

# Happy 40th birthday BBC Radio

'The Shipping Forecast', 'Six Continents', 'From our own correspondent', 'Breakfast on 3', John Peel, 'Alistair Cooke', 'Children's Hour', 'Uncle Mac', 'The Navy Lark', 'Hancock's Half Hour', 'The Today programme', 'The Proms', John Peel, 'Gardeners' Question Time', 'The Brains Trust', 'Round Britain Quiz', 'Take It From Here', 'The News Quiz', 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue', 'The Early Music Show', 'Late Junction', 'Front Row', 'The Shipping Forecast', 'Just a minute', 'File on 4', 'Test Match Special', 'Pick of the Pops', Jack de Manio and John Humphreys — but most of all John Peel and 'The Shipping Forecast'.

Lying in a tent in the Hebrides in 1974, listening to the rain beating down and the BBC announcer reading out the Scottish Shipping Forecast, 'Machrihanish, Tiree ...'. Driving around in the car anywhere, anytime, and flicking on Radio 4. Fascinating facts about far-off places or little thought-about things to relieve the tedium of motorway driving. Sunday lunchtimes long ago: family around the table, giggling to Ha-ha-ha 'Hancock's Half Hour', or to Leslie Phillips' 'Left hand down a bit' in 'The Navy Lark'. Queries about cotoneaster and alliums on 'Gardeners' Question Time'. Brian Johnstone discussing cakes sent in by listeners to 'Test Match Special'.

The BBC just is. Even more than the NHS, it is the institution that defines us, feeds us. It is assailed from all angles by those who are jealous of it and want to destroy it: most of all by Rupert Murdoch. He would impose his values on us, which are not the values of 'File on 4' and 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue'. We won't miss it till it's gone.

Wake up to 'Breakfast' on 3; get ready for bed to 'Late Junction'. With no advertisements in between. Priceless.

Radio 2, the old 'Light Programme'. Its music was once for housewives and the deeply untrendy. Except that now its music is very much my music: Mike Harding's folk music; the country music of Bob Harris, and Nick Barraclough.

Yes, I know some that I've mentioned predate Radios 1-4, but it is all of a piece.

Where did the old 'Home Service' stop and the new Radio 4 start? A change in name, that's all. And Radio 1 forced by the pirates.

'Round the Horne'. Kenny Everett. But most of all John Peel and 'The Shipping Forecast'.

## Neville Goodman

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Our weekend rota, years ago, was shared among six doctors from three practices in adjacent areas. So, every sixth weekend saw me car-bound for hours at a time as I crossed and re-crossed a large part of South London — and, ever since then, Radio 3 and Radio 4 have been among my dearest friends.

Radio 3 meant music; I would get into the car and switch on to find myself in the middle of some piece I could not identify. I would play guessing games as I listened for some melodic or harmonic clue. Or, there would be performances of some great works I knew very well, and I would sing along loudly. All this sustained me as the hours dragged on. There were jazz programmes, too, and I can remember hearing the great Errol Garner play 'I'll remember April' with such ebullient bounce and humour that I had to stop the car in order fully to savour it and to laugh at the sheer pleasure of it. There were talks, there were plays — there was none of the passivity of watching television, for you conjured up images from sound as you listened.

I would switch between Radio 3 and Radio 4; between them they never let me down. If Radio 3 was broadcasting Stockhausen or Boulez, Radio 4 was sure to have comedy or something like Melvin Bragg being fascinatingly polymathic; similarly, if Radio 4 was overdosing me with show-business trivia, then Radio 3 would have Bach or Brahms or Bruckner to keep me happy. And it has continued thus, on car journeys; as I hammer away at my computer; as I try to cook, or as I just sit down to listen ... Radio 3 and Radio 4, my friends for life.

## Michael Lasserson

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Radio 4 was the BBC Home Service, and may be again if in times of national emergency all other channels are forced to close. If that happens I hope the BBC controllers follow the precedent set 40 years ago and continue with an uninterrupted schedule. In particular, I would emphasise the necessity of continuing to broadcast 'The Archers', 'The News Quiz' and 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue'. BBC radios 1-4 may be 40 years old, but the daddy of them all is Radio 4, at almost 70.

It is almost impossible in this technological age to imagine what would have to happen to precipitate a crisis so deep that we'd be restricted once again to a single radio station. The need for light relief, the British ability to laugh in the face of adversity and to laugh at our leaders and ourselves, could be our saving grace. While boosting national morale with my three favourite radio programmes I could also see a role for them in issuing coded messages and feeding misinformation to our enemies (how could they ever begin to comprehend 'Mornington Crescent'?). Therein lies the heartbeat of Radio 4. Is it really just a comforting relic of the empire and what it means to be British?

My Archers addiction is already on record, but now is the time to admit to a weekday schedule dictated by Radio 4. I wake to John Humphrys and James Naughtie on 'The Today Programme' and am regularly irritated by their subtle attempts to subvert my own opinion on matters of national importance. Nonetheless, it saves reading a newspaper, enabling me to multi-task, keeping up with the news while showering, dressing and having breakfast.

During the day, 'Women's Hour' or 'You and Yours' are treats while driving to off-site meetings, but in the evening, routine returns. My evening meal is prepared during the 18.30 slot and eaten in the company of my Ambridge friends. Thereafter, it's ad hoc listening only if an advance announcement has whetted my appetite for something (most often 'Front Row'). I'm usually sound asleep before 'Book at Bedtime', but I have

to confess to looking forward to insomniac old age when I plan to train myself to doze off to 'Sailing by' and the late night 'Shipping Forecast'.

### Marjory A Greig

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As I write this, I am on the Radio 2 website, listening to Benny and the Jets from Elton John's O2 Arena concert on the BBC listen again feature. It sounds like a great concert. I know that it doesn't have the street cred of Snow Patrol but it is great music and you can hear all the words. Where were you when you first heard 'Philadelphia Freedom'?

Of course, the other BBC stations have their uses but only for specific purposes. Like a toilet brush perhaps. Does anyone listen to Radio 1 these days? When you eventually tire of atonal music on Radio 3 and endless political speculation on Radio 4, it is good to get back to Radio 2. Like a well-worn pair of slippers, there is no question, it is the place to be, today, tomorrow, and always.

There is something quite special and connecting with the past, about starting the day with someone who I remember from my schooldays. I know that Terry's other listener would agree with me that his wit and observations on life grow more true with each passing year. Like most GPs, I don't hear much of Ken Bruce in the forenoon but Jeremy Vine over lunchtime never fails to produce interesting debates before handing over to the unique talents of Steve Wright and the madcap Chris Evans at drivetime.

Who could forget giants of the past such as John Dunn and Jimmy Young? Brian Matthews is back after a long illness. Jonathan Ross on a Saturday. Bob Harris on a Thursday. These are household names. It is not too strong to say that they contribute to my understanding of what it means to be British. Gentle, civilised, but with a hint of self-deprecating humour.

Radio 2 is not all pink and fluffy. It also has the power to stir strong emotions. It engages with the affairs of the day. Some of the evening magazine programmes have gripped my imagination causing me to listen to the end. Stories about Karen Carpenter, Pavarotti, and just last week, one about the career of the Sex Pistols were as good as anything on Radio 4.

I'm a well-balanced individual though with chips on both shoulders and not a zealot. Let us celebrate the achievements of Radio 2, Europe's most popular radio station. By all means try the rest, including the ones with adverts. Then come home to the best.

### Max Inwood

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Someone recently observed that we never see ugly or unattractive newsreaders on the television. Radio, of course is different. I don't have a clue what Charlotte Green looks like, but her voice is a marvel, something to make one feel safe and secure, like being tucked up in bed with a hot water bottle. The kaleidoscope of voices is one of the attractions of Radio 4, each one with its own instantly recognisable identity (in passing, can anyone tell me what the memory process is in this — how a few words spoken down a phone are enough to tell us who is speaking?). I can remember distinctly voices from at least 40 years ago: the morning rumblings of Jack de Manio doing 'Today' (all on his own in those distant days); the wonderful journalist William Hardcastle on 'The World at One' — a medical school friend said that he was one of the few people who sounded fat; or the patrician tones of Derek Cooper on 'The Food Programme'. Perhaps this is all a middle class conceit, that visual appearance is a shallow quality, while voice is altogether more serious. Without doubt voice can be very persuasive. The duo Flotsam and Jetsam sang on radio (long before the birth of Radio 4):

*Little Betty Bouncer  
Loves an announcer  
Down at the BBC.  
She doesn't know his name  
But how she rejoices  
When she hears that voice of voices.*

Perhaps I am just being seduced by an endless supply of talk enunciated in what my wife describes as 'English Fruity'.

If it were only mellifluous voices uttering impeccable received pronunciation English we would soon be bored. The glory of Radio 4 is the breadth of content: news and current affairs, documentaries, fiendish quizzes, comedy, soaps, drama, arts, religion, history, and philosophy. Remarkably, a number of

the programmes have been on air for longer than 40 years. They feel like Victorian battleships sailing on majestically, impervious to transient changes of taste. Think of 'Desert Island Discs' (1942), 'Any Questions' (1948), 'Brain of Britain' (1953), 'The Reith Lectures' (1948), 'Women's Hour' (1946) and 'Gardeners' Question Time' (1947, and claiming to have answered 30 000 questions). 'Gardeners' Question Time' is very English anomaly. Like 'The Living World', this is surely a programme designed for television. How does it manage to continue its existence on radio? It's a reminder of another pre-Radio 4 oddity, 'Educating Archie', which ran for some years with an extraordinarily talented range of tutors for Archie. But Archie was a ventriloquist's dummy. On radio.

And when you get fed up with Radio 4 you can always complain to 'Feedback'. Nobody from the BBC ever apologises, or admits to any error, but like Radio 4 itself, it's quintessentially English: a well-mannered, civilised, exchange of views. In impeccable received pronunciation English.

*What is the matter with Radio Four?  
I'm not an old fart and I'm not an  
old bore  
Or a grumpy old bugger like  
Evelyn Waugh,  
But it doesn't half stick in my craw!*

From 'Now we are Sixty', by Christopher Matthew (after AA Milne).

### David Jewell