HOW TO LISTEN TO AN AUDIO STREAM USING VLC
Sound reinforcement for the hearing impaired

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (PATACS)

INTRODUCTION

Live streaming is a modern phenomenon. It resembles TV and radio broadcasting: a video or audio source is distributed to many recipients, either via a local area network (LAN) or the Internet.

Any person can log a smart phone or tablet into the network, and use the free VLC media player to watch or hear a live streamed program. And, just like in the era of broadcasting, each person can control the volume level of the audio to suit their needs and preferences.

I became interested in this subject when the president of my local computer club, PATACS, casually mentioned that it would be valuable to provide audio reinforcement for the hearing impaired in the classroom environment used for meetings of the club. That classroom is also used for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) of George Mason University in Fairfax City, Virginia. OLLI is aimed at retirees. Although the classroom has a public-address system for amplifying the voice of any instructor, some in the audience inevitably need more audio boost than others.
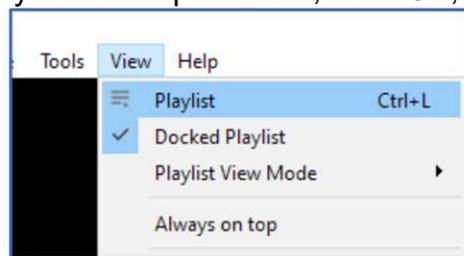

Illustration 1

So I looked into various methods to provide audio reinforcement to individuals. Live audio streaming appears to be the most practical, and most affordable for members of the audience.

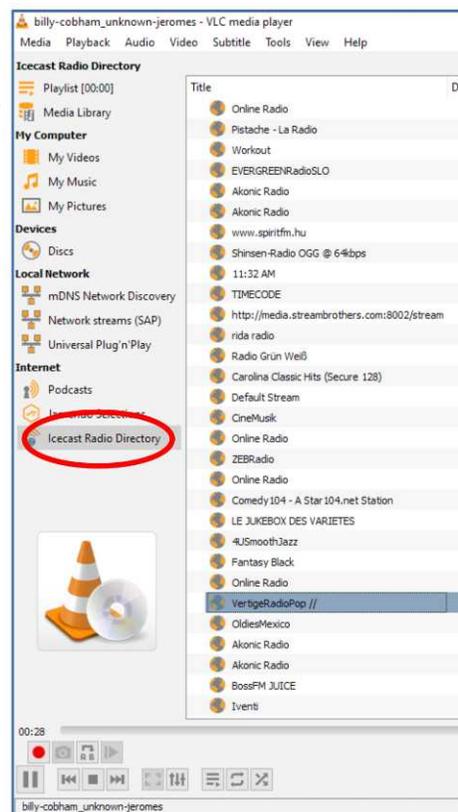**USE VLC TO BROWSE AND LISTEN TO A SOUND AUDIO STREAM**

These next three illustrations were created on a Windows 10 computer running VLC version 3.0.14.

First, to try out some live audio streams on the internet, open up VLC and use its View menu to display the VLC Playlist. You can see the View menu and the Playlist choice in **illustration 1**.

VLC on a computer provides a list of various audio sources that are constantly streaming. You can try one at any time. And VLC on a computer provides the URL for each streaming audio source; you can use that URL to play the same audio source using VLC on a smart phone or tablet.
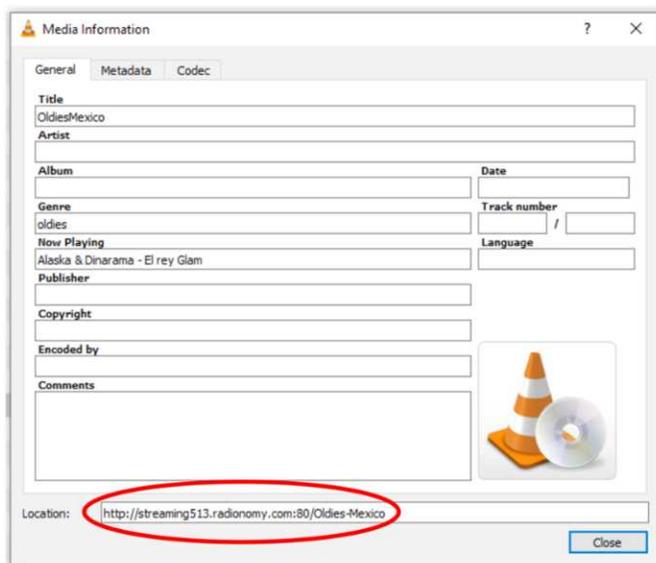

Illustration 2

In the VLC home screen, a variety of audio sources are listed in the left pane, as you can see in **illustration 1**. Under the **Internet** heading, click on **Icecast Radio Network**, which is circled in the illustration.

A list of streaming audio sources appears to the right, like that shown in the illustration.

Double-click on any audio source in the list, and VLC connects to that source, so you can hear it. Control buttons appear at the bottom of the VLC screen, including Pause and Stop. You can see those controls at the bottom left corner of the illustration.

Right-click on any audio source in the list, and VLC opens a window of Media Information details for that source, like the one you see in **illustration 3**.
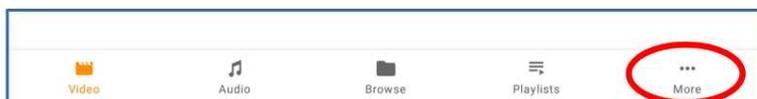

Illustration 3

Note the bottom of that window provides a Location field containing a URL for the audio source. That URL is circled in the illustration. Make note of it; you will need it VLC on your portable device.

LISTEN TO AN AUDIO STREAM USING VLC ON A PORTABLE DEVICE

These next illustrations were created using an Android tablet and VLC version 3.3.4. When you start VLC on a portable device for the first time, it will prompt you for permissions and, if you permit, search your portable device for video and audio files. That search can take some time.
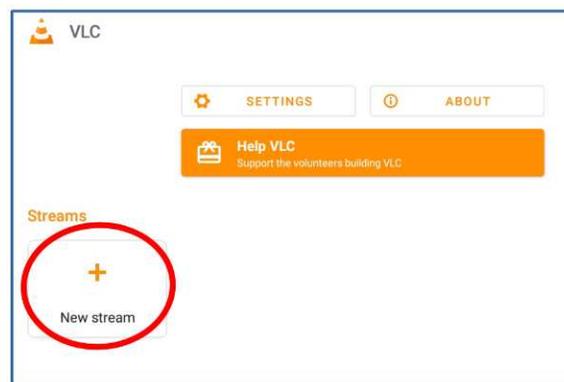
At the bottom of the VLC screen, buttons for media types appear. You can see the buttons in **illustration 4**.

Illustration 4

In that list, tap the **More** button. That button is circled in the illustration. The screen changes to include a rectangle including a **+ button** and the phrase **New stream**. You can see that screen in **illustration 5**.

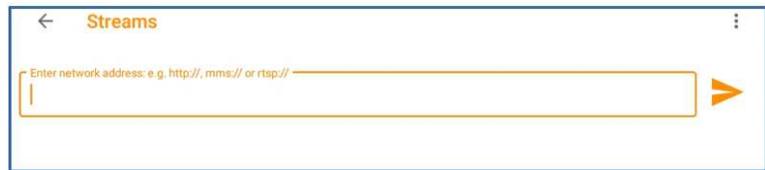Tap the + button, and a URL field appears, as shown in **illustration 6**.

In that field, type the URL that you found in the Information window of VLC on your computer.

Illustration 5

Then tap the right-arrow icon
appearing to the right of the field.

The audio stream starts playing on
your portable device.

VLC also adds that first audio stream to
your list of audio streams. You can see that stream list in by tapping the left-arrow icon at the
top left corner of the VLC window, as depicted in **illustration 7**. Also at that point, at the
bottom of the screen, VLC shows information about the current audio stream, and provides a
Pause button.

Your list of audio streams remains in VLC on your portable device. You can use the list to
resume listening to any stream in the future.

On this screen, you can delete any stream in
the list by tapping on the three-dot button at
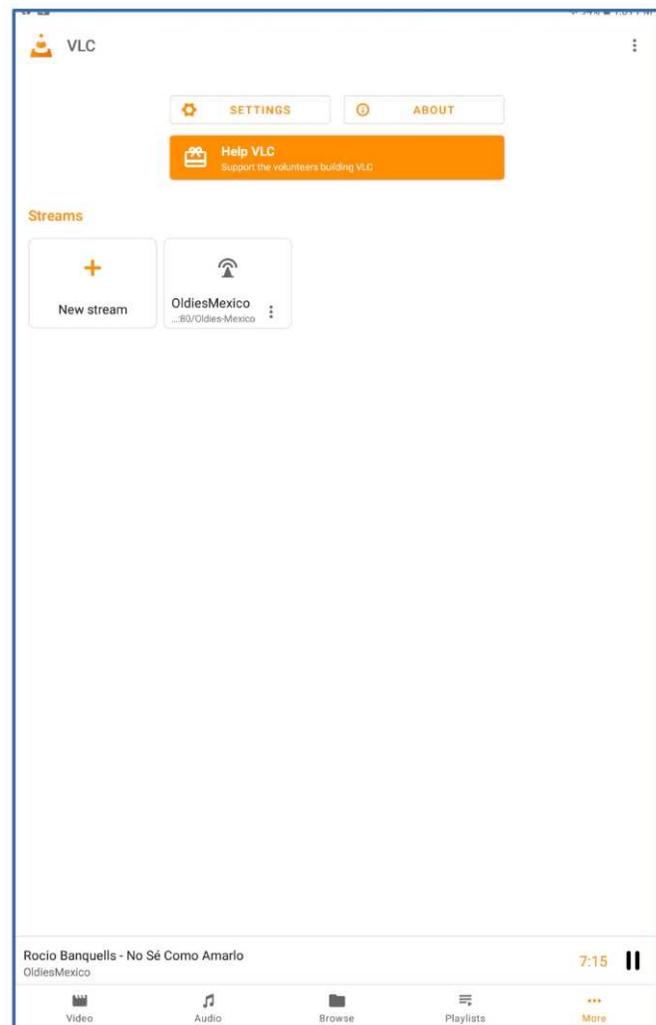the right of the stream name.

USING VLC TO LISTEN IN A CLASSROOM

A meeting space or classroom can use audio
streaming to send the presentation audio to
your portable device. The meeting should
provide you with both the password for
connecting to the local LAN WiFi, and the
URL to put into VLC on your portable device
so you can hear the audio stream.

When you are given the URL for the audio
stream, you can put it into VLC on your
portable device just like you did at home,
using the process explained above.
You should bring and use earbuds or
headphones compatible with your portable
device, so that you can listen and adjust
audio volume without disturbing others in the
audience.

CONSERVE YOUR SMART PHONE
BATTERY

Audio streaming in a long meeting can drain
your smart phone battery. There are two ways
to minimize that problem.

First, consider using a different portable device. A tablet or retired smart phone will work fine
as an audio streaming receiver.

Second, if your smart phone is your only audio streaming receiver, consider bringing along a power bank battery to keep the phone charged while in use.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s. He is a frequent contributor to PATACS Posts, the newsletter of the Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society, and occasionally provides presentations on various tech topics at PATACS meetings. He lives in Arlington VA with his son, many computers and digital cameras, and too many cats.