

*“Working for quality
and diversity in
British broadcasting”*

Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay CBE



The Old Rectory Business Centre
Springhead Road, Northfleet
Kent, DA11 8HN

Tel: 01474 338716 email: info@vlv.org.uk
Fax: 01474 325440 web: www.vlv.org.uk

Response from Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV) to the 2014 BBC Trust Service Review

BBC music radio: Radio 1, 1Xtra, Radio 2, Radio 3, 6 Music and Asian Network

October 2014

Response from Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV) to the 2014 BBC Trust Service Review:

BBC music radio: Radio 1, 1Xtra, Radio 2, Radio 3, 6 Music and Asian Network

INFORMATION ABOUT THE VLV

The Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) is an independent, non-profit-making association, free from political, commercial and sectarian affiliations, working for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV represents the interests of listeners and viewers as citizens and consumers across the full range of broadcasting issues. VLV is concerned with the structures, regulation, funding and institutions that underpin the British Broadcasting system.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

VLV welcomes the opportunity to respond to this review of BBC Music Radio encompassing output on BBC Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra, Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 6 and the Asian Network.

BBC Radio 2 and 3 are core listening for many of our members. We have encouraged our members to make individual responses and this submission is from the Board and Trustees of VLV.

VLV believes BBC music radio makes a valuable contribution to the cultural landscape of the UK. While we understand the rationale behind grouping music services together for this review, we believe that these services have little in common with each other and in many cases do not share the same listeners. The audience is fragmented by different tastes – classical, popular, easy listening, Asian etc. Therefore we will consider each service individually in our response as far as is possible where we believe there is evidence to support our conclusions.

We begin our submission by outlining our concerns about the position of radio within the BBC.

VLV's members appear to be mostly concerned with the future of Radio 3, partly perhaps because they are avid Radio 3 listeners and partly perhaps because they fear it may be more vulnerable to cuts because it is considered niche and less popular than other channels such as Radio 1 or 2. VLV encourages the BBC Trust to consider the comprehensive delivery of a range of music to a range of audiences. Radio 3 is highly valued by its loyal listeners and we would encourage the Trust to consider this when making its recommendations.

VLV values the speech element of all these stations and would not want that element to be ignored in this Review despite the characterisation of these services as 'music radio'.

The BBC

VLV believes that:

- The BBC remains a unique cultural institution which is greatly admired in the UK and around the world.
- The BBC sets a standard for programmes not just in the UK but for the rest of the world.
- Through its programmes and services BBC Radio provides a range of fascinating material to inform, educate and entertain the listener - still the core values of public service broadcasting.
- The licence fee is still the best way to sustain the BBC's independence, important not just to broadcasting but to democracy itself.
- Funding via the licence fee means the BBC is not driven by the need to deliver large audiences to advertisers and sponsors of programmes but rather to deliver high quality programmes to audiences. We consider that many listeners value programmes which are not interrupted by advertising. All its services are free at point of use to users in the United Kingdom.

Radio

The 2009 *Digital Britain* report makes a very good case for the unique nature of radio. "Being a flexible medium, radio's appeal to the listener is that it is more than simply a stream of audio: it is an intimate, portable and ambient medium; and it is a very personal medium: the pictures that it forms inside our heads are different for every listener."¹

Radio may be one of the oldest forms of electronic media but it has actually grown in popularity at a time when an increasingly wide range of media are competing for our time and attention. Over 90% of the population consume in total an excess of 1 billion hours of radio a week. The importance of radio to the consumer must not be underestimated.

But radio is also a vital element in the lives of many citizens of the nations and regions of the UK.

Radio is especially important to the elderly, disabled and those citizens isolated geographically or socially. It is a central part of the lives of many groups; the housebound, the sight impaired, those in institutions, the elderly, people who work alone or through the night. Radio keeps them in touch in a personal way not achieved by other media.

We note that whilst time spent listening remains under pressure in the face of digital competition, BBC Radio has been highly resilient in terms of reach with record audiences for Radio 2, Radio 4, 6 Music and the Asian Network. Hours continue to be under pressure though they have stabilised in the last quarter. Over the year, 90% of the population listened to the radio every week; 67% to BBC Radio.

¹ Digital Britain Report, Chapter 3b, Paragraph 2

GENERAL CONCERNS IN ADDITION TO DETAILED RESPONSES TO EACH STATION

VLV's view, as stated in VLV's submission to the Trust in August 2010 relating to the Review of Radios 3,4 and 7, has not changed. To quote:

"While the rest of the media and politicians might be excused for concentrating on the television output of the BBC we are concerned that whenever senior BBC Executives or the BBC Trust make public statements, radio is usually mentioned as an after thought. Examples of programmes are nearly always from the television services. This apparent lack of understanding and commitment to radio may explain why the only [proposed] channel closures in the BBC Strategy Review were for 6 Music and the Asian Network rather than any significant television output."

Radio and the internet

We welcome the extra dimension that the internet has brought to radio listening. We value the useful background information provided for programmes on many parts of the BBC website. It also enables anyone in the world with internet access to listen to BBC programmes, thus bringing the UK to the world and fulfilling the 4th public purpose in the service licences of BBC Radio services:

- The use of computers to access radio programmes may have encouraged many to adopt this technology and helped bridge the digital divide.
- We are concerned 25% of the population do not have access to a computer and therefore are not able to use any of this technology and content.
- Radio 3 has a particularly useful website for providing extensive background material including musical examples but also full play lists.
- We welcome the extension of the availability of most live concerts on the iPlayer from 7 to 30 days especially as they are webcast in 300 bit rather than the 180 on normal digital transmissions.
- The greater availability of many speech or speech based programmes for much longer via podcasts and archiving.

Answers to General Questions in the Review

1. How well does the BBC serve audiences with 'music radio'?

VLV believes that BBC Music Radio provides a wide range of music genres across the six stations being reviewed. The output of all these stations importantly includes news broadcasts and speech elements which add to the value delivered on each station for listeners. This helps ensure audiences are not only entertained but also provided with information which broadens their understanding, not only of music, but also of news and other relevant information.

2. How well are Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra, Radio 2, Radio 3, 6 Music and Asian Network performing against the terms of their services licences?

We go into detail later in this document on the individual services and their performance against their service licences, but as a general observation while these six stations are providing a wide range of content, VLV questions whether the BBC is being successful in attracting the widest possible range of audiences, especially those in the younger cohort.

We are concerned that the younger audience of under 24 year olds is migrating to other platforms for music entertainment. Therefore VLV would encourage the BBC to examine its offer for young people and ensure a high profile for its offer for younger listeners - Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra and Radio 6. There has been criticism that Radio 1's audience is too old given its target listenership of 15-29 year olds. We recognise the effort the BBC is making to engage this younger audience and would encourage it to continue with its strategy of attracting younger listeners.

We note that while Radio 2, 3 and 6 Music maintained audience levels in the most recent RAJAR figures, Radio 1Xtra's weekly listeners had declined very slightly from 1.11m last year to 1.057m.

Are the services delivering high quality and distinctive content?

We note that Radio 3 has been criticised by commercial competitors for a lack of distinctiveness in its output, in its efforts to appeal to a wider audience. We would encourage Radio 3 and all the BBC's music stations to focus on being distinctive and providing a service which cannot be found on other radio stations. This is the *raison d'être* of the BBC and we encourage it to ensure it is fulfilling this ambition.

Are the services making an effective contribution to delivering the BBC's public purposes?

VLV believes that these services are making an effective contribution to delivering the BBC's public purposes, especially in purpose 1, sustaining citizenship and civil society – through its news and current affairs content and purpose 3, stimulating creativity and cultural excellence – through the range and variety of music available across these services.

3. Are Radio 1, Radio 1Xtra, Radio 2, Radio 3, 6 Music and Asian Network well-positioned to deliver their service licence commitments in the future?

Since the last reviews of the six stations now under consideration, there have been significant budget cuts across all BBC output, largely due to the last licence fee settlement.

Recent budget cuts have led to removal of a number of well-known DJs from Radio 1, affecting weekend output especially, and Radio 1Xtra. On Radio 2 there have been cuts to the overnight schedule, with an increase in repeated programmes. Radio 3 has seen a cut in original drama, live music and concerts. Overall it was reported at the time of DQF that the Asian Network would see a 34% cut in content spend and Radio 6 Music one of 2.6%.

Are the services responding effectively to changing audience expectations and listening habits, primarily in response to technological shifts?

We note the introduction last year of Playlister which allows users to tag tracks as they are played on BBC Radio and build up and export their personal playlists. We also recognise the efforts to engage younger audiences via YouTube and the iPlayer Radio App which reaches more than six million browsers every week.

Comments on Individual Services

Radio 1 and Radio 1Xtra

VLV has supported Radio 1 and Radio 1Xtra in the past because of the originality they can provide which is not available on other risk-free commercial networks. We encourage the BBC to continue its efforts to ensure that both stations are distinctive in their originality and preparedness to buck the trend. Often bands which are unknown and find no other outlets are more likely to be heard on Radio 1.

We echo the concerns expressed in the BBC Trust Review of Radio 1 five years ago that the **potential** target audience for these stations is not being reached and encourage the BBC to continue developing strategies to engage this younger audience.

We note that the most recent RAJAR figures show Radio 1 has an audience of 10.55 million listeners – up compared with the previous quarter, although down 220,000 on this time last year.

We note that the station's share has remained static between 2013 and 2014. Considering the migration of listeners from traditional broadcast platforms, we believe that these figures demonstrate the BBC's strategy is being largely successful.

VLV believes it is crucial that the under 24s are engaged by the BBC if the future of the Corporation is to be safeguarded. If they are not supporters of the BBC, VLV fears that public support for the licence fee and funding for the BBC could be at risk in years to come.

Radio 2

VLV recognises the huge popularity of Radio 2 which, according to the latest RAJAR figures is maintaining its listening base – 15,014,000 listeners which is up slightly on the 2013 figures.

We recognise the success of the *Chris Evans' Breakfast Show* which is the most popular element of the BBC Radio 2 schedule, attracting 9.91 million listeners, making it the most popular radio programme since the current RAJAR methodology began in 1999. This is no mean feat and VLV welcomes the success of this show because it demonstrates the huge potential of live radio still to reach mass audiences.

VLV supports the recommendations made by the Trust in its Review of Radio 2 in 2010 that the service should *take the opportunity to use the station's scale and influence to take more creative risks... refreshing arts and comedy programming ...and appeal to audiences who are currently less likely to listen, including ethnic minorities...* We also

supported the recommendation that the station should address the decline in listeners aged over 65.

We look forward to seeing research which the BBC Trust will conduct as part of this Review to see whether Radio 2 has been successful in achieving these strategic goals.

Radio 3

As stated above, VLV members are loyal supporters of Radio 3. It is crucial for them that Radio 3 remains on the FM platform.

We note that, according to the latest RAJAR figures, the station has a weekly audience of 1.91 million listeners, compared to 2.0m last year and 2.09m last quarter, and the network's share is 1.1% which is 0.1% down on 2013's figures.

We agreed with the BBC Trust when it last reviewed the Radio 3 service licence in 2011 saying:

*"Radio 3 is greatly valued by a relatively small but loyal audience who appreciate its intelligent, thoughtful and passionate tone and content. Radio 3 contributes significantly to the BBC's public purposes through its focus on high-quality classical music and its breadth of output covering jazz, world music, arts and culture. Its continuing challenge is to develop a welcoming and accessible tone while maintaining its core commitment to high-quality and distinctive music and arts."*²

We supported the BBC Trust recommendations for BBC Management which included exploring ways in which the station could be more accessible and attract a wider audience.

VLV believes that Radio 3 plays a unique role in widening and informing the listening audience's taste in music. The wide variety of cultural speech based programmes provides a source of information that should aid the lifelong learning of all listeners.

The views of VLV have not changed dramatically since we made a submission to the 2010 Review of Radio 3.

To summarise, these are the key views VLV expressed in 2010:

- We are content that Radio 3 achieves a good balance between broadcasting the core repertoire of the great composers along with a good range of new music.
- We support the policy of broadcasting the works of neglected composers as well as little known works by the great masters.
- A great strength of the network is the wide range of musical genres that can be heard in any week.
- In addition to the wide range of musical genres from chamber music via ensembles to orchestras and opera but also the range from the 10th to 21st century.
- We welcome the broadcasting of concerts from Europe provided by EBU partners.
- We encouraged the BBC to broadcast more new contemporary classical music in peak times rather than on the late night slots.

² BBC Trust Review of BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio 7, February 2011

- We applauded Radio 3's serious coverage of cultural matters each week in *Music Matters*, *Sunday Feature*, most weekday nights an hour of cultural discussion and the essay among along with other programmes.
- We applauded Radio 3 for broadcasting full length plays regularly, including new drama.
- We noted Radio 3's contribution to religious broadcasting with *Choral Evensong* and suggested that there was scope for the station to develop this concept further and have more programmes about faith.

Additionally we would like to add:

- We note that recently the number of plays broadcast on Radio 3 has been reduced and they are relegated to a 10pm slot on Sunday night. While this is a comparatively expensive element of Radio 3 output we regret the change. While it may have made space in the schedule for an extra live concert, we regret the reduction in drama output. Radio 3 is now the only BBC radio station airing 90 minute drama performances and because they are now less frequent, this seriously reduces the scope for writers and adapters of drama.
- Our members question whether running news items at 15 minute intervals early morning until 8.45 is appropriate. They feel the frequency of these bulletins is a little excessive.
- VLV welcomes the arrival of younger presenters since the last Review. They are often refreshingly innovative and enjoyable to listen to as they have an enthusiasm for classical music which is palpable.
- VLV welcomes the initiative of introducing younger children to a top 10 playlist. We applaud the effort to welcome children to classical music and congratulate the BBC on this innovative idea.
- VLV encourages the BBC to retain the distinctiveness of its output on Radio 3, concentrating on what it can provide which is different from other commercial stations, such as Classic FM. The weekday morning broadcasts on Radio 3, including *Essential Classics*, seem directed at Classic FM audiences with excerpts of pieces of music rather than full works, talk-show style interventions using celebrities, intrusively frequent news bulletins and competitions. These may be well-meaning attempts to attract new audiences but are certainly not as distinctive as is the afternoon and evening schedules, particularly with the welcome return of live concerts. More originality in the attempt to attract new listeners would be welcome.
- We welcome the broadcast of live or recorded live concerts and would like to continue to be able to hear these on Radio 3.
- *In Tune* is particularly commended for its ability to combine a lightness of touch with genuinely interesting insights and interviews.

Performance Groups

While we understand that the BBC Proms and BBC Performing Groups are outside the scope of this review, VLV would like to take this opportunity to commend strongly the work of the BBC Performing Groups.

There are five BBC orchestras and a full time professional BBC choir. Three of the orchestras are based in the regions and nations. The performances by these groups on Radio 3 make it unique and of world class. The existence of these resources gives the station the ability to programme a wide variety of concerts each week and the fact that they can broadcast from studios as well as concert halls underwrites a rich and cost-effective service to listeners. As a result of the performances of these groups more adventurous programmes can be made.

We welcomed the conclusions of the independent enquiry by John Myerscough into the performance groups that was published in June 2012 - especially the response to a possible cut of 20% in budgets and the recommendation of a maximum of 10%. It found that a severe diminution would result in the quality, range and volume of live and specially recorded music available to the BBC. This would be inconsistent with the Corporation's editorial offerings and delivery to audiences.

VLV wants to highlight the contribution these musical groups make to the richness of BBC output. They inspire and encourage young musicians and young composers through the commissioning of new music and competitions which are run on both radio and television. The overall contribution they make have major international impact in representing British culture and it is indelibly associated with radio.

Likewise, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the contribution which the BBC Proms make. Their impact is far wider than just radio broadcasting in the UK because these concerts are broadcast throughout the EBU and further afield.

6 Music

6 Music is not core listening for many VLV members but the feedback we have had from our supporters indicates that 6 Music is doing well. For those who appreciate new and independent music presented in an upbeat informal manner, this is a station of choice.

VLV welcomed the public campaign in 2010 to prevent its closure because we recognised that this campaign was led by those who are passionate supporters of alternative popular music. We applaud the BBC Trust for listening to the public and overturning the proposal by BBC Management to close the station.

It was clear that this decision was the right one since the audience to Radio 6 has tripled since that time.

Asian Network

As with Radio 6 Music, the Asian Network is not core listening for VLV members, but we welcomed the decision by BBC Management to not close this station which remains popular among a key audience group. We note its weekly reach of 552,000 listeners and believe that it provides an important service which should be maintained.

Conclusions

While VLV has concerns about the reported impact of cuts in programme budgets, essentially VLV is content with the general direction of the BBC Music Radio stations under consideration for this Review.

The BBC Charter Agreement requires that every programme in a public broadcasting service must exhibit one of the following characteristics: high quality, challenging, original, innovative or engaging. The Music Radio stations often exhibit most of these characteristics and the stations are a flagship of public service broadcasting. They are beacons not only for the UK, but are seen by many overseas listeners and commentators to provide an example and standard of programming for broadcasters across the world to emulate in their own distinctive ways.