stadium might or might not have when I arrive, so I end up taking a lot of equipment.” We travel with the team, and we usually get there the day before to set up and line check,” she explains. “The next day we do pre-game coverage and then the game. As soon as it’s over, we tear down and we’re gone. There’s no waiting around — many times the TSA comes to the stadium to screen us and they get us on a bus that takes us right to our plane.”

Her current work with the Vikings is especially gratifying, and though she’s been with Clear Channel for only a brief while, she’s already made a big impression with her co-workers. “We were at an away game in Green Bay, and I remember looking to the right and left, seeing all the press boxes, and all I saw were men,” she recalls. “I wasn’t surprised, because there aren’t many women back in the Clear Channel facilities, so I’m able to connect wirelessly, which has been great.”

parent company that owns many of the local stations, including KFAN [sports], KDGL [classic hits], and M102 [countury], so there’s a lot of variety with what I do.”

Of the many hats Veronica wears, one of her primary responsibilities is to engineer live remote broadcasts. “If you hear on the radio that someone is broadcasting from a special location, a bar or a park for example, I’m going to be there. I set up all of the broadcast equipment and get the talent on the air,” she says. It’s a job that combines conventional audio engineering with information technology (IT), involving either wireless point-to-point transmitters or some form of hard-wired ethernet connection. “If we can’t get an ISDN line for multi-channel audio, we have to use whatever internet connection happens to be at the location,” she says. “More recently we started using ‘mi-fi’ or ‘the Water.’ That’s a small-format analog mixer with me to all the games because I mix what the audience hears in the entire league.”

Radio-Ready Sound

When mixing the NFL games, Veronica works to achieve a certain sound that’s tailored for each announcer. “There’s a typical sound that I’m used to hearing,” she says. “I’m familiar with our broadcasters’ voices, and what people are used to hearing on the radio, so when it comes to picking my microphones, compression and EQ, I try to dial in the sound that people expect and what I know sounds good. But I’m not just mixing the announcers and getting a good sound for them. I take a small-format analog mixer with me to all the games because I have to be able to mix in the sound of the crowd in the background in order to make the broadcast more exciting, and the announcers have to be able to hear each other and they have to be able to hear our person on the field who isn’t broadcast over the air, but they help tell our announcer what’s going on. So it’s setting up different mixes for people and for the broadcast. It’s actually very similar to mixing bands live in a club setting, and I think that’s why I caught on so quickly here. You know, if you walk into a typical bar gig you’re going to have to mix front-of-house and the stage monitors, too.”

Though Veronica spends much of her time engineering for non-musical events, she still has plenty of opportunities to mix and record bands, albeit without all the late nights. “Clear Channel has what we call ‘Studio C’ or ‘The Sky Room.’ Each station calls it something different,” she says, “but it’s all the same — an on-air performance area with a stage and PA. It’s meant for more intimate-feeling performances. Each station invites listeners to come to the studio and they’ll have bands play an acoustic set when they’re coming through the area on tour. We get all kinds of artists coming through. For instance, I recently mixed Hot Chelle Rae and Carly Rae Jepsen. When an artist comes into the studio, I’m basically mixing a live show for the studio audience, but I do it from a control room off to the side of the stage. I mix what the audience hears and also what goes out on the air, plus I multitrack record everything into Pro Tools, just in case one of the performances gets selected to be on some sort of compilation.”

Soldering and Socializing

When asked what she learned at McNally Smith that has been the most helpful in her current work, Veronica is quick to respond. “What I learned from Peter Greenlund in the Live Sound program has been very helpful. What he taught us was very practical — it may not specifically to live sound, for example, being able to make different types of cables, using...
a universal resistor color-coding scheme, all of that I use. Also, a lot of what Tom Day taught me, like soldering skills and especially trouble-shooting skills. The ability to trouble-shoot is key in this kind of work,” she says. “When you go into an unfamiliar space and something isn’t working and you have two hours until the broadcast happens, you don’t have a choice — you have to figure it out. If you walk up to something to plug into and it doesn’t fit, you have to build an adapter. Without the knowledge and skills they taught me, I would’ve curled up on the floor crying in some of the situations I’ve been in. But because I learned all of that, it’s given me confidence in my ability to make it happen in any circumstance.”

For current and prospective Production students Veronica offers some advice. “It’s important to keep an open mind,” she says. “Don’t come into production thinking you can just make beats and sell them and that it’s going to be your living. It could happen, but you don’t know. And don’t limit yourself to thinking you’ll only ever work with a certain type of musician or only a certain style of music. I can understand why some people would have that attitude, but if I had thought that way and if I didn’t have an open mind, I never would have applied for this job and I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing today.

“I also think it’s important to make friends and keep in touch with them after you graduate,” she adds. “The bonds you make with your peers while you’re in school can help bring you more opportunities after you graduate.”

Reflecting back on her college years and her current career in radio broadcasting, Veronica has no regrets. “I have the best of both worlds here. I still get to work with bands and I still get to record. But having spent all those years in school and in those great studios, thinking all I wanted to do was work in a recording studio, and now I’m 1,000% fulfilled with what I’m doing in radio — that’s been the biggest surprise. I can’t think of anything I’d rather be doing or a group of people I’d rather be working with than the people I work with now.”