MAKING MUSIC RADIO

THE RECORD INDUSTRY AND POPULAR MUSIC PRODUCTION IN THE UK

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For my mother, Elizabeth Ann Percival (née Murphy) (1937-2004)

and my father, Stanley Thomas Percival.

ABSTRACT

Music radio is the most listened to form of radio, and one of the least researched by academic ethnographers. This research project addresses industry structure and agency in an investigation into the relationship between music radio and the record industry in the UK, how that relationship works to produce music radio and to shape the production of popular music. The underlying context for this research is Peterson's production of culture perspective. The research is in three parts: a model of music radio production and consumption, an ethnographic investigation focusing on music radio programmers and record industry pluggers, and an ethnographic investigation into the use of specialist music radio programming by alternative pop and rock artists in Glasgow, Scotland. The research has four main conclusions: music radio continues to be central to the record industry's promotional strategy for new commercial recordings; music radio is increasing able to mediate the production practices of the popular music industry; that mediation is focused through the social relationship between music radio programmers and record industry pluggers; cultural practices of musicians are developed and mediated by consumption of specialist music radio, as they become *part* of specialist music radio.

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This research project may have commenced at Strathclyde University, but it was at Stirling's Film and Media Studies Department it found its true home. I met many good

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I INTRODUCTION

Music radio is the most listened to form of radio, and one of the least researched by academic ethnographers. This research project addresses industry structure and agency in an investigation into the relationship between music radio and the record industry in the UK, and how that relationship works to produce music radio and to shape the production of popular music. The underlying context for this research is Peterson's production of culture perspective.

This research project investigates the relationship between the record industry and the radio industry, how that relationship works to produce music radio and to shape the production of popular music. I approached the issues in three ways:

(i) the construction of a model of music radio production and consumption, illustrating lines of power, influence and ideology;

(ii) an ethnographic investigation of the primary point of contact and negotiation between a record company and a music radio station - the plugger/programmer relationship;

(iii) an ethnographic investigation into the use of specialist music radio by independent musicians in Glasgow, Scotland.

This research is necessary because there is a lack of literature which tackles both structure and agency in music radio and its relationship with the record industry. In particular there have been few ethnographic studies that have involved in-depth empirical analysis of how pluggers and programmers conceptualise their cultural work, and no serious work in the UK at all on how those conceptualisations work in the production of music radio and popular music.

There is a tendency for radio studies academics to be drawn to elements of radio content

that are more amenable to content or textual analysis. There is in fact much interesting work in the field around radio drama, news and current affairs and DJ speech [1]. It seems to me that there are two reasons for this emphasis on speech content. Firstly, any research in these aspects of radio can be framed in terms of, for example, how drama works in other media (television or theatre, perhaps). There is thus an existing theoretical framework within which to situate new work in radio. It is easy to underestimate how important this can be to an academic looking for appropriate and useful tools to help tackle a particular research question. So, not only does this help the researcher to do the work and reach a reasonable conclusion, it also associates work in radio studies with theoretical approaches from related fields. Which leads me to my second point: there is a perfectly understandable desire to do research that that has cultural status within the academy. One of the ways of doing that is to study forms of radio output that have relationships with critical/theoretical studies in other fields, preferably studies or fields that connote high cultural capital.

There is really nothing particularly wrong with either of these reasons for the focus on speech radio. What *is* a problem is that there consequently tends to be less work in music radio. Where there is interesting work on music radio, much of it addressed here, it tends to focus on analyses of programming strategies (Ahlkvist and Faulkner, 2002) or issues of market concentration and diversity (Chambers, 2003). Inevitably this dissertation uses theoretical frameworks from elsewhere in media and cultural studies, but those frameworks are referenced here to contextualise work on how the radio industry *constructs* the notion of 'music radio'. These frameworks are also necessary to address the relationship between the radio industry and the record industry, and lines of cultural and economic power cross between those industries.

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[1] Useful examples of each (respectively) are Crook (1999), Schlesinger (1987), Tolson (2006).

Thesis

This research project argues the following:

1. Music radio continues to be central to the record industry's promotional strategy for new commercial recordings.

2. The record industry's on-going need for the promotional power of radio has augmented the capacity of UK music radio to mediate the cultural production practices of the record industry, with important consequences for the sounds of commercially recorded popular music.

3. The mediation of the cultural production practices of the record industry by music radio, and so the sound of commercially recorded popular music, is focused through the social relationship between music radio programmers and record pluggers.

4. Cultural practices of musicians are developed and mediated by consumption of specialist music radio.

Chapter II is a critical introduction to the issues in studying music radio. When I use quotes or other information from my informants in this chapter, they are referenced in the same format as that used in Chapter V. The job titles used in these references were the titles informants had at the time of interview (interviews were carried out between December 2004 and December 2005). More detail on informants' subsequent status in their respective industries is supplied in Chapter V. In Chapter III I present two models of the relationship between music radio and the record industry. In Chapter IV I address the strengths and weaknesses of the ethnographic methodology I use to investigate the central research questions. Chapter V presents and discusses the results of my interviews with music radio programmers and record industry pluggers. In Chapter VI I present and discuss the empirical material from my interviews with BBC Radio Scotland specialist music

show, *Beat Patrol* and with the bands Bis, The Delgados and Mogwai. Chapter VII has a summary of the key arguments of the research project, and a brief discussion of potentially fruitful future research directions.

II MUSIC RADIO MATTERS

Mass broadcast radio's first proposed application (Benjamin, 2002) as a "radio music box"

is still by far its biggest application. Strauss (2005) quotes Arbitron data from the US

market showing formats ranked by station numbers as:

1. News/talk: 2,179 stations
2. Country: 2,066 stations
3. Religious: 2,014 stations
4. Adult contemporary: 1,556 stations
5. Adult standards: 1,196 stations
6. Oldies: 1,060 stations
7. Rock: 869 stations
(Straus, 2005).

All music formats have 61.7% of total listening, followed by Talk formats with 19.9% and

Religious with 18.4% (a mix of music and talk formats). The figures for the UK radio market

are less easy to assess, but RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research) reports indicate a

market dominated by music formats (RAJAR, 2007). Clearly, music radio matters to the

radio industry as a whole, to the record industry, to radio audiences and to music fans. It

matters socially, economically, sometimes politically and always culturally. Music radio is

an entity *distinct* from the record industry - it is a product of the economic and cultural

interaction of the radio industry and the record industry.

In this dissertation I focus on music radio as part of the radio industry as a whole in the UK.

I define music radio to be a form of audio broadcasting in which music accounts for at least

50% of content across a typical 24-hour broadcast day. In some places I refer to individual

programmes or shows with at least 50% music content, but which are broadcast as part of

a mixed output schedule across a 7-day week in which speech plays a more significant part

overall - for example, a specialist music show on BBC Radio Scotland.

At the time of writing there is a debate about how radio can continue to be a significant

cultural and industrial player in an era of increasing competition for the attention of

audiences (Ofcom 2004; 2006; 2007). It is far from easy to pull apart these cultural,

economic, political and technological arguments, nor is it the primary purpose of this

dissertation to do so.

Ofcom's 2006 report on the Communications Market is however bullish about radio. A

selection of it's key findings are:

> • The US is by far the largest market for radio, with annual revenues of £11bn in 2005; Japan is second with revenues of £1.9bn. Together the US and Japan account for over 50% of the radio revenues of the twelve countries studied in this report. The UK is the fourth largest market with revenues of £1.2bn in 2005.
>
> • The proportion of total advertising spent on radio varies substantially by country. In the US, 11.5% of all display advertising expenditure goes on radio; in the UK it is less than 4%.
>
> • Radio listening is more popular in the UK than in any other country in this study – with weekly listening per capita averaging nearly 23 hours. The share of listening to PSB [Public Service Broadcasting] stations is also higher in the UK than anywhere else – at around 55% of total listening.
>
> • Digital radio is increasing in popularity. The UK leads in the roll-out of DAB, with 85% coverage and over 200 stations available.
>
> • The internet is having a positive impact on radio listening with around one third of adult broadband users among the countries we surveyed listening to online radio every week. Less than one in five adults claims to be listening to less radio offline as a result of being connected to broadband. (Ofcom, 2006:5).

Some of the delivery technologies are changing, but the conditions under which music radio

is produced and consumed remain much the same as they have been for many years: the

product is a serial audio stream, which is created centrally and distributed through analogue

or digital media to an audience in a one-to-many relationship. The conditions of distribution

and consumption have already become more diverse and complex, but music radio as a

text in its most basic form consists of a mix of DJ voice, station branding, and music. Music

radio often also includes significant non-music content such as advertising and

sponsorship, news bulletins, travel, weather, entertainment guides, competitions, phone-ins

and other speech material.

Barnard (2000) describes music radio as a continuous string of beads of approximately the

same size, each representing a chunk of time filled with one of those elements (a record, a

commercial, a new bulletin, and so on). As Crisell (2002) put it, when describing the

revolutionary nature of DJ-led strip-programmed music radio arriving from the US in 1960s

Britain, courtesy of the offshore pirate stations like Radio Caroline and Radio London:

> The real point of such output is that its significant unit is not the *programme*, which listeners have to adjust to, but the segment or 'bite' - a pop record, news bulletin, commercial, interview … (Crisell, 2002, 148).

New production technologies have made more convenient the processes of audio processing and mixing, and have reduced the economic and technical entry barriers to those wishing to create their own content. Nevertheless, the core processes of making an audio stream which *sounds* like music radio remain largely unchanged. Even when music radio formats feature playlists dominated by back catalogue (that is, former hits) tracks there is still a relationship, one which will become more important as it becomes easier for audiences to legally and easily download back catalogue tracks from services such as Apple's iTunes Music Store. For example, a listener could hear a Led Zeppelin album track on a Classic Rock station and download it in minutes from Apple's iTunes.

Apple's iTunes and other legal digital download services are part of an evolutionary change in the distribution and consumption of recorded music. The record industry argues that illegal distribution of copyright protected recorded music has been damaging their profitability for a number of years and that revenue from legitimate digital sales has yet to compensate for this shortfall (Allen, 2007b), despite conflicting evidence (Allen, 2007a).

The piracy argument has been convincingly contested by amongst others, Williamson and Cloonan (2007), but the legitimacy or otherwise of the position of the major record labels is not a significant issue while record companies continue to see radio as a primary channel for the promotion of recordings from which economic value may be extracted through sales and exploitation of performance rights. What matters is the continued existence of an audience for music radio - as long as that audience is sufficiently, measurably large (and/or contains demographics desirable to advertisers or public service broadcasters), there will continue to be a significant relationship between music radio and the record industry.

One of the more interesting contradictions in the issue of digital distribution of music is that some of the same technologies (streaming, audio format compression) that the record

industry sees as a threat to its traditional unit-shifting business model, actually open up new

possibilities for radio listening, as the table below suggests.

Production form	Distribution	Consumption technology
Analogue radio	Terrestrial broadcast	Analogue radio sets Mobile phones
Digital radio	Terrestrial broadcast Satellite broadcast	Digital radio sets Digital television Mobile phones
Streamed radio	Internet	Personal computers Wi-fi enabled devices
Podcasts	Internet	Personal computers Wi-fi enabled devices Digital music players

The picture is a little more complicated than this, of course: analogue and digital radio

programming can be streamed or podcast; streamed radio can be simulcast or played back

on demand; podcasts are downloaded and may be archived for repeated future listening by

the downloader.

These multiple channels, according to Ofcom (2007:3) are at least partly responsible for an

overall increase in radio listening in the UK, in the face of competition for audience media

attention from computer gaming, social networking, television, cinema and other leisure

activities. Despite this generally positive climate for the UK radio industry, Ofcom has

indicated that caution may be necessary if, as they suggest, listening in the key 15-24 age

demographic is shrinking, despite the overall increase in radio listening (Ofcom, 2007:27).

It is of course possible, that the significance of the reported decrease in numbers of 15-24

year old listeners may be less a cause for alarm and more a reflection of the upward

movement of the median age of the UK population as a whole. There is an assumption

here that if younger people do not start listening to radio early, they will never start listening

to radio, and it is not at all clear that there is any meaningful evidence to support this

position. What is more important here though is that if the reported figures on overall

listening continue to rise, then the significance of music radio to the record industry will

remain.

So, while the development of technologies that the record industry has framed as a threat

may in fact lead to growth in the consumption of radio, there is some evidence that the legal

download market is changing some of the fine grain of the relationship between the record

industry and music radio. There is, for example, a much reduced lead time between a new

song appearing on a music radio playlist and its subsequent availability as a download.

Lead times of six weeks between playlisting and availability of a CD single were not

unusual as late as 2005. A UK download only music chart debuted on 1 September 2004

(Timms and Wood, 2004) and from 1 January 2007 download-only singles have contributed

to official sales, whether or not there is a physical release (Gibson, 2007a). The movement

of legal downloading into the mainstream of sales has helped reduce the gap between

playlisting and availability to buy to somewhere between two weeks and zero. This

suggests that the period in the late 1990s during which the amount of time between initial

airplay of a new single and its physical release (driven by record company desire for the

highest possible chart placing in the first release week), was an anomaly, and that current

trends towards a much shorter airplay-to-release gap represent a return to pre-1990s

industry promotional practices.

There are two further more general arguments which convince me that music radio, the

record industry and their relationship in the UK will remain largely as they been since the

launch of BBC Radio 1 in late 1967.   First, the powerful vested economic interests in the

recorded music and music radio industries mean that it is highly unlikely that either will

disappear or radically transform in the short to medium term. Any threat to the continued

economic success of either industry is likely to generate a sustained response designed to

manage or neutralise that threat [2]. Secondly, historical precedent suggests that perceived

technology-driven threats to existing economic structures in media industries are often

represented as being significantly more dangerous than they really are. For example, in the

late-1970s and early-1980s, home taping did not in fact 'kill music' (or the music industry).

During the 1980s, the record industry and consumers embraced the pre-recorded audio

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[2] The record industry response to digital distribution is an example of the approach to the threat to economic dominance and control. The success of this approach is difficult to assess at the time of writing, but there's little reason to suppose that the record industry will scale back its attempts to re-assert control of its licensed properties.

cassette and for most of that decade, the format dominated commercial album sales. The audio cassette took over as market leading format in 1982, the CD (launched in 1983) nudged vinyl into third place in 1989 (Humphries, 2007) and in 1992 the CD (launched in 1983) finally won the format battle with audio cassette (Paul, 2003).

So, while the record industry and the music radio industry continue to exist in familiar forms, there must also continue to be a relationship between them. It is an analysis of this relationship as a cultural and economic exchange that is at the centre of this dissertation.

STUDYING MUSIC RADIO

In broad terms, this research draws on the production of culture approach, developed by Peterson (1976) and others subsequently, but discussed with clarity and depth in Peterson and Anand (2004). Peterson and Anand identify six facets in a system of production of culture, the disruption of any one of which will tend to disrupt the whole system and lead to a period of adjustment and restabilisation. The facets are technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organisational structure, occupational careers and market. My focus then is on examining the music radio / record industry relationship in terms of the agency of the cultural intermediaries working within a loosely coupled production system, and touches on aspects of four of those facets: industry structure; organisational structure; occupational careers; market.

The first relevant facet is industry structure. Peterson and Anand note that the record industry is …

> … [an] open system of oligarchy composed of niche-market-targeted divisions plus many small specialty service and market development firms where the former produce the most lucrative products and the latter produce the most innovative … (Peterson and Anand, 2004:316).

The radio industry is more problematic in the UK. In commercial terms it most closely resembles Peterson and Anand's classification of an industry consisting of … "a few vertically integrated oligarchal firms that mass produce a few standardized products."

(Peterson and Anand, 2004:316) … but with elements of the more evolved, open oligarchal system that characterises the music industry. Radio in the UK is also dominated by the BBC, whose primary objective in reaching audiences is as an end in itself (Wall, 2003). This changes the commercial model of production somewhat in that a single dominant cultural organisation will produce innovation (specialist music shows, for example) alongside products that compete in a mainstream mass market (like breakfast radio shows on Radio 1 and Radio 2). Overall though, the structures of both industries remain relatively stable.

The second relevant facet is organisational structure. Record companies, and to a certain extent radio station owners tend to adopt an organisational structure that consists of …

> … a variegated form of large firm that tries to take advantage of the potential flexibility of the bureaucratic form without giving up central control by acquiring creative services through short-term contracts. (Peterson and Anand, 2004:316).

The record industry in the UK fits this model closely, as does the UK commercial radio industry. Since the 1994 structural changes imposed on the BBC by Director General John Birt, in pursuit of a more market-driven model of organisation, the Corporation has also come to resemble this model, albeit with the weight of 70 years of bureaucratic, centralised control slowing the pace of structural innovation.

The most relevant production facet for this research is that of occupational careers. As Peterson and Anand (2004) put it:

> Culture is produced through sustained collective activity, so each cultural field develops a career system (Becker 1982, Menger 1999), and the networks of working relationships developed by creative workers make for what some have called "cultures of production". (Peterson and Anand, 2004:317).

There is a career structure of sorts in the record industry, but there is little in the way of formal professional qualification, controlling entry to the sector (Negus, 1992). This is also true of commercial radio in the UK, despite the increasing number of vocational courses designed to feed into both industries. Most workers in the record industry and in music radio enter those industries, as Peterson and Anand (2004) suggest, from the "bottom up"

and build careers in an essentially ad-hoc way. This is also true to a degree in the BBC in terms of the point of entry to the organisation as a music radio generalist. Once inside the BBC however there are clear, bureaucratically defined career paths [3]. The BBC also uses both its own network of local radio stations and local commercial radio as feeders for potential personnel. Furthermore, workers move not only within an industry, but *across* industries. Several of my informants have worked in both music radio and the record industry.

Similarly, notions of "market" are central to the cultural production of popular music and to both commercial radio and the BBC (the latter tends to view Peterson and Anand's market as a "public", though the same rules appear to segment both constructions). For the record industry and both sectors of music radio, Peterson and Anand's (2004) definition of market works well:

> Markets are constructed by producers to render the welter of consumer tastes comprehensible … Once consumer tastes are reified as a market, those in the field tailor their actions to create cultural goods like those that are currently most popular as represented by the accepted measurement tools. (Peterson and Anand, 2004:317).

This plays out most clearly in commercial music radio, in its obsession with research as a central tool in making programming decisions. There are differences in emphasis at the BBC, but the Corporation still uses research extensively to inform its programming, and its choice of presenters (2005, personal interview with Kim MacNally, Research Manager, BBC Radio 2 and 6Music).

This research on popular music radio in the UK focuses mainly on hits stations whose playlists are dominated by contemporary or recent releases. The reason for this focus is that these are the stations which have the most active and relevant relationship with the record industry, and thus are the most useful in exploring that relationship. There is though one other major national music station in the UK which does not fall into this category, but

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[3] Those intending to join the BBC as journalists have very specific qualificatory hoops to pass through before become BBC graduate trainees, in contrast to the less formal means of entry in music radio.

has a very important relationship with a specific part of the record industry - Classic FM. Despite the popularity of Classic FM, pulling in around 6 million listeners per week (RAJAR, 2007), and its formal similarity to commercial popular music radio (DJs, commercials, short-ish pieces of music), it is quite different from other UK music radio stations. So, while there is most definitely a potentially fascinating research project to be carried out on Classic FM and its relationship with the record industry, that relationship is so intimately bound with the dynamic of the classical music industry, that it is research that should be carried out elsewhere as a comparison to the work I present here.

Typically then, studies which address music radio fall into two broad areas: firstly the role of music for radio, and secondly, the role of radio for music. Both approaches frequently characterise the relationship between the recorded music industry and the music radio industry as symbiotic - a term originally borrowed from zoological science. In its original context, symbiosis can be defined as "a close association of animals or plants of different species that is often, but not always, of mutual benefit" (Encarta World English Dictionary, 1999). In more general use, symbiosis is defined as characterising "a cooperative, mutually beneficial relationship between two people or groups" (ibid).

The relationship between the record industry and the music radio industry demonstrates some aspects of both these definitions, but in most studies there is an assumption that the symbiosis is of readily definable mutual benefit. More considered examination of the relationship suggests that the symbiosis may not always be of obvious mutual benefit, nor is it often in any strict sense truly cooperative. Rather it is a relationship in which some kind of mutually beneficial symbiosis often appears to be the goal, but is in fact regularly characterised by conflict, resolution and a shifting balance of power.

Status of radio as a medium

Berland (1990) produced one of the most cited work on music radio, and opens with an

excellent summary of the status of radio as a medium [4]:

> In the broadcasting industry, radio is commonly referred to as a 'secondary medium'. The phrase conveys the pragmatic view that no one cares whether you listen to radio so long as you do not turn it off. Since it was displaced by television, radio has been expected to accommodate itself technologically and discursively to every situation. Are you brushing your teeth, turning a corner, buying or selling jeans, or entering inventory into the computer? So much the better. Your broadcaster respects the fact that these important activities must come first. Radio is humble and friendly, it follows you everywhere. In any event, television makes more money. (Berland, 1990:105).

Radio then is perceived as being 'secondary' in a number of ways. The act of consuming radio demands less attention than the act of consuming a visual medium like television, so radio is often (if not normally) consumed while the 'listener' is involved in some other activity, mundane or otherwise. There is by implication a continuum of cognitive effort exerted by radio consumers ranging from subconscious awareness of radio as background noise (perhaps someone else's music radio in a public space), to intent listening (to drama or documentary in a private space). Berland is correct in her assessment that for the radio industry the only metric that really matters is whether or not the radio is switched on, and tuned to a specific station. In the UK a radio 'listener' is deemed to be such if that person is tuned to a particular radio station for 5 minutes or more in a week [5], and there is no attempt to measure the extent to which radio is 'listened' to, as opposed to merely 'heard' (partly because of the methodological challenges of doing so). Despite the large numbers of radio listeners in the UK where 90% of the population over the age of 15 listen to radio every week (RAJAR, 2007), it is demonstrably less economically significant than television. The table below is total UK display advertising [6] spend in 2006, sourced from the Advertising Association's Advertising Statistics Yearbook 2007, WARC.

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[4] Berland refers to radio in Canada and the United States, but much of her argument is relevant to radio elsewhere, and in the UK in particular.

[5] In the UK in 2007 the listening figures are in fact calculated by RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research) on a sample of audience and are based on what individuals *say* they listen to for 5 minutes or more per week. This may or may not accurately reflect their *actual* consumption of radio, regardless of the cognitive effort involved in the listening process.

[6] Display advertising excludes revenue from print media classified advertising, and revenue from internet paid-for search advertising.

Media Shares of Total Display Advertising Expenditure (%), 2006

TV	34.1
Press	32.0
Direct Mail	17.2
Outdoor	8.0
Radio	4.0
Cinema	1.4
Internet	3.4

Commercial radio is a relatively small player in overall advertising spend, which reflects its status as a 'secondary medium' far more than its pervasiveness as a broadcast medium. At the BBC, overall spending on radio and television breaks down as below (BBC, 2007).

BBC Licence Fee Spend 2006/2007 (%)

TV Total	68.8
Radio Total	17.5
(Radio National)	(10.7)
(Radio Local)	(6.8)

(Remaining licence fee spend is online services and administration).

These raw figures do not, however get to grips with the relationship between music radio and the record industry, nor does it say anything about the cultural and social value of music radio. I will address the former in detail in Chapter V *Production Relationships* and the latter in Chapter VI *Consumption Relationships*.

Unique characteristics of radio

McLeish (1999) identifies some 22 characteristics of radio, most of which are arguably unique to the medium. In this section I address the most relevant of these, and those which are most often cited in literature.

The most obviously unique characteristic of radio, its 'secondary' nature has been addressed in the previous section, but there are others that are relevant to any study of music radio. Lewis and Booth (1989), amongst others contribute to a broad consensus on what constitutes a list of the other unique characteristics of radio:

1. Radio is cheap. Producing good quality, listenable (analogue) radio is significantly cheaper and requires considerably less technical expertise than the production of television, even with the rapid development of cheap and powerful video editing software and the growth of online video distribution sites, such as YouTube. Receiving analogue radio is also incredibly cheap and reliable, using well established technology. This low cost contributes to two more key characteristics of radio.

2. Radio is local. Perhaps more accurately, radio *can be* local. The low cost of producing radio means that there can be more, and smaller radio stations than would ever be possible with conventional television broadcast technology. There is an underlying question of exactly *how* 'local' commercial radio really is in 2007, though given the scope of that question, it should be explored in a research project with objectives other than this one. For the most part UK commercial music radio emphasises its local-ness (or regionality) through local news and advertising, weather, traffic reports, DJs with regional knowledge and accents, and in some specialist shows, local music. National (analogue) commercial music radio has another issue in that locality is not an issue. As this affects only one national analogue station, Virgin Radio, it is not an issue I intend to explore in this research.

3. Radio is pervasive. Most figures (including those from RAJAR) suggest that there is an average of around 5 analogue radio sets per UK household, so radio can fill most domestic spaces if required to do so. All cars (and taxis) have radios, as do increasing numbers of mobile phones and other mobile electronic devices. Many commercial selling spaces use radio as the background to browsing and buying activity - some retail chains have their own national closed radio networks (HMV, Top Shop, and so on). It would be difficult for most UK adults to pass through a 24-hour period without at least some passing contact with radio

broadcasts. Regardless then of one's position on media effects research, it is clear that radio has a large audience that may be receptive to the medium's cultural, social or economic messages.

4. Radio is an intimate medium. Its pervasiveness contributes to its use as largely (though not exclusively) private listening, whether at home, work or on the move. The lack of a visual dimension also works alongside these other characteristics to develop a sense of connection between individual listeners, and the presenter or station as a whole (Tacchi, 1998; Crisell, 2006). A second effect of radio's intimacy is an often-cited perceived closeness between audience members, often listening alone, but aware that other listeners are doing the same thing at the same time. This quality of radio underpins part of the empirical research I present here in Chapter V *Production relationships*, and is central to the work I present in Chapter VI *Consumption relationships*.

5. Most radio is live. Unlike most television, most radio broadcasting is live. This is a strong contributor to the intimacy of radio - listeners are addressed directly and in real time. However, there is an important discontinuity between radio and the record. As Chanan (1995) puts it:

> Radio operates in the present tense, records reproduce a past moment. Radio is ephemeral, records preserve the evanescent. For the recording engineer the record is not a live medium, but precisely a record, which reproduces an original sound. For the broadcaster, the sound at source has no independent integrity and is malleable. (Chanan, 1995:60).

Chanan suggests that music for radio producers is not "music", it is merely a sound source, which may or may not be used by radio producers in the ways a record buyer might listen. This is true up to point for music programmers who, as my empirical work suggests often have a much more complex relationship with the music contained in a recording. Nevertheless, the malleability of the record emerges as a factor for the programmers who authorise the speeding up of records, in the belief that it makes those records sound more energetic or exciting (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network). It might also be argued that radio is becoming *less* ephemeral than it once was, in that podcasts are digital

records of radio show (either broadcast, or recorded specifically to be podcast).
Nevertheless, my feeling is that most music radio is consumed by most listeners as a live
stream of real-time audio.

THE ROLE OF MUSIC FOR RADIO

The key function of music for music radio is as primary content, and commercially recorded
music has made possible the notion of music radio [7]. Without records, music radio stations
could not exist for broadcasters with finite economic resources and limited numbers of
performing musicians. In this section I will examine why music in general, and recorded
music in particular is used in radio. This means that questions of how music shapes the
sound and culture of music radio will not be directly addressed here. They will however,
form part of the discussion of the interview results and documentation of the proposed
model for music radio.

Crisell (2002) notes that records came to dominate output of music on radio post-WW2 in
the US as radio stations scrambled to fill airtime emptied of the dramas, soaps, comedies,
variety shows, documentaries and quizzes, which had moved to the new medium of
television. For the BBC the move to recorded music did not happen until much later,
following a decade of challenge from the record-led Radio Luxembourg and the offshore
pirates, between 1957 and 1967. There were reasons other than institutional inertia and
cultural conservatism - Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL), the collection agency
responsible for collecting and distributing airplay and public performance royalties, acting
for the UK record companies and in association with the Musician's Union had imposed a
restriction on the playing of commercial recordings (known as needle-time). These

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[7] The use of music on radio is not limited to music radio formats. Music is often an essential
soundtrack to radio drama and is used in other programming forms such as documentary, comedy,
quiz shows, current affairs and even news (Barnard, 2000). None of these programming forms is
dominated by music, and individuals involved in their production are unlikely to have close, recurrent
relationships with music industry professionals. This use of music on radio is however valuable to the
record industry in direct economic terms (licensing and performing rights payments), indirect
economic terms (exposure of music to new audiences), and potentially in cultural terms (accruing
appropriate credibility or cultural capital).

restrictions were eventually removed in 1989, following an extensive review by the

Monopolies and Mergers Commission (1988).

Crisell (2002) argues that commercially recorded music was good for radio in two more

important ways:

> Records benefited radio in two important ways. First, the richness and variety of sound they
> could provide would have needed a multitude of live bands and orchestras … second, each
> tune represented the best performance that an artist or band was capable of … [and so]
> listener's favourites could be played repeatedly without any variation in musical quality.
> (Crisell, 2002:140).

Recorded music continues to dominate the airwaves in the early 21st century, partly for the

reasons outlined by Crisell, and partly due to conditions that emerged in the middle and late

20th century. I explore those conditions in the remainder of this section, and in the next

section *The role of radio for music*.

Records are cheap and easy

Not withstanding the licensing costs to radio stations of paying record companies for the

use of their recordings on air, records remain a cheap solution to filling airtime. The first

saving for stations is in numbers of employees, because the production of music radio is

relatively simple. For most mainstream radio stations the basic requirements are a DJ, an

audio source for music, station branding and commercials (record decks, CDs, or a hard

drive), a microphone and a mixing desk. In terms of personnel, after the fixed costs of the

equipment and broadcasting licence, having only one or two broadcasters saves money. In

fact, in community and hospital radio in the UK, and college radio across North America,

many DJs work on a voluntary basis.

The second, related saving, is in the cost of generating speech content between the

records. Unlike many other forms of radio speech, DJ talk is largely unscripted, often

unplanned and frequently spontaneous (Chapman, 1992; Tolson, 2006). Low levels of

scripting reduce preparation time, which is a significant factor in daily music shows with running times of four hours or more.

A third reason that records are cheap and easy is that, depending on the size of the station, most record companies provide CDs or digital music files free, in the form of promotional copies of releases. For larger stations this can even become a problem as Heads of Music or producers have to sift through often very large numbers of records on a daily basis - I observed this directly at BBC Radio Scotland and during a short period as a DJ at XFM in London. Thus there are very low costs in acquiring content for most radio stations, beyond the payment of broadcast performance royalties.

Music and branding

For most commercial music radio stations, music defines their branding and so also station identity. In the UK and elsewhere, commercial music radio stations use extensive music testing in an attempt to ensure their music policy is hitting their target demographic (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network). Market research has, for many stations, become central to their music programming strategy, and is directly concerned with reducing risk and uncertainty in creating content, regardless of a station's source of income.

A brand, in contemporary capitalist terms, is a more than simply a product, which in this case is a radio station. In broadcasting, a brand is a way of distilling a number of essentialist characteristics of a product into an overarching product image, which is clearly identifiable, readily understood, marketable, and in many cases, transferable across media. In music radio, many industry professionals believe that the music they play is a core strategy in station branding. Whether or not this is actually the case is a question that is beyond the scope of this work, but it is certainly one that would repay future research outwith the discipline of market research.

Music then is perceived as a central part of the branding of music radio stations, and in the

UK at least, radio professionals whose job it is to choose records for broadcast, spend considerable time and effort in pursuit of the most effective playlist strategy. As one Head of Music for a UK regional network of commercial FM stations put it, "I'm responsible ... for making sure that we have a coherent music policy that is designed to attract the most in-target listeners we can, and retain them for as long as possible ... core listeners, that listen to the station a lot [and] have a relationship with the brand." (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

This matters for commercial music radio in the UK firstly because good branding helps distinguish one station from another in a rather poorly differentiated and busy marketplace. Secondly, good branding can be transferable across media, and in many cases across industries. For example, 'Kerrang' started life in the 1980s as a UK specialist rock and heavy metal monthly magazine. The brand has been successfully extended into commercially released compilation CDs, regional analogue radio and national digital rock radio stations. Each of these has its own slightly differentiated core taste demographic and yet the Kerrang branding maintains a surprising unity (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Of course, much of music radio's concern with branding as a route to ratings success is predicated on the underlying assumption that market research is, by-and-large, correct. There is therefore also an assumption that demographic categories are a fair representation of audience tastes generally and that taste in radio music (as opposed to music more generally) is consistent with other 'lifestyle' choices and patterns of consumption.

Music, audiences and advertisers

There are two strands, clearly visible in the UK, to arguments about the role that music plays for the radio industry. Superficially they are same - music is used to attract audiences and therefore ratings. The value of those ratings is the common currency of the radio industry in most geographical territories. But the key drivers for accumulation of that

currency are a little different according to the funding model of the radio station or network. For commercial radio, ratings are directly related to the accumulation of economic capital and therefore profit. For publicly-funded broadcasters, such as the BBC, ratings are less explicitly linked to income, and have political value for the organisation both internally and externally: internally in terms of status and influence of individuals and departments; externally in terms of negotiations with government, external collaborators and competitors, Ofcom and the 'public', the BBC's continuing relevance as a public service broadcaster

In the case of commercial radio, Frith and others have argued convincingly that music radio is not really about music at all - commercial music radio exists in order to deliver audiences to advertisers (Frith, 1981; 2001). While core funding of commercial radio comes from advertising and sponsorship, this will continue to be the case, and other interested parties, such as share-holders, audiences, musicians and the record industry will tend to be of secondary concern. Shareholders, of course, tend to be happy while stations are profitable. Audiences tend to be happy with a station that matches their radio needs. Musicians or artists tend to be happy when their music is being played on radio stations, and thus the record industry is happy when those artists sell their music. When all of these interests (and there are others) are aligned, a radio station tends to be economically successful.

So, for commercial radio, music is the tool that is central to achieving its core objective of profit. This doesn't mean however that commercial music radio functions entirely without recognition of the other potential roles it can play, outwith the core profit-making activity. I will return to these secondary roles in later chapters, but one role that has cultural significance is that of exposing new artists or genres, often at a local or regional level. Relatively few commercial music radio stations have new music shows that do this regularly (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records). One station that does showcase new music is the quasi-national network XFM [8], which features a number of

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[8] XFM is a 'quasi-national' station with 3 UK regional analogue territories and a national digital radio presence. It's first FM licence was won in London in 1997, the second in Manchester in 2005 and its third a re-branded Beat 106 in central Scotland in 2006. The London station has been simulcast nationally on digital radio, and while it has occasionally acknowledged the existence of listeners outside of central London, its focus remains the capital city. All XFM licences are controlled by UK

shows whose content suggests something approaching the public service values of a BBC station. In at least one show, on London's XFM, late night presenter John Kennedy would not have sounded out of place as a successor to the BBC's late icon of alternative music, John Peel. XFM Scotland has a analogous and similarly knowledgeable DJ, Jim Gellatly in the same time-slot, and with the same programme branding, *X-posure*. It is also at this point that notions of public service overlap with commercial radio's concept of itself as being rooted in a local, often urban community. Connections to community are frequently manifested in travel reports, local news and weather, phone-ins, competitions and sponsored events (Barnard, 1989). More significantly for this dissertation, shows like *X-posure* often make community connections by playing recordings by unsigned local musicians - see Appendix 1 for Jim Gellatly's MySpace site on which 4 unsigned bands are featured every week (the bands are also played in Gellatly's show on XFM). So, even music from artists who haven't yet come into formal contact with the record industry still has a role to play for music radio, commercial and BBC.

These shows are an important part of XFM's branding, and are about establishing a link to a relatively small audience of music enthusiasts, rather than pursuing maximum ratings in a given target demographic. In this sense, XFM's strategy is little different from the BBC strategy quoted by Hendy as "ratings by day, reputation by night" (Hendy, 2000b:744). Part of the reason that this strategy emerged at all has been the patterns of broadcast media consumption first established in 1950s America, and later elsewhere. As television became the dominant evening broadcast medium, radio audiences shrank and shows became more specialist (Frith, 1981; Barnes, 1988; Barnard, 1989).

Explicit in the conditions under which commercial radio was permitted in the UK from 1973 onwards was that, despite their lack of public funding, stations were legally required to broadcast a percentage of 'public service' programming. Leaving aside for the moment

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major radio group, GCap. XFM has become a valuable tool for GCap to access a younger demographic with a taste for alternative rock and pop. The association of the brand with rebellion and independence has wavered at times since GCap bought out the London brand in August 1998, but its specialist shows still play new music from a number of genres.

arguments about what 'public service' might be, the result for a short time at least was programming that included coverage of local music, arts and community issues. Barnard (1989) and Crisell (2002) describe how these conditions were gradually less strictly enforced in the first decade of commercial music radio in the UK, and stations began to sound more like a hybrid of the BBC's youth / music station Radio 1 and US Top 40 stations.

Yet despite its obvious debt to US format radio, some commercial music radio stations in the UK have retained a notion of public service (if not quite Reithian in nature), alongside core profit-making motivation. There is of course an old argument, supported mainly by those in commercial broadcasting, that making programming that achieves high ratings *is* public service. Thus, if audience numbers are large, then that audience is consuming something that in some way meets its wants and needs. This is a reductionist argument that ignores the complexities of, amongst other things, the socially constructed nature of concepts like 'audience', 'public' and 'market'. Nevertheless this argument captures part of the need of UK commercial music radio industry to be seen as more than simply a profit-generating machine.

In summary, music plays a significant part in achieving both primary and secondary objectives in the music radio industry. The primary objective for mainstream music radio is ratings success. For commercial radio success in ratings has a direct link to profitability, in form of advertising income and in share price of the parent organisation. For the BBC, ratings success has a more complex, but important relationship with funding in the form of the licence fee. Good ratings indicate that a large number of licence fee payers are being reached. Lower ratings, hitting specialist taste demographics, indicate public service targets are being reached, high ratings for shows can confer political power for programme producers within the organisation - achieving that balance has historically been part of the BBC's argument for the continuation of the licence fee funding system (Hewlett, 2007).

Notions of public service are core to BBC radio [9], but they are also present in commercial music radio. Music is often used to represent those values in, for example, late evening new music shows on stations like XFM in the UK. Music created by unsigned local musicians is often a feature of new music shows, and is used by music radio to demonstrate a commitment to a local creative community. As prevailing music and radio industry logic is that radio play is good for sales, local musicians should benefit from exposure on radio, and an early radio appearance can sometimes be a first step towards a record company contract. New music here normally means newly released material from either unsigned, or indie label artists, but does not imply a specific genre or style. The actual amount of airtime allocated to unsigned artists is relatively small - Vic Galloway's indie music show on BBC Radio Scotland (02 July 2007) featured only one unknown local band track in a playlist of 23 songs (see Appendix 2). John Kennedy' XFM London show, *X-posure* on 4 July 2007 featured no artists that did not have a label of sorts, but the majority of the playlist was generically indie or alternative, and many of the labels were small to medium-sized independents (See Appendix 3).

THE ROLE OF RADIO FOR MUSIC

In this section I will explain why music radio is important to the record industry and, more generally, to the production and consumption of popular music. For the record industry the relationship is economic in two ways. Firstly, radio play is, by consensus of both radio and the record industry, considered to increase sales of records and to build the media profile of an artist (Frith, 1981; Barnard, 1989; Berland, 1990). Secondly, radio play of records generates public performance royalties, paid by radio stations to record companies, publishers and ultimately, in principle at least, to artists (Frith, 2001; Frith and Marshall, 2004).

Also considered in this section is the influence of radio as a *medium* and as an *industry* on

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[9] Or at least, notions of public service are core to BBC radio's representations of itself.

the sound of popular music. In the discussion of the research interviews in this dissertation, several subjects confirm that not only can radio directly and indirectly influence signing policies of record labels, but also that music radio can also change the sound of a finished recording before it is commercially released.

Any discussion of the role that radio plays for music must be understood in the context of the argument of Frith and others that, for popular music, the creative and the commercial are bound together like two sides of the same coin (Frith, 1996). It is this property that is a defining characteristic of popular music as it evolved in the 20th century. Without accepting this fundamental premise, it is almost futile to make any meaningful thesis on the role of radio for music - it is a role that has inextricably linked commercial and creative implications.

Radio, the record industry and revenue

Music radio generates revenue for the record industry in two main ways. The first is indirectly, by increasing sales of records through radio play. The second is in the payment of performance royalties to recording and publishing companies.

Promoting record sales

As discussed earlier record companies made the connection between more radio play of songs and increased sales of the records as far back as the 1930s (Frith, 1981; Peterson, 1997; Barnard 2000). Crisell (2002) notes that from the late-1940s in the US (and later in the UK) that:

> Despite continuing misgivings among record companies and musicians, radio stimulated sales rather than depressed them, the evanescence of the medium tempting millions of listeners to go out and capture their favourite tunes on disc. (Crisell, 2002:141).

Despite several attempts at quantitative research, there has yet to be an unambiguous and statistically convincing correlation between number of radio plays and sales in a specified time period. While it is possible to obtain reasonably reliable data on the number of record plays in a geographic area, it is more difficult to obtain accurate figures for record sales and how those relate to, for example, chart positions (Hull, 1998). Even if both number of plays and accurate sales figures were freely available, they would have to be cross-referenced with accurate audience listening figures. Given that the methodology of radio ratings acquisition in the UK is subject to heated debate, and is flawed at best, it becomes difficult to envisage a sensible quantitative analysis of the relationship between radio play, sales and audiences [10].

In some ways the absence of such an analysis matters little to either the radio industry or the record industry. The anecdotal relationship between radio play of records and the corresponding increase in sales of that record, or the media profile of that artist, has been established for decades. It is also anecdotally understood in both industries that radio play does not automatically lead to a record becoming a hit. This suggests that at times, the record industry had a better picture of what music radio wanted, than it had of what might be commercially successful. The circular argument is then that one of the key influences on airplay, is airplay (Frith, 1981) and this issue emerges strongly from my interviews with programmers and pluggers. In the UK ChartsPlus has provided, since 2001, a weekly Top 100 airplay chart to subscribers, based on analysis of output of around 100 music radio stations across the country provided by Music Control (ChartsPlus, 2007). The information in this chart feeds back into playlists, but also to record companies - the Head of Regional Radio for Polydor records discusses the importance of the airplay chart for his company:

> The airplay chart is worth watching though - because in the top 100, every so often you'll see a little batch of records that pop into the 100 again, say between 75 and 100. And you're like 'Blimey, they're still playing that? (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

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[10] The success of Apple's iTunes music store has many implications for the economic model of the record industry, but one of those is that a third party (Apple) now has access to, and control of accurate sales figures for iTunes downloads. If Apple releases detailed breakdowns of actual unit sales of songs from the iTunes Music Store, it may become more easy to do some of the quantitative studies that relate to radio play. Of course, within a given iTunes territory, the raw figures give no indication of the geographical location of the purchaser, so only national analysis is possible.

There is then the question of how this relationship between radio play and record sales works, or otherwise, when a radio station plays mainly older records. These 'gold' format stations would appear to have little need of a close relationship with the record industry - they do not require regular deliveries of new airtime-filling records. Neither would the record industry appear to need a relationship with a station that plays apparently obsolete back catalogue. However, there is a boom in nostalgia and back catalogue re-issues on CD which started in the mid-1980s, and continues to accelerate with the availability of vast amounts of digital archive on iTunes and similar online services. The combination of gold format stations and an always-on supply of easily obtainable back catalogue suggests a new potential dimension to the relationship between music radio and the record industry, one in which sales of back catalogue recordings become an increasingly important revenue stream for record companies.

Overall then, there is long-established anecdotal evidence that radio play promotes the sales of records and so an important role played by radio for the record industry is indirectly increasing income.

Broadcast performance payments

Beyond its role in promoting record sales the music radio industry makes a much more direct positive contribution to the balance sheet of record companies, and this in the payments that radio stations make to various rights holders in order to make use of commercially released music on air. Of course, this is far from straightforward as it is contingent on UK copyright law - as Frith and Marshall put it: "If there is one thing upon which copyright scholars agree, it is that copyright is very complex …" (Frith and Marshall, 2004:6).

I am indebted to Frith and Marshall's clarity of approach in their exploration of music and

copyright, and I summarise their account here. In broad terms, composers of songs assign

performance and broadcasting rights (including all aspects of negotiation and collection) to

the Performing Rights Society (PRS). One of those rights is the right to record that work,

known as the mechanical right - this right is administered by the Mechanical Copyright

Protection Society (MCPS). This is how the MCPS-PRS Alliance describe their activities on

their website:

> MCPS is a not-for-profit organisation, which collects and distributes royalties for its composer and publisher members whenever a piece of music is copied or that copy is issued to the public.
> PRS is a not-for-profit organisation, which collects and distributes public performance royalties for its composers, songwriters and music publishers. (MCPS-PRS Alliance, 2007).

Thus PRS payments are due to rights holders (normally publishing companies or record

companies) when a record is played on a radio station. To complicate matters, there is an

additional right, devised as a response to the increasing use of recording by broadcasters,

film makers and jukebox owners, through the early-mid 20th Century:

> A new kind of musical copyright was created, a right related to the original composition but subsisting in the recording itself, rather than the underlying musical work. This *neighbouring right* [original authors' emphasis] is usually owned by … the company that organises and publishes the recording … The owner of this right has the exclusive rights to cause the recording to be heard in public [and] to broadcast the recording … In Britain record companies usually assign these rights to Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL). (Frith and Marshall, 2004:8).

PPL thus collects payments from broadcasters and distributes them to the record

companies. The collection agencies obtain their radio broadcast data from a commercial

tracking company, Music Control, who say this about themselves:

> Music Control tracks music broadcast on more than 700 radio and TV services worldwide using a unique fingerprint recognition technology. Music Control is part of the Media Control Group, Europe's leading music monitors for over 20 years. (IFPI, 2007).

There are, inevitably, further somewhat complex issues involved in rights ownership and

exploitation. For more on these issues, see Frith and Marshall (2004).

Production

There are five areas where the radio industry is effective in influencing production of popular music: feedback to record companies on pre-release material; direct or indirect effect on artist signing policy; artists' and record producers' approach to recording music; local production by unsigned artists whose work is situated in a local or regional scene or community.

Music radio feedback and record releases

The first area of influence for music radio is in the feedback given to record companies on their pre-release material. A number of my interview subjects, from both radio and the record industry, were quite clear on how radio can affect various aspects of the release of new material by new and established artists. Based on written or verbal evaluation from music radio stations, record companies might for example reconsider the order of release of singles from an album. Standard record industry practice is *not* to release the song deemed most commercial from a forthcoming album. Instead a potentially lesser hit is released first as tool to establish the presence of a new artist, or the return of an established artist for both radio programmers and for the radio audience. Having given programmers and public a 'heads-up' with the first single, a second or even third single will follow to build on a broader marketing campaign for the album. It is the decisions on release order (or how commercial a song is judged to be) that big radio stations can influence (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Powerful radio stations, or station networks can request (and sometimes get) remixes or edits of songs destined to be singles, so that those songs comply more closely with the station's sound, identity or branding. This practice has been established for so many years that record companies usually pre-empt such requests by providing to radio stations shorter (or less lyrically explicit) radio edits of forthcoming singles. Even then, it is not uncommon for music radio stations to speed up playback of tracks (normally, but not always dance tracks) to 'increase the energy' of the song (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network). This in turn can lead to record companies releasing a faster edit of the original

song. Music radio's influence on new releases from the record industry can also be both more powerful and less visible. In the event of universal negative radio reaction to a new record, that record may have its release date delayed, sometimes indefinitely.

Music radio feedback and record company signing policy

The cumulative feedback from music radio stations, particular the large and influential stations in the UK, like BBC Radio 1 and Radio 2, can have an even more fundamental effect on the business of record companies. The feedback, together with highly visible playlist decisions, contributes to a perception of the kind of records that big music radio stations like to programme, which can affect the signing policy of record labels. In some cases, senior radio music policy figures have been able to approach major labels in the UK, and ask that those labels seek out and sign more artists that match the requirements of the radio station (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2). Music radio then, can affect the A&R strategy of major record labels (A&R is Artists and Repertoire, the record company department whose main responsibility is finding and signing new artists).

Music radio and record production

The recording process is about the sound of the finished product, and is conceptually related to somewhat problematic notions like 'production values' and 'radio friendliness'. Many of my interview subjects had problems articulating what they meant by 'radio friendly' records - the most commonly cited characteristic tended to be the catchiness of the hook or the chorus. My preliminary research and broadcasting experience had led me to expect from programmers and pluggers a greater emphasis on the sound of the record, but often the production value of a record only emerged as a factor in 'radio friendliness' after more specific questioning. A record is likely to be judged to have a radio friendly sound, based on four sets of criteria.

The first set of criteria for the radio friendliness of a record is associated with objective and quantifiable technical characteristics. These are primarily the presence or absence of recording artefacts like unintended distortion, extraneous non-musical sounds, analogue tape hiss or digital glitches.

The second set of criteria is subjective, enculturated notions of what are understood as 'good' instrument or vocal sounds. As music industry fashion and technology changes, those sounds that are judged to be 'good' change their aural characteristics [11]. What does not change is the consensus of record and radio industry as to what those 'good' sounds are at any point in their shared history. These criteria tend to be employed both explicitly and implicitly during the recording and mixing process. Ultimately, the effectiveness of that process tends to be judged by radio programming decision makers.

The third set of criteria, also subjective and enculturated, is associated with the musical qualities of a record, beyond the traditional music publishing distinctions of lyric, melody and arrangement. This is where it becomes more difficult to clearly differentiate between the processes of song writing and the recording and mixing of a song or other piece of music. During the process of recording and mixing, songs can be modified by introducing new sounds and musical elements which can increase the chances of that record being perceived as being radio friendly. Typically these elements might be: additional layers of harmony vocals or instrumentation; counter-melodies or new instrumental motifs; increased dynamics; samples or non-musical noises. If these added elements work together with lyric, melody and arrangement to make a record more memorable or 'hooky', then that record has a greater chance of being perceived as a radio friendly record by music radio stations.

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[11] Informally, a sound engineer acquaintance has claimed it is possible to identify the decade in which a previously unheard record originated, based only on hearing the drum sound. If notions of what sounds good (or professional or slick) change over time according to availability of technology and its interaction with social and cultural attitudes, then it is reasonable to suppose that those sounds will also be heard by radio programmers in different ways over time.

The fourth set of criteria are based around limitations in consumer radio receiving

equipment. Most recording studios, even small or bedroom set-ups, have significantly

higher quality playback equipment than that available to most consumers of popular music.

A consequence of this might be that music is recorded and mixed to sound good on very

high quality studio amplification and speaker systems. Historically however, record

producers have considered the likely conditions of playback. Until the early to mid-1980s,

for example, music was mixed and mastered for playback on vinyl, rather than the digital

clarity of CDs.

Similarly, as radios became both more portable and more pervasive in the early 1960s,

record producers began to consider the playback conditions imposed by radio. Transistor

radio speakers were small, even in cars, and there were further frequency band-width

limitations imposed by AM radio broadcasts. So final mixes of records were often designed

to sound good not only on studio speakers, but on the small speakers of a transistor radio.

> In the early days of Motown … Berry Gordy systematically translated his acts' music into
> records that would sound good on cheap transistor and car radios (even, apparently, mixing
> records though appropriately tiny and tinny speakers). (Frith, 1981:113).

Frith notes that by the mid-1970s, most rock record producers were more interested in how

mixes would sound when reproduced on FM stereo radio and on high-end stereo hi-fi

equipment. In the late-1970s and early-1980s however, Dave Robinson, co-founder of Stiff

Records in the UK, used a technique similar to Gordy's in different generic and cultural

context. According to then Stiff Records artist, Tracey Ullman in 2006:

> He had this little transistor radio behind his desk, and when you made a record, he would
> always play it through the transistor radio. [Mimics Robinson] 'Y'know, what are the people ... I
> want to know how the little people are going to hear it in the car, drivin' along, y'know?'
> (Ullman, 2006).

Overall then, this role of music radio for popular music lies in its direct and indirect influence

on the sound of the music itself, through the recording and production process. Therefore,

the presence of music radio can change the sound of records before they achieve

commercial release. This inevitably leads to a question which I intend to address in more

detail later in the dissertation: if it is reasonable to assume that music radio does indeed

have a considerable level of influence on the sound of popular music in general, why does this matter? The short answer is that, speculatively, music radio thus tends to contribute to an evening out of mainstream sounds and the stifling of innovation. On the other hand, there are specialist music radio programmes whose purpose is, in part at least, to encourage new ideas and new sounds. Whilst this type of programming can have relatively large, even national audiences, its most interesting effects are at local and regional levels. The most recognised regular new music show in the UK was John Peel on BBC Radio 1. Peel had an unbroken career with Radio 1 from its inception in 1967 until his death in 2004. To my ears, Radio 1 *sounds* less edgy and innovative since Peel's death, but it would be a wholly different research project that attempted to assess the impact of Peel's absence on Radio 1 programming policy and innovation in popular music culture.

Music radio, local music production and *scenes*

The fourth role of radio for music is related to the previous three, in the sense that all four roles contribute in some way to ideas of how music should sound on radio. This last role however functions outwith the formal confines of the record industry, and is only indirectly concerned with the selling of music or artists. Here, radio's role is much more a consequence of some of the characteristics associated with radio itself, discussed earlier in this chapter. Most important amongst those characteristics, for my argument at least, is radio's propensity to build virtual communities, listening alone, but understanding themselves as part of a mass broadcast audience (Lewis and Booth, 1989; Scannell and Cardiff, 1991). There can be a strong sense of belonging related to being part of such an audience, particularly if that audience is perceived to be small, perhaps even exclusive, and is believed to have clearly defined shared tastes or values.

Another characteristic of radio, discussed earlier is its ability to make strong connections to locality or region (Crisell, 1994; Barnard, 2000). For the small number of mainstream radio shows that play unsigned local artists, these two key attributes of radio (nurturing of a virtual community and local-ness) work together to reflect and reinforce local popular music

production. Examples of UK radio programmes which have become a factor in the

development of local or regional production of popular music include: BBC Scotland's *Beat*

Patrol (1980-2000) and its successors, *Air* (2000-2007) and *The Vic Galloway Show* (2007);

XFM's *X-posure* (in London, Manchester and Glasgow); Gary Crowley on BBC Radio

London, and others. In Chapter VI *Consumption Relationships*, I will be looking in some

detail at the history and importance of BBC Radio Scotland's *Beat Patrol*. Local or regional

connections are often reinforced when Presenter / DJs become part of local club and live

music scenes. BBC Radio Scotland DJ Vic Galloway, for example, has been running a club

at Glasgow's Barfly since 2003 (see Appendix 4), and it is this close social proximity that

confirms Galloway's on-air persona as representative of Scottish alternative music .

Elsewhere, one of the reasons for the iconic status of Radio 1's champion of new music,

John Peel was his regular live appearances around the UK with the John Peel Road Show -

his accessibility in a small live venue emphasise his image (arguably, his *performance*) as

an unpretentious music enthusiast and man of the people.

For artists early in their career, hearing their music played alongside commercially released

records acts as external validation of the quality of their music. It also develops artists'

ability to situate their own creative output in a broader culture of popular music production.

This understanding of their own music works at two levels: the aesthetic and the technical.

Artists are able to consider their song-writing and performance capabilities alongside those

of others. They are also in a position to evaluate the technical and production aspects of

their recordings, as they sound *on radio*. Subjectively then it can build artists' confidence in

their own music, and objectively allows comparison of locally produced sounds with national

or international sounds. The appearance of demos on a radio programme with high status

as an arbiter of taste can draw the attention of the record industry at a local or regional

level. If a specialist music show deems an unsigned artist interesting *and* good enough to

play, it may be that they are good enough to be signed to a recording contract. Having

demos played on radio can build status for artists - status that Thornton (after Bourdieu)

might have described as subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). This subcultural capital might

be reflected in gig billing (moving up towards headline status) or attention from other local

media outlets (local newspapers).

Consumption

The role of radio in consumption of popular music is addressed in part by consideration of the promotion of record sales by on-air radio play. There are however, significant cultural effects, beyond this relatively straightforward relationship between industries.

It is important to make a clear distinction between music radio audiences and record buyers, despite a tendency in some research to imply that they are one and the same (Wallis and Malm, 1993). However, even if radio listeners are not necessarily regular buyers of records, they can still influence the production of popular music. For example, most of the music radio industry relies on extensive market research testing of their music policy. Where those test samples are comprised of self-identified listeners to a radio station, their response to music testing has a direct influence on a station's music policy. The radio station's music policy then feeds back to the record industry and may be able then to influence the sound of future record releases and even the signing policy of record labels.

Music radio as consumer guide

A (preferably trusted) consumer guide is necessary for mainstream audiences simply because there is so much newly recorded commercial music, adding to the millions of songs already available for purchase. Music radio acts as a filter through which only a small number of new records can pass, and which also establishes a canon of acceptable oldies. The latter is especially true of commercial Gold (oldies) stations, and those whose

playlist is based around an '80s, 90s and Now' format [12]. Radio stations that regularly

playlist new releases seem to be suggesting to their audience that, from all the new music

available, these records were picked because the station believes that listeners will like

them. Equally, stations playing oldies imply that their audiences might have forgotten about

some of these records, but they still sound good. For better or worse, music radio works

towards establishing a canon of releases that appears to represent 'good' music, old and

new, whilst at the same time, abandoning vast numbers of records to cult following or

obscurity. To be sure, new channels of distribution and information sharing on the web and

mobile communication mean that radio is part of a more complex system of filtering music

for the consumer. Yet radio is the oldest part of the system, and largely retains the

authority of an established medium.

Dissemination of styles

Music radio has historically played a key role in the dissemination of local or regional styles

and idioms in popular music (Jones, 2002). A frequently cited example is the part that radio

played in making black music forms like rhythm and blues and doo-wop available to young

white radio audiences in the post-WW2 United States. White audiences were unable or

unwilling to go to the venues where r'n'b was being performed live, but black radio stations

however could be heard by white teens in white neighbourhoods. More importantly, white

musicians were able to hear, imitate and modify black sounds, so consumption of music

radio enables *production* of new sounds and styles (Kloosterman and Quispel, 1990).

Summary

The effects of music radio in the production of popular music are two-fold: (i) the sound of

music officially released by record companies can be, and often is modified according

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[12] For example, see South Wales FM station, Red Dragon at http://www.reddragonfm.co.uk
(Accessed 20 July 2007).

requirements of the music radio industry, and (ii) consequently, there is on-going naturalisation of common-sense notions which describe the *sound* of good music radio. I am inclined to agree with those who argue that the effect of radio on music production is to discourage innovation in mainstream popular music, at least in the *sound* of the records (Chambers, 2003). Music radio tends to encourage the record industry to produce the kind of music that suits the purposes of music radio. That is not to say that to a degree the interests of the music radio industry and the record industry are not aligned - both have an interest in artists becoming or remaining successful (Frith, 2001). Music radio stations benefit from associations with successful artists, and artists benefit from exposure on radio.

ISSUES IN MUSIC RADIO

In this section I discuss some of the key relevant themes that emerge from literature addressing music radio, and its relationship with the record industry.

Cultural status of radio

Lewis (2000) argues that academic study of radio has been marginal for a number of reasons, foremost among them being the dominance of visual culture in industrial and post-industrial societies. He traces this historically through radio's displacement by television as dominant mass broadcast medium in the 1940s (US) and 1950s (UK), accompanied by a concomitant shift in media effects research focus. Lewis suggests that part of the reason for the lack of serious radio studies has been the development of the study of visual media, television and film out of an earlier literary tradition which itself had displaced much older aural and oral cultures:

> … in media and cultural studies that radio has, until recently, been absent in the theoretical part of the field, and radio practice is often little more than an uncritical reproduction of broadcast journalistic technique. Radio is seen as 'transparent' or unproblematic and the result is that the student interested in radio theory has constantly to attempt a mental substitution of radio for the visual media … (Lewis, 2000:163)

Crisell (2001) picks up on the issue of writing about radio in review comments on Crook (1999), Barnard (2000) and Hendy (2000a), suggesting that some writing (in this case, Crook) in radio studies can work between professional guide and sometimes uncomfortable attempts at theory. In my view, this is the somewhat inevitable result of the tendency for many radio studies academics to have been active broadcasters at some level, and in many cases, continue to be active. The route into radio studies often begins with a career in broadcasting, and develops into teaching radio as practice, as I have found when talking with colleagues in the Radio Studies Network (http://www.radiostudiesnetwork.org.uk).

In contrast (and again anecdotally) whilst many Popular Music Studies academics may play instruments or perform in some way, significantly fewer have had careers in the music industry. There are of course exceptions to this, but in any future anthropological or sociological work on the Academy itself, a comparative study of Radio Studies and Popular Music Studies would be illuminating.

Crisell's (2001) point that radio studies research is often unclear about where it stands in terms of theory and practice has some bearing on my writing here and the credibility of this dissertation. My point about radio studies careers, is directly relevant because of my own broadcasting career which began part way into my academic career, just after I'd completed my Masters degree and just before I took my first Research Assistant post. This parallel development of careers, with regular freelance music radio broadcasting running alongside my move into a full-time lecturing post, has enabled a critical approach to thinking about radio, alongside an insider's contextual knowledge. I return to these issues in more depth in Chapter IV *Methodology*. For me, the balance of being both an insider (radio professional) and an outsider (critical academic) has been essential in developing the model of music radio, discussed in detail in Chapter III *Models of music radio*.

'Symbiosis'

One of the most interesting issues in perceptions of the relationship between music radio

and the record industry is the taken-for-granted-ness of the 'symbiosis' of that relationship. The majority of my interview respondents understand the interaction between the two industries as being characterised by mutual benefit. Despite some historical hiccups (Frith, 1981), there has been a sense that playing records on air makes them more popular and more likely to sell (which tends to make those records more likely to appear on playlists). However, as Berland (1990) and others have pointed out, the corporate objectives of the record industry and music radio are not so much the same as they are usefully complementary. That complementarity can be strained if music radio's corporate interests diverge sufficiently from those of the record industry, and it is here that conflict arises and must be managed, normally at the point of contact between pluggers and music programmers. The relationship is thus more complex than straightforward symbiosis and is characterised by multiple variables and influences, the least investigated of which is the social negotiation between key industry workers.

Radio and 'professionalism'

The term 'professional' is often used unproblematically within the music radio industry to signify an individual whose working life is centred in radio. In the UK there are courses in radio at undergraduate and postgraduate level, but the emphasis is usually on the aspects of radio associated with higher levels of cultural capital: journalism and drama. The concept of 'professionalism' is central to many of these courses, and Goldsmiths, University of London, is not atypical in its prospectus description of its MA in Radio:

> Throughout the year, the programme includes workshops and seminars by visiting
> professionals and artists in the radio journalism and radio drama fields. We are happy to
> support work experience placements in professional newsrooms and radio drama productions.
> (Goldsmiths, 2007).

My own experience in radio suggests that music radio career paths are not formally structured - presenter-DJs usually start as hobbyists, volunteering for hospital radio or local commercial radio stations. Production and management personnel can come up through the same routes, or move in from other industries. There is little in the way of professional

qualifications in presentation or station management - the closest model elsewhere in industry is probably the apprentice model in trades like plumbing or ship building. Radio professionals occupy a space overlapping the second and third definitions above: they are paid to do the job that they might have been doing as a hobby elsewhere, and they (normally) have extensive knowledge about their occupation.

Studies that address the notion of the 'professional' in broadcast media tend to focus on journalism when it comes to radio (Crook, 1998). Aldrige and Evetts (2003) discuss the construction of 'professionalism' in journalism as a dynamic process. It is flexible enough to move from an alignment with a set of values associated with independence and marginality to other values linked to more conventional notions of respectability. In broadcasting, as in print journalism, the notion of professionalism is often utilised by practitioners as an instrument that distances management from the processes of creating the core media product.

> Until 1955 the BBC had a monopoly on broadcast news in the UK. It has always undertaken most of its training internally, but has also recruited journalists from newspapers. When commercial television was established, it recruited journalists from the BBC and the press … This demand contributed to the greatly improved pay and conditions of journalists during the 1960s and 1970s … (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003:562).

Much of their evidence is convincing, though the BBC has had internal processes for the selection and training of radio and television journalists from early in the Corporation's history. The situation in music radio was quite different - the BBC's competition for music broadcasting came from continental stations like Luxembourg and Normandie in the 1930s, Luxembourg again in the 1950s and the offshore 'pirates' in the 1960s. It faced no legal competitors until 1973, with the launch of Independent Local Radio (ILR) stations, many of which featured popular music as the mainstay of their output (Barnard, 1989). The process of developing notions of what it meant to be a good DJ or music radio broadcaster had taken place largely outside the BBC. Offshore radio in the 1960s was designed to resemble US hits radio formats. BBC Radio 1 developed by the early 1970s into a modified version of those 1960s formats, whilst the first ILR music stations to a large extent based their sound on Radio 1. UK radio then has developed notions of what it means to be a

professional ('good') music radio broadcaster by straining the sounds of US hits radio through a BBC filter in the early 1970s. Of course the sound of UK music radio has changed since the early 1970s (as any online archive repositories of music radio broadcasts will confirm [13]), but that the underlying notions of what it means to be a 'good' 'professional' music radio DJ or programmer remain.

The radio industry's interests in representing itself to itself (and to external institutions and organizations) as an industry composed of 'professionals' are manifested in the annual Sony Awards, presented to programmes and personnel across the whole of the UK radio industry. The Sony Awards ceremony was first held in 1983 and it is a curious mix of recognition based on ratings success and on notions of 'creativity' and 'innovation', with awards for stations, programmes and individuals in the radio industry, commercial and BBC. It is a curious anomaly that an annual award ceremony for radio did not arrive until 1984 - the British Academy of Film and Television Arts has been handing out equivalent awards since 1947. This may be so because of the strangely marginal cultural status of radio (discussed earlier in this chapter). It may also be due in large part to the existence of the BBC.

As the legal monopoly radio broadcaster in the UK until 1973, and arguably Britain's leading cultural institution, for decades BBC radio simply did not need awards - it was the *BBC*. The early 1980s however was a time of rapid expansion of commercial radio broadcasting and increasingly there may have been a sense that radio (Lewis and Booth's 1989 *Invisible Medium*) needed a unified front similar to the film and television industries' BAFTA. The Sonys are awarded by a large judging panel drawn from commercial radio and the BBC, and signify a mix of peer acknowledgement and recognition of creative, artistic and commercial aspects of radio. The Sony Awards thus represent a radio industry that sees itself as composed of radio 'professionals', whose talents are measurable and transferable. This notion of professionalism in music radio is key to understanding the relationship

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[13] See Radio Rewind at http://www.radiorewind.co.uk for examples of sounds from the history of BBC Radio 1, including MP3s of the launch day in 1967 and various DJ shows from the early 1970s (last accessed 20 July 2007).

between the radio industry and the record industry. It is also one which is central to my argument that the relationship between *individuals* at the interface between the two industries (a) is crucial to corporate relationships, and (b) has important consequences for popular music culture.

Radio and the discourse of 'blindness'

Crisell (2001) notes that Crook, like Shingler and Weiringa (1998) before him, takes issue with the frequently used description of radio as "blind" medium. Crisell has little time for this as a basis for understanding radio:

> They read like some comical spasm of 'political correctness', as if the writers see themselves as leaping to defend someone who has been demeaned because he or she is a wheelchair-user … blindness is [in fact] the prerequisite of [radio's] imaginative power … it presents us with the teasing paradox of not seeing yet visualizing. (Crisell, 2001:246).

Crisell identifies a tendency towards defensiveness in much writing about radio. This is, in my view, partly a consequence of the professional/academic progression I discuss in the previous section, and partly due the position of radio studies somewhere below popular music studies (and a long way from film or television studies) in any hierarchy of intellectual or cultural capital in the field of critical media studies.

The discourse of the 'blindness' of radio as a medium, is rooted in another problem with radio studies writing. The sense of this discourse is that radio is vital and interesting to study *because* of this dependence on visualisation and the use of imagination. Visualisation and imagination are of course key elements of radio drama and other fictive forms as described by Barnard (2000).

Histories

There a number of thoroughly researched and well written histories of radio broadcasting in the UK, but only one that focuses exclusively on the full sweep of music radio history,

Barnard's (1989) *On the Radio.* Chapman's (1992) *Selling the Sixties* concentrates of the offshore pirate era (1964-1968), as does Hind and Mosco's (1985) *Rebel Radio: the Full Story of British Pirate Radio*, albeit in a less reflective form. Other essential sources are Briggs's (1965-1995) five-volume *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Scannell and Cardiff's (1991) *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, sections of Barnards' (2000) *Studying Radio*, and of Crisell's (2002) *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*. There are numerous discussions of music radio in the context of broader discussion of media and popular music including some very clear material in Frith (1981; 2001), Negus (1999) and Wall (2003), the last of which is intended for undergraduate students, and consequently effectively summarises many of the arguments around the relationship between radio and music in only 6 pages (Wall, 2003:114-119). My point then is that there are excellent and thoughtful histories elsewhere, and my intention with this work is to focus on contemporary issues in the relationship between music radio and the record industry. As Wall argues:

> … radio is clearly part of a wider popular music system, which does have major implications for popular music culture. Radio play does feature significantly in the processes through which music becomes more widely known, which records are purchased and, ultimately, which ones are made and released. However, this is not the overwhelming determinism that Rothenbuhler and McCourt [1992] suggest, rather it is part of a complex interaction of record and radio industry production processes, institutional practices and regulatory context. (Wall, 2003:119).

It is precisely this complex interaction that interests me, and that which I investigate in this research project. Where the histories I note above shed useful light on an argument, I will refer to those sources, but it is not my intention to present a history section here, and I would commend readers to the material cited above, starting with Barnard (1989).

Radio and digital technology

Ofcom and the radio industry in general have been concerned about how digital technologies change the way the radio is consumed and consequently, how it is regulated (Ofcom, 2004; 2006; 2007). There has been an on-going debate in Radio Studies about the nature of radio in a post-digital environment, but Priestman (2004) argues convincingly

that issues of definition and the character of radio content's technological carrier have relatively small amounts of influence on the *meaning* of radio for its consumers. Priestman is correct in his point that on-demand streaming of music radio opens up many possibilities for new modes of asynchronous consumption, but his point of departure on the digital debate is flawed:

> The economics of filling airtime under today's broadcast licence regimes, together with the availability of automating production technology, threatens to steer a large section of popular radio away from … a cultural conversation and towards closer integration with the interests of the mainstream music industry. (Priestman, 2004:77).

His position is perhaps somewhat idealistic - Priestman assumes that (in 2004 at least) there was a "cultural conversation" between music radio and its consumers that was somehow distant from the interests of the mainstream music industry. My position is that most mainstream radio (BBC and commercial sector) has been implicated in the interests of the mainstream music industry for several decades, but that in the last 10 years, this complex relationship has gradually reconfigured to increase the influence of *radio* on the record industry, rather than vice-versa. Priestman's optimism for the future of radio as cultural conversation is however inspiring to those of us who believe in music radio's power to be meaningful beyond the political economy of the music industry.

Public service and music radio

One of the central issues in my discussion of the relationship between UK music radio and the record industry is the substantial presence of the BBC as a public service broadcaster in the UK radio market - its two national analogue radio FM networks (Radio 1 and Radio 2) are the most listened to music stations in the UK by some margin (RAJAR, 2007). Commercial radio stations make a profit by selling airtime to advertisers who wish to reach the listeners that RAJAR tells them are out there. The profit motive and the interests of investors are the ultimate ends for commercial radio, and audience ratings merely a device to achieving those ends. For public service stations, ratings are an end in themselves (Wall, 2003). This, as my empirical work shows, has a profound effect on the approach to

music programming of each sector. As Barnard (2000) put it:

> Serving the public meant giving the listeners programming deemed to have cultural,
> intellectual or educational merit … setting cultural priorities … (Barnard, 2000:29).

Barnard's distillation of Reith's philosophy of public service, as embodied in the BBC,
emerges several times in my interviews with Radio 1 and Radio 2 programmers, some 80
or so years since Reith's original formulation. It is politically important for the BBC to
conform to its own ideology of public service, but it is more important to be *seen* to be doing
so. If the rhetoric and pursuit of public service objectives is associated with ratings
success, then so much the better for the BBC.

Commercial radio stations in the UK frequently suggest that the BBC's radio networks have
an unfair competitive advantage - they (unlike the commercial sector) have guaranteed
funding from the licence fee, they can be received across the UK, they benefit from cross-
network promotion, and so on. In the analysis of my empirical work later in this research
project, I argue that far from being a problem for commercial radio, Radio 1 and Radio 2
make commercial radio in the UK *better*.

The debate over the nature of and rationale for public service has had some essential
contributions from outside the UK. Bolin (2002) suggests that the Swedish debate about
public service in the wake of increasing broadcast media competition, is really about a
struggle for control of the meaning of the concept of "public service". The implication is that
those who win this debate will influence the future shape of broadcasting. It is significant
that Bolin notes that part of the reason for the character of the on-going Swedish (and more
generally Nordic) debate on the nature of public service broadcasting is that many
broadcast professionals have come from an academic background, and have strong views
on what radio and television should be doing (Bolin cites both Engblom, 1998 and
Ulvenstam, 1967).

Bolin notes Syvertsen's (1999) argument that competition in broadcast media industries has
led to competitive definitions of the term 'public service':

> In the first phase, public service is seen as a common utility or public good, something that should be available to everyone, just like roads, electricity, etc. Eventually, in a second phase, the public service mission begins to be seen in terms of publicity, that is an arena or public sphere for society's conversation with itself. With deregulation of the media markets, public service has come more and more to stand for 'audience service', that is, as if the media are at the public's service. In the course of these changes in definitions, argues Syvertsen, the concept of public service has become emptied of meaning. (Bolin, 2002:282).

Bolin suggests that this process of "emptying" the term public service of meaning leads to a cycle of new meanings to "re-fill" the term. And so *a* concept of public service will continue despite increasing influence and power of commerce in radio and TV broadcasting. I believe that the BBC increasingly finds itself caught between these two ways of imagining the role of a public service broadcaster: in the service of a 'public' or in the service of an 'audience'.

Bolin also supports Ytreberg's (1999) argument that, as broadcasting markets have opened up to competition, with the establishment of independent production companies, it has become more difficult to distinguish the output of commercially funded broadcasters from that of publicly funded national broadcasters. This is in part explained by the significantly increased mobility of broadcast professionals, moving between jobs, companies and sectors. Bolin's focus is on Swedish television, but the phenomenon of mobile professionals acting more independently, is relevant to any discussion of music radio in the UK.

There is mobility here between the publicly funded sector (the BBC, and to an extent, community radio) and the commercial sector. There is also, perhaps more interestingly, mobility across industries, as record industry professionals move to radio (both public and commercial sector broadcasting) and vice versa. I will return to this point in Chapter V Production Relationships.

Audience

The notion of audience is central to radio broadcasting. As Barnard (2000) suggests, there

is no point in broadcasting without the presence of an audience to hear it.

> A radio station may exist primarily as a profit sources for its owners or as a means of serving a public, but in each instance the audience is pivotal: the 'quality' of the audience that the stations may deliver to potential advertisers may mean the difference between profit and loss, while an ostensibly 'public service' station such as a BBC local radio station might see high numbers of listeners as confirmation of its right to exists and to command a proportion of the licence fee. (Barnard, 2000:87).

Barnard's discussion of audience is both useful and clear. The resources spent by the BBC and the commercial sector on researching radio audiences suggest that radio is audience-led in both sectors, and indeed this is the perception of that radio broadcasters normally seek to foster. In the case of my radio informants it is clear to me that, inasmuch as my perception of their responses may be flawed, not only did they wish to convince me that their decisions were led by their understanding of audience, they themselves also believed that this reflected the reality of their day-to-day life. It is an understanding of broadcasters' perception of audience that illuminates the processes of music programming designed to deliver specific demographic consumer slices to advertisers, or to maximise a predetermined favourable balance between raw ratings and the performance of public service principles.

This leads to a further point, on which Barnard quotes McQuail (1997), that the construction of 'audience' as 'market' (through research) must be "from the media … and within the terms of media industry discourse" (McQuail, 1997:9, cited in Barnard, 2000:91). This audience is not a community of people listening to radio (as individual members of that audience might see themselves), it is a heterogeneous group, structured in terms of age, social class, income and spending potential. With the possible exclusion of the last of these, both BBC and commercial radio stations understand their audience primarily in terms of demographics (a term Barnard correctly suggests is somewhat overused in the radio industry), even when more qualitative data is available [14].

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[14] The BBC's AI (Appreciation Index) uses interviews and focus groups to try to assess how much listeners engage with and enjoy programmes and programme strands. BBC AIs (like other indices) are quantitative expressions of qualitative questions.

III MODELS OF MUSIC RADIO

A useful way to sum up the arguments in Chapter II is to represent those relationships in a simplified model of cultural production and consumption, which can form a basis for subsequent more detailed ethnographic work. In this chapter I present and discuss two models: Malm and Wallis (1992) and my own development of some of the ideas in that model. The second, more complex model is the context for the empirical work in Chapters V and VI.

MODELS OF SYSTEMS OF PRODUCTION

To briefly return to an earlier point, my argument, like Priestman's (2004) is that digital technologies do not radically challenge radio's economic models and aesthetic form, as has been suggested by, amongst others, Ofcom. On the contrary, podcasting, digital radio and streamed services (in real time and on-demand) work to confirm and enhance radio both as an economic entity and a cultural form.

Moreover, the music radio industry will continue to exist as an entity created by the interaction of the radio industry and the radio industry. I believe this not so much because there is a compelling argument *for* radio's continued existence as a mass medium, but because there is no convincing argument *against*. There are alternative channels for consuming radio-like services, like online personal jukeboxes and digital music players, but what they have in common is that they are *not* broadcast radio. The models for cultural production and consumption of popular music, mediated by radio, become more complex and multi-stranded as these industries adjust to new techno-economic environments. Radio though will continue to be a filter between the over-production of the record industry and the consumption of music, as music radio or records, so even if the dynamic of the relationship is subject to change, the underlying connections and inter-dependencies will remain. The major (global) vested interests in existing media and entertainment

businesses have shown no signs of surrendering their hegemony.

The models I discuss here are not just ways of understanding the relationship between music radio and the record industry *now*, but can continue to be both useful and valid in the future. A central theme of this research is that music radio is an under-researched and under-theorised medium, and that to appreciate why it is important, there must be a clear picture of the relationship between music radio and the record industry. Two approaches are necessary to get to the heart of this relationship. The first approach is to generate a theoretical model that captures the economic and cultural forces which control lines of influence and power in that relationship. The second requires a detailed analysis of the interaction between music radio and record industry personnel operating at the interface between the two industries - Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries in the form of record company promotional staff and music radio programmers. The former is addressed in this chapter and the latter in Chapter V *Production Relationships*.

The models presented here address production, mediation and consumption. The focus, though, is on the *production* of music radio as a phenomenon that exists as a consequence of the interaction between the radio industry and the record industry. A central aspect to the models is the negotiation and naturalisation of the notion of what constitutes 'good' music radio and how those notions relate to superficially similar concepts of what constitutes 'good' music.

There are, however, those who consider the use of models to be problematic. Negus comments:

> I have no intention of presenting the material in this book as a neat 'model', nor do I wish to reduce the diverse ranges of experiences I have drawn on to a closed system of production. (Negus, 1999:9).

This is a legitimate criticism of the sometimes prescriptive use of models to represent cultural production. However, I would argue that bringing together the rigour of a conceptual model with empirical material drawn from interviews results in a balanced and

multilayered interpretation of the processes at work in the relationship between music radio and the record industry. This approach captures Negus' "diverse ranges of experience" which characterise key components of the model. Neither are the models intended to represent a closed system of production. The first model is implicit, and the second explicit in being situated in a broader media/entertainment/cultural industry context. The music radio industry is then part of the radio industry as a whole, which is in turn part of a system of broadcasting organisations and processes. Similarly, the record industry is part of the music industry, which in turn is part of the global entertainment industry. It is important to acknowledge that models shown here do not represent closed systems - they represent parts of a much larger system of global cultural production and consumption. The form of the models is by necessity simplified, but this in no way suggests that the processes represented are themselves uncomplicated.

TWO MODELS

The models presented are:

(i) Malm and Wallis's (1992) model. This is a simple and direct representation of the relationship between music radio and the record industry. In this section I discuss the strengths and limitations of this model, and its influence on the development of a new model.

(ii) Radio and the record industry: a revised model (2007).

This extended model is constructed through critical analysis of existing literature, critical reflection of my own experience of the record industry and as a worker in music radio, and incorporates some of the arguments of the production of culture perspective.

1 MALM AND WALLIS MODEL (1992)
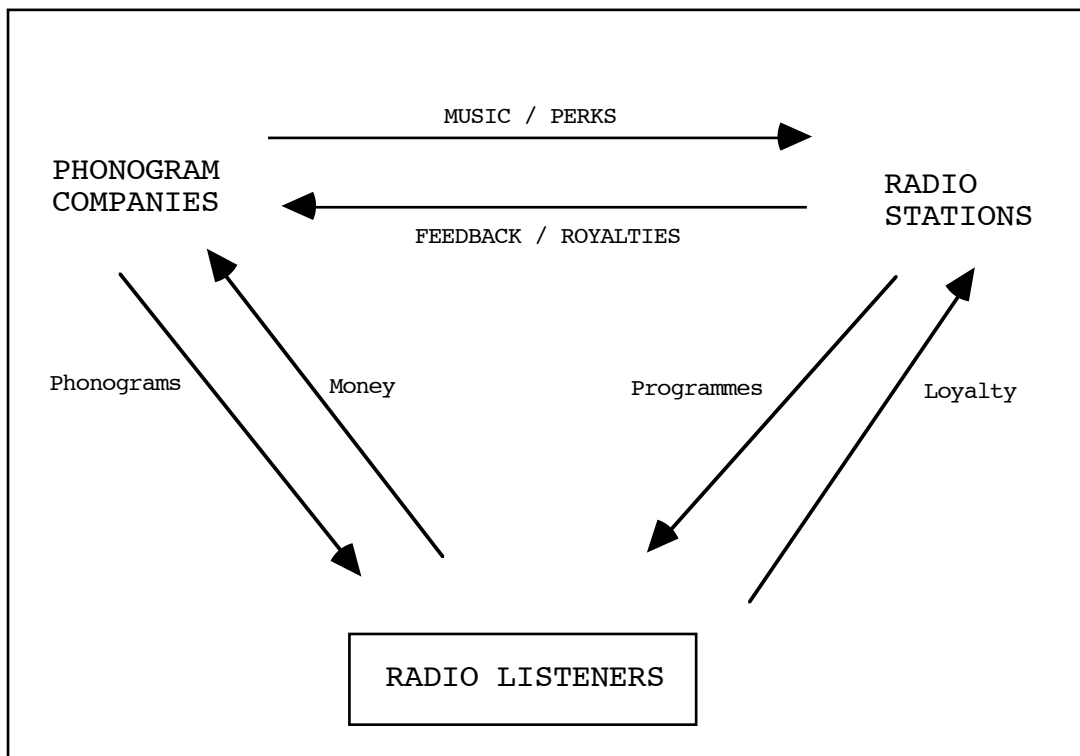
FIGURE 1: From Malm, K. and Wallis, R. (1992). Media Policy and Music Activity. London: Routledge. p.30, Figure 2.3

Malm and Wallis: The Rationale

The Malm and Wallis model is predicated on the argument that as radio broadcasters reduce the amount of music recording originated by the radio station (unsigned artists, live performances, session tracks by signed artists, and so on) they become more reliant on commercial recordings to fill airtime (and so are subject to the decision making of an organisation outwith their ability to control or influence) [15]. They argue that record companies become more dependent on radio stations to showcase their commercial recordings because without the A&R function of radio, the apparent pool of worthwhile non-recorded music shrinks. That may be true in a specific cultural and historical moment but I am not sure how reasonable it is to generalise from that point. My empirical research suggests the opposite trend (in the UK at least): the power of radio seems to be increasing, as does radio's ability to influence decision making in the record industry.

Malm and Wallis preface their series of case studies of national music policies and music activity with a discussion of their overall approach, and a justification of their methodology. Their model of the radio / record industry relationship uses an adapted systems approach, but they are quite clear about the limitations of classic systems theory when applied to production and consumption in the media and cultural industries. For example, they flag up inconsistencies in the literature over the use of the terms 'open' and 'closed' when describing systems. Malm and Wallis quite correctly point out that no system can be truly 'closed', because every system must at some level "exchange physical materials or information with its environment" (Malm and Wallis 1992:19). Nevertheless, they seem comfortable with Rhenman's (1964:78) definition of a system as "consisting of a number of components, each having certain attributes or properties, the components connected by certain relationships." (Malm and Wallis 1992:19).

Elsewhere, they identify an 'interactionist' approach to academic study of the music

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[15] The Malm and Wallis notion of broadcasters as autonomous seekers of unrecorded musical talent reflects the public service approach to popular music culture in the national broadcasting system of their national base, Sweden.

industry, focusing on "relations between those involved in the creative process" (Malm and Wallis 1992:17). Whilst their music radio systems model clearly shows those relations at a macro level, there is little fine-grain detail on how those relationships actually *work*. It is this fine-grain, interactionist approach that is central to the models I present here.

Malm and Wallis cite as being critical to their theoretical framework De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach's (1989) postulates on the way in which media systems work. Those postulates are:

1. External conditions define media content.
2. The primary internal condition in a media system (holding it together) is a financial one.
3. Technological advances lead to media systems becoming more specialized or fragmented. (Malm and Wallis 1992:20)

These are a very useful starting point from which to consider media systems, but all three demand further consideration, in the context of my analysis of both Malm and Wallis and my own model.

First, the assertion that external conditions define media content implies, amongst other things, that media content is always reactive, rather than proactive. For music radio, I would argue that this is true in that content is almost always driven by some notion of imagined audience. How that audience may be defined can vary enormously depending on the objectives of a broadcasting organisation. Furthermore, the objectives of any broadcaster are shaped by external environmental factors in the form of politics, culture and economy. However, this first postulate conceals the importance of *internal* conditions that shape media content. The clearest example of this is in public service broadcasters such as the BBC. It is true that the content of BBC radio music networks is shaped by external conditions (notably, regulation and competition), but content is also shaped by the BBC's internal culture and its own corporate notions of public service. In fact, the BBC's first 50 years of paternalistic monopoly on legal UK radio broadcasting allowed the Corporation to work largely according to its internal judgement of what was appropriate content. Therefore I am inclined to modify the first postulate to: 'external conditions *constrain* media content'. This allows for the powerful influence of internal conditions in the BBC and also for the

presence of the BBC as itself an external constraint on the content of commercial media generally and music radio in particular.

The second postulate is that the primary internal condition in a media system, a condition that both drives the system and is the glue that holds it together, is economic. Once more there is an implicit assumption that media systems function in a free market. This ignores the distorting effect of a major publicly funded, public service broadcaster, such as the BBC. It is true that any media system would not function without some form of financial support. But if the BBC is (officially) not about generating economic capital in the form of profit, then it becomes more difficult to sustain the argument that finance is always the primary internal condition in a media system. So I would argue here for a more sophisticated postulate for a UK music radio system: 'one of several significant internal conditions in a media system is economic' (and of course the economic is also cultural).

The third postulate suggests that there is inevitable specialisation or fragmentation in media systems as new technology enters those systems. Empirical evidence would I am sure, tend to support this argument, at least on first inspection. However, this postulate is both somewhat deterministic and a little misleading. It is deterministic in that it assumes that new technologies are the de facto driver of system change, and so suggests support for the technological determinism thesis (see Heilbroner, 1967, for an early exploration of technological determinism). This implies that social, economic and regulatory constraints play little or no role in the fragmentation or otherwise of a media system. It is somewhat misleading because it suggests that changes in production, distribution or consumption technologies change the fundamental character of system relationships.

In UK music radio digital technologies are changing production procedures in, for example, digital editing of recording and hard drive (rather than CD or record) playback on air. The growth of digital radio broadcasting has multiplied the number of stations available to listeners with digital receivers. Listening patterns increasingly include asynchronous consumption, as audiences stream recent radio programming after its initial live broadcast.

None of this has a major impact on the fundamental character of the relationships between music radio, the record industry and audience-consumers. In fact an increasingly interactive audience increases (rather than decreases) the demand for liveness (Gibson, 2007c). Radio stations still need content, record companies still use radio as a key promotional tool and source of royalty income, and for the time being at least, audiences need radio. Thus, a more useful version of the third postulate would be: 'technological advances can contribute to more complex relationships in media systems' (and tend to stimulate fragmentation of audiences into smaller, more specialised taste demographics). For the purposes of the new model I present as part of this research, I do not consider new digital technologies as determinants of fundamental change in the underlying relationships of a UK music radio system. Rather, they tend to increase complexity of the model by providing new pathways for distribution, consumption and feedback.

To summarise my understanding of Malm and Wallis's preface to their systems approach:

(i)   No media system can be completely closed.

(ii)   Systems consist of components connected by relationships.

(iii)   For my analysis of the Malm and Wallis model, and the development of two new models of music radio systems in the UK, I have modified the De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach postulates. They become:

1. External conditions *constrain* media content.

2. One of several significant internal conditions in a media system is financial.

3. Technological advances can contribute to more complex relationships in media systems.

A critical discussion of Malm & Wallis (1992)

The Malm and Wallis model (Figure 1), represents a fair approximation of the relationship between record companies, radio stations and listeners. The system it represents is a really a subsystem of a more general set of relations between music radio stations and the

record industry. In this model 'radio listeners' are not *all* radio listeners, and 'radio stations' are not *all* radio stations. The listeners here are those that regularly listen to a small number of radio stations, and that also buy records often enough to be meaningful to the record industry. Similarly, not all music radio stations play newly released music, so they neither supply feedback to record companies, nor receive perks or much in the way of new music. It is reasonable to note however, that despite my comments below, this model was probably never intended to represent more complex aspects of the record-radio-audience-consumer relationship.

The model is absolutely correct to use the term 'phonogram industry' - elsewhere in this research project I refer to the 'record industry', to allow for all music delivery formats, but the logic is the same. Neither the Malm and Wallis model nor mine can usefully represent the music industry in its broadest sense. For example, although live music plays a part in output for most UK music radio stations, the number of output hours of 'live' or 'recorded as-live' are far out-weighed by the number of output hours of commercially released recordings.

Conversely, most live music is expensive and potentially complex to present, for which reasons the BBC dominates live music broadcasting in the UK. For example, according the BBC: "Radio Scotland transmits more live music than all commercial stations in Scotland combined." (BBC Executive Report, 2007:54). It is true that music radio frequently makes use of artists visiting the station to perform 'exclusive' acoustic sets [16]. These are normally cheap - commercial radio doesn't pay an appearance fee (though the BBC pays Musician's Union rates). Outside of the acoustic session format, live music broadcasting takes two principle forms, both expensive and technically challenging. First there is the BBC's extension of the 'session' concept, where bands record material in a (normally) one-day

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[16] Acoustic sessions are a standard promotional practice for the record industry. Artists or bands perform live, unedited acoustic versions of their songs at stations all over the UK as part of a promotional tour. The 'exclusivity' of the sessions might be justified in the sense that each performance will be slightly different.

session in BBC studio for exclusive BBC use [17]. In part to emphasise its difference from commercial music radio, since the early 1990s, BBC Radio 1 has featured full live performances from its own studios (normally Maida Vale in London) as part of specialist evening programming. The cost of covering other live performance events as outside recordings or broadcasts tends be prohibitive for individual commercial stations, so the BBC tends to dominate here as well. The BBC's coverage of the Glastonbury, for example, although likely to be expensive, provides BBC television and radio with many hours of (repeatable) content.

An instructive contrast in music radio power relationships was visible at Scottish music festival, T In The Park 2006. Television rights had been secured by the BBC, but the national youth music station Radio 1 broadcast radio highlights. Commercial music radio stations like XFM Scotland (Scottish central belt) and Tay FM (east coast) were also part of the backstage 'media village'. Only the BBC had rights to broadcast performances from the stages, while the commercial stations were left only with 'exclusive' acoustic sessions and interviews.

The live music events covered on radio represent a small proportion of the live events across the UK in any given week (extensive BBC coverage of music festivals not withstanding), but Malm and Wallis correctly do not attempt to address the live music industry in their model. Neither is the retail arm of the music industry explicitly represented here, despite the significance of retail's mediating role in revenue generation for the record industry, and in in-shop marketing and promotion of new releases.

In the Malm and Wallis model, the entity 'radio listeners' is boxed out, and placed in the middle of the graphic. One implication of putting listeners at the heart of the model is that radio listeners (and this, like *audience*, is not an unproblematic term) consume music radio programming (as opposed to consuming *music*) and along the way become loyal to a radio

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[17] These session recordings can be (and often are) licensed by the BBC for commercial release.

station. Malm and Wallis explain their notion of loyalty as a presumption that … "…

listeners remain loyal to a particular broadcaster as long as they like the fare that is offered

and are not tempted to look for other alternative stations." (Malm and Wallis 1992:31).

Perhaps it is simply an issue of terminology, but I would suggest that the word 'loyalty'

implies a stronger connection to a radio station than one defined simply by its music policy.

If we assume this loyalty exists, it follows that a listener association with a radio station may

be based in part on music policy, but it must also imply identification with the cultural or

social values associated with the station (or indeed the brand). 'Am I', a listener might ask

herself, 'the kind of person that listens to this station? Do I *want* to be like them?' Listening

to a radio station, or show, or DJ then becomes a statement of identity as much as a brand

of designer clothing, or a specific colour of Burberry might be (see, amongst others,

McRobbie, 1989).

There is also the question of what radio 'listening' actually means. Malm and Wallis

implicitly pre-suppose that the consumption of radio output is the same under all conditions.

Most scholarship suggests two levels of consumption: active listening and passive listening

(or background listening) (Barnard 2000; Crisell, 2002). Of course this conceals a more

complex truth where listening behaviour is likely to be almost continuously variable,

between close attention and peripheral awareness.

Furthermore, the record industry and music radio, for mutually beneficial reasons, work with

the assumption that a listener is a listener. Not only do they assume that an individual radio

audience member 'listens' in the same way, at all times, they assume that the audience

consists of an assemblage of individuals, all of whom listen in pretty much the same way, at

the same time. If that assumption is challenged, the economic model of music radio is

undermined - if it can be shown that a large part of the audience is not actively listening,

then why would advertisers pay for airtime?

The 'loyalty' that Malm and Wallis present also suggests that audiences tend to listen to one

station until they stopping liking the *station*, at which point they move their loyalty to another station. UK commercial radio programming has for years followed practices developed in the US - they programme music that their target audience doesn't *dislike*, rather than music that they really do like (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network). In fact, much of the development of North American music radio has been predicated on the assumption that listeners are fickle, have low boredom thresholds and are likely to switch stations as soon as they hear a track they do not like (Ahlkvist and Faulkner, 2002). Attempts to tackle the potential transience of audience include guaranteed commercial-free segments of airtime, and cash and prize give-aways, and more recently Capital FM's radical strategy of reducing the airtime devoted to commercials (Marketing Week, 2005).

Malm and Wallis correctly argue that the system as represented here is in a state of continuous flux - it never reaches a steady state of equilibrium. They support this argument with the example of a record company whose income from record sales is falling. That record company is not forced out of the system, but must increase another revenue stream, in this case that from royalties. For Malm and Wallis, this structure supports record companies' development of rights and intellectual property, in compensation for reduced direct sales income.

In their model, the matched pairs of bonds in the diagram represent a demand-reward relationship, though the relationships are much more complex than the model suggests. In the following paragraphs I explore the relationships established by Malm and Wallis, and propose additional layers that elaborate those relationships. The following section presents a first model that captures some of those additional complexities.

Malm and Wallis acknowledge that only a subset of radio listeners will buy records as a consequence of hearing those records on the radio. This follows radio and record industry assumptions that radio play results in record sales. What is not clear (and cannot be clear without some quantitative research) is what proportion of the radio audience actually buys records. This is likely to vary according to a host of demographic variables, so it is not an

immediately relevant statistic here. There have however been attempts to correlate radio play with record sales. Hull found it impossible as an academic to get accurate sales figures from record companies or chart compilers on a week-to-week basis. His solution was to correlate radio play with chart position. His conclusion was that airplay does affect chart position, but its effects are both genre dependent and often inconsistent (Hull, 1998).

It seems to me that while there must be a substantial demographic that listens to radio and buys records, there must also be two further groups: firstly, those who listen, but never buy records; secondly, those who never listen, but still buy records. For record companies, the former may seem to be irrelevant. For music radio, the latter may seem to be equally unimportant. Both positions are incorrect. The listening patterns and preferences of radio listeners who do not buy records have equal weight, in ratings at least, as those listeners who *do* buy records. Feedback, via market research, formal or informal interactivity, from a sample of all listeners to a music radio station affects music policy. After all, music radio stations need to be able to show that they are reaching their target demographic. Then there are those who buy records but never listen to radio. To be more precise, they will tend to *report* that they never listen to radio, when in reality it is often difficult to avoid hearing some form of radio in a normally active life. This demographic is relevant to music radio because the records that are sold are reflected, sooner or later, in music radio programming policy.

The relationship between record companies and radio stations described by Malm and Wallis is more complex that the relatively straightforward demand and reward pairing shown here. Nevertheless, many of those complexities are streamlined here to the supply of music and perks to radio stations from record companies, and the return of feedback and royalties in the other direction. The perks, as defined by Malm and Wallis, include promotional material or activities over and above the provision of records (in whatever format).

It is undoubtedly true that record companies supply records to radio stations, in large

numbers, and irrespective of the size of the record company. If on the other hand, a radio station is very small, it may have trouble obtaining free or promotional copies of records. Whether this will continue to be the case when there is a zero-overhead option for record companies in the form of downloads, is not yet clear.

Malm and Wallis' definition of 'perks' is, although limited, correct as far as it goes. In addition to the music itself and other promotional materials or activities, the record industry is happy to use other inducements that might result in a new record being play listed. Following the payola [18] scandal in 1950s America, legislation was passed in 1960 to outlaw any form of direct inducements to radio stations and DJs. The inducements revealed at the time included straight cash payments and supply of drugs (Frith, 1981; Chanan, 1995).

The record industry responded to legislation against payola by offering other forms of encouragement to music radio programmers. These can range from record company sponsored dinners or parties, to free flights (known in the industry as 'flyaways'), to artist album launches or showcase concerts. The widespread use of these practices became apparent in the course of a 2-year US federal investigation, following which Sony-BMG and Warners settled for $10m and $5m respectively and Universal for $12m in 2006 (Leeds, 2006). Settlements with the four largest radio station owning groups in the US (Clear Channel Communications Inc., CBS Radio, Entercom Communications Corp. and Citadel Broadcasting Corp.) was reached in early 2007, paying between them $12.5m, and donating 8,400 half-hour airtime slots for independent record labels and local artists (Spain, 2007).

My research has indicated that non-cash inducements to music radio programmers continue to be used in the UK, and are very much part of the fabric of the relationship between record companies and music radio (issues I explore in depth in my discussion of interview material in Chapter V *Production Relationships*).

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[18] Allegedly coined in the 1930s as a contraction of "payment" and "Victrola" a well-known brand of record turntable.

The flow of royalties from radio stations to record companies is legally enforced in Europe for signatories to the Rome convention and it is a reliable source of income for the record industry. Royalties here are public performance payments due to both record company and performer, for radio play of a commercial recording. These are royalties above and beyond the composers' publishing royalties (Malm and Wallis, 1992:31), and were not payable in the US until after the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (Frith and Marshall, 2004:9)

Feedback from radio stations to record companies can take several forms, some more readily quantifiable than others. Malm and Wallis identify principal feedback from radio stations as information on which records or styles are popular with their audiences, or with station music policy decision makers. This broad perspective on feedback is useful, but becomes more valuable with closer examination. Playlisting of a record is an indirect indication that a radio station thinks either that it might be a hit, or that the record is 'radio-friendly' (a contested expression explored at some length in Chapter V *Production Relationships*), or both. A more direct form of feedback is informal or formal reviews of new records or artists. DJs, producers and Heads of Music tell record company promotions people whether they believe a record is good, or more importantly, appropriate for their station or show.

The weight attributed to this form of feedback is often dependent on the strength of personal relationships between radio station personnel and the record company plugger, and of course their respective positions in the hierarchy of an organisation. The usefulness of this feedback is also related to notions of professional expertise, and the assumption that radio station personnel have some kind of valuable, intuitive knowledge derived from many years of listening to records and observing their success or failure on playlists, and by association, in terms of sales.

In summary, the Malm and Wallis model presents a systems approach to the relationship between the record industry, the radio industry and their respective consumers (shown here

as a single grouping, 'radio listeners'). Its strengths are its clarity and simplicity, and its

fundamentally correct representation of some of the relationships between these actors. It

is limited in its ability to show the more nuanced aspects of those relationships.

2 RADIO AND THE RECORD INDUSTRY: A REVISED MODEL (2007)

Consumption

APPLICATION

Audience   Listening only

Listening & buying

Buying only

AESTHETIC / PROFESSIONAL / THEORY

Record companies

MUSIC RADIO
- Station
- Programme

Record buyers

APPLICATION

Broadcasters

Management/Corporate   Production   Presentation (DJ)

Professional ideology

Production

AESTHETIC / PROFESSIONAL / THEORY
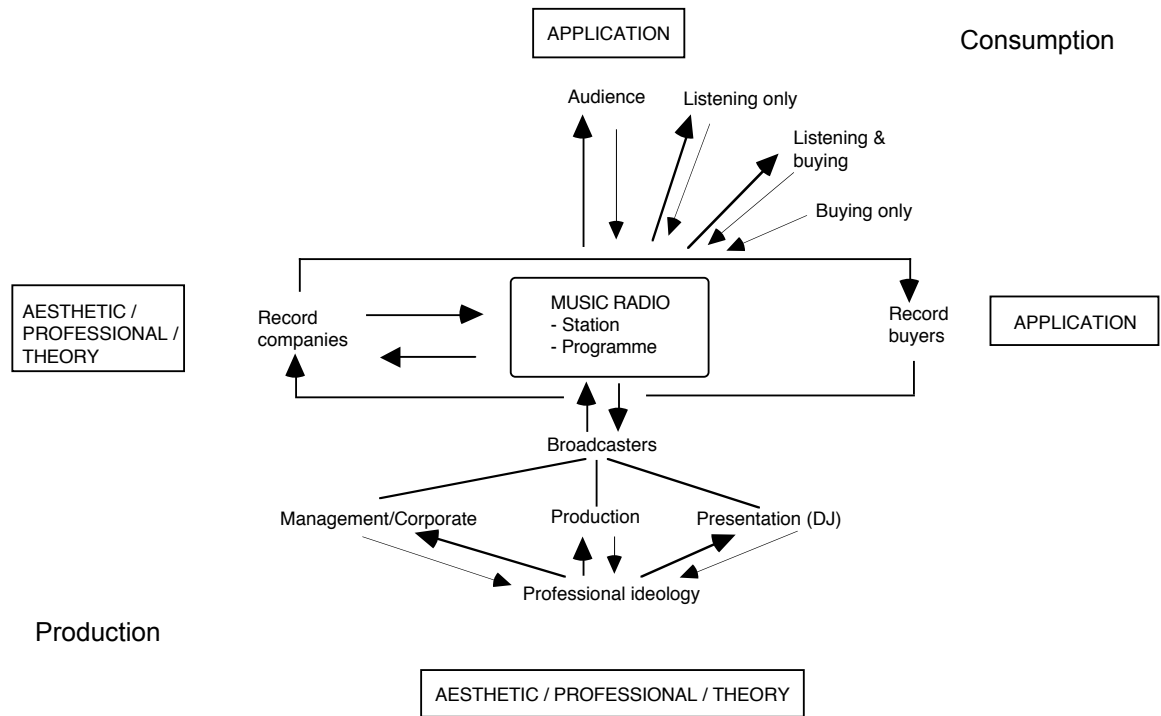
Figure 2: A model of UK music radio

Initial thoughts on this model developed out of empirical observations and preliminary

interviews, but certain structural and content elements of the model are influenced by the

work of other researchers, including Malm and Wallis (1992), Barnard (1989), Chapman

(1992), and Frith (1981, 1996). Equally valuable has been Garfield's account of the

changes at the UK national pop and rock station BBC Radio 1, following the appointment of

Matthew Bannister as Controller in 1993 (Garfield, 1998).

Introduction to components and relationships

This section describes the components and relationships represented in a new model of UK

music radio (Figure 2). The model represents the activity of the radio industry on the vertical axis, and the activity of the music industry on the horizontal axis. It would be possible to extend the model to account for other elements of the music industry, including the live music industry and retailing. For the sake of clarity of representation and focus of argument, I am concentrating only on music radio and its relationship with the record industry. The allocation of axes is of course arbitrary, but the configuration chosen here allows for maximum clarity of presentation.

The arrows connecting components represent relationships, and where there are arrow-heads, the direction of flow of information or influence. In some cases relationships are similar to Malm and Wallis's balanced pairs of demand and reward, but often they represent more complex interactions. Bold lines represent strong relationships and fine lines represent weak relationships.

The *x* and *y* axes represent a continuum from production to consumption, where production activity, in both the radio and record industries is the consequence of interactions between corporate and professional ideologies, notions of aesthetic expertise, corporate, institutional and cultural imperatives. The axes also represent a relationship between theory and application, and between ideology and action. At one end of this relationship (production) are abstract values based on personal aesthetic and professional value judgements. At the other end of the axes are the applications of those abstract values (consumption). For radio the abstract is the notion of 'good' radio, and the application is the reaching (and construction) of audience. In the commercial sector, this means the packaging and selling of audiences to advertisers. For the record industry the abstraction is 'good' music and the application of that concept is selling records. In terms of economics, of course, it doesn't really matter which record sells, as long as enough units are shifted, so the ways in which notions of 'good' are negotiated and constructed will be addressed in Chapter V *Production Relationships*.

Music radio

Music radio is the central entity in the model - it exists at the intersection of the interests and activities of the music and radio industries. It is created when there is a complex series of interactions within and between record and radio industries and notional feedback from 'audiences'. Music radio in this model may be either a music radio station whose output is dominated by popular music (local, regional or national), or (as with Radio Scotland) music programming on a mixed output speech/music station. Each of these sub-entities ('station' and 'programme') clearly has different characteristics. The institutional rules and priorities that govern the running of a music radio station are different (not least, in scale and construction of audience) to those governing the making of a music programme that is part of a mixed output station. Further, there are significant differences in the ideological and corporate objectives of commercial radio stations and publicly funded BBC radio.

My argument here is that, despite these contextual variations, there is a conceptual commonality in the industry making it possible for me to construct a general model which represents more general relationships and processes in music radio. Two of the relationships I represent here are those between broadcasters and audiences, and between record companies and record buyers. The model should therefore become a tool that will help to develop an understanding of these entities and processes. More importantly, perhaps, the model should be flexible enough to absorb ambiguity, without denying its existence. This is a fundamental requirement of any model that attempts to represent entities and processes for which it may not be possible (or even desirable) to completely resolve ambiguity.

Production, mediation and *consumption*

The area to the lower left area of the model is concerned with aspects of production, theory and ideology. The upper right area of the model is concerned with aspects consumption, and therefore also the application of the same theory and ideology. Again, the central

entity, music radio represents a mediation (or negotiation) between production and consumption - music radio is mediator and mediated, producer, consumer and product.

Music radio broadcasting, professional ideology and professional practice

The bottom end (production) of the model's (vertical) radio axis represents a series of interactions between professionals in three broadcast roles. In a structure which is not unique in broadcast media (though it is particularly well-defined in radio) professional ideology both drives and is driven by activity in three roles: Management/Corporate; Production; Presentation (On-air Talent). Each of these groups uses notions of professionalism to frame their concepts of 'good'ness. These notions of professionalism arise from a naturalised corporate culture in which mutually agreed standards define aesthetics and shape creative decision making and evaluation.

The evolution of radio broadcast professional ideology, and its accompanying canon of acceptable institutional practices, means that there can be many possible definitions of 'good', each justifiable within a specific context. Yet, at the same time, there is a remarkable agreement within the radio industry as to what these 'goods' represent, and it remains most interesting to me that the majority of these canonical definitions can work in both public and private sector broadcasting. Put another way, for most broadcasters, good radio is good radio, no matter what the source of funding. However, 'good' radio is a concept which shifts over time, as professional practice changes and evolves. These changes in professional broadcast ideology over time occur at three levels:

(i) Programme (Show) level - DJ practice, including discourse, style and developing notions of DJ/Presenter as star/brand;

(ii) Strand or Departmental level - evolution of production technologies, and influence of other media (television in particular, but also print and Internet);

(iii) Station level - changing corporate objectives. For the commercial sector, this last point can mean a change in the targeted demographic, or perceived changes in existing audience demographic. For the BBC, it can often mean a shift in balance between public service broadcasting responsibilities and the need to be seen to achieve high ratings.

The interaction of the practices of DJ/presentation, production, and corporate strategy, creates music radio. Music radio feeds back into the production process through a number of mechanisms. These mechanisms include media criticism, internal quality reviews and interaction with other culture and media industries. Music radio delivers music and speech to an audience, normally by analogue broadcasting, but increasingly by digital radio, through streamed services and podcasts on the Internet. Audiences then close the loop by feeding back into music radio. A weak interaction is shown in the model, and in this case it represents two things: firstly an indirect influence on the shape of music radio, and secondly an essentially illusory power to affect the substance of music radio.

The indirect influence is felt by broadcasters at corporate strategy level: audiences make a decision on whether on not to listen to a show or to a station. This, of course, shows up in ratings. Provided that corporate strategists are sensitive to ratings (and few are not), this then affects production practices and consequently, the aural shape of music radio. The fine line in the model also represents the deceptively ineffectual nature of apparently direct interaction of audience and music radio. The most obvious deception is the suggestion that phone-ins, SMS messages or emails can make a serious difference to the substance of music radio. It might be argued that individual texts of music radio *are* altered by the on-air presence of audience representatives, but my point here is that phone-ins in particular are (amongst other things) a device that appears to democratise radio, whilst leaving power in the hands of broadcasters. This in itself does not seem to me to be an intrinsically bad thing, rather it is the deception that is interesting - its intended effect is to generate a sense of ownership in listeners, like Malm and Wallis's 'loyalty', even if they do not succeed in getting their voices on air, or attempt to do so.

As a final comment on audience interaction with music radio, ethnographic observation of the effects of letter writing by individuals to public service broadcasters suggests that there is a high level of management attention given to a small number of letters of complaint. Any letter that indicates serious grievance, offence or protest must be answered (often by the production department responsible for the show which triggered the letter). Thus, the actions and views of a vocal minority can often disproportionately affect some aspects of radio station operation. I have uncovered little evidence, however, that the lone gunmen of radio audiences have any serious influence on broadcast output overall, when measured against (often expensive) audience satisfaction research, focus groups and, of course, ratings.

Good radio

I have already suggested that 'good' radio is an articulation of the common currency used throughout the UK radio industry, whether in the commercial sector or the BBC. The expression conceals a complex of (often conflicting) values and fluid definitions beneath a veneer of common-sense and mutual professional understanding. In order to have any depth of insight into the processes of information flow and interaction being examined here, it is necessary to attempt to deconstruct these notions of 'good'ness and attempt to answer core questions about the processes which underpin the formation of the values of 'good' radio (and indeed, 'good' music). These questions go beyond philosophical arguments in aesthetics, and involve issues of production, consumption, and professional and corporate ideology. I will address, at least in part, six key questions here, though clearly there could be many more ...

- how many 'goods' exist?

- which groups construct these values?

- why is it useful for these groups to do so?

- how are these values constructed?

- how are they effected, mediated and audited?

- how do they change over time?

The answers to these questions are not, I feel, discrete. Rather, I hope that answers will emerge from a discussion of the inter-related issues that provoked the questions in the first place.

It is possible to make a distinction between at least two types of 'good' music radio. The first is directly connected to the constructed audience, where a notion of audience is derived through an analysis of official RAJAR listening figures. Broadcasters and station managers would argue that if a particular format or policy results in a large audience, then the station must be making 'good' radio. This 'good' is particularly interesting, because it is a use value of radio, and does not explicitly depend on some commonly understood professional assessment of the quality of the product (the radio programme or station). Rather it depends on measurable consumption as an indicator of success (or 'good'ness). In an economic sense, this 'good' is particularly important. For commercial radio stations a large audience means increased advertising revenue, because advertisers will perceive the station as one that will deliver a larger number of potential consumers. This is therefore 'good' for the station. For the BBC, there is no directly measurable economic benefit of producing this kind of 'good' radio. However, achieving high listening figures is politically important to the BBC in three ways: presenting itself to other media; presenting itself to the UK public (who pay for the BBC); within the organisation, where high ratings is a strong indicator of success, and therefore likely to lead to an increase in authority, prestige and influence for programme makers and key decision makers.

Caught between BBC Charter commitments to serve minority interests, and the requirement to justify the licence fee by appealing to a large number of people, the BBC is just as interested in RAJAR figure as its commercial competitors. The BBC's concerns with ratings are clearly evident in Garfield's (1998) account of the changes in Radio 1 in the period 1993-98, under the controllership of Matthew Bannister, during which ratings slumped dramatically and recovered gradually. The size of the RAJAR-measured audience

in this account is a central measure of how 'good' Radio 1 actually was. Thus, for the

majority of commercial radio stations in the UK, and also to a perhaps surprising extent at

the BBC, the notion of 'large' audience is almost always synonymic with 'good' radio. If

there is a difference between the BBC and commercial sector here, I would suggest that it

might be this: for the BBC, making 'good' radio results achieving higher ratings, whereas for

the commercial sector, if a show achieves high ratings, it is therefore 'good' radio.

The second notion of 'good' radio is constructed in a much more flexible and problematic

way. This 'good' is a product of the interaction between notions of technical skill, ability to

judge content and presentation style - in short, this 'good' is related to a notion of familiarity

with the grammar of radio. Technical skills include the ability to control level and quality of

sound, microphone technique and placement, editing and mixing of multiple sound sources

(for pre-recorded interviews or multitrack recordings of live performances). These skills

tend to be the responsibility of an audio engineering specialist, but are increasingly part of a

more general production role in radio. The main role of production personnel is to

determine the content of individual programmes, though at a more strategic level, station

management determines overall policy on content.

Notions of good presentation technique include the ability to speak with reasonable clarity

and minimal hesitation, and technical knowledge of broadcast mixing desks from which

sound sources are triggered in the correct sequence and at the correct time (or correct

turntable speed, if the source is a vinyl record [19]). For radio to be considered 'good'

according to these technical, production and presentation criteria, all three must be judged

as being of sufficiently high quality. The experts that are permitted (within a loose hierarchy

of peer relationships) to make that judgement are usually radio professionals or radio

critics. Whilst the criteria of critics may include aspects of consumption (is it entertaining? is

it offensive? is it value for public money?), the criteria of radio professionals are more

obviously dependent on the three technical aspects I have already noted (for more on

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[19] A notable exception to this notion of 'good' was Radio 1's John Peel, whose apparent inability to play records at the correct speed was a signifier of his authenticity as a 'music fan', rather than 'professional DJ'.

notions of the roles of technical skill, production values and voice presentation, see McLeish, 1999). For both groups, however, more problematic is the question of assessing creativity in radio. As with ratings methodology, this issue is often marginalised *because* it is difficult to resolve. As a consequence, there is an emphasis on the more directly quantifiable (though still value driven) technical qualities of radio.

I have already suggested that there is a pre-supposition of a mode of listening, or degree of listening effort on the part of an audience. I would suggest that in fact, when these technical criteria are employed to assess the quality of music radio, little or no concept of audience is involved. In my ethnographic work, a BBC Scotland music producer stated that she felt she was making programmes for line management, not for any audience.

It is perhaps important to note that these two 'goods' are not in any way mutually exclusive. Radio considered 'good' according to my second definition, that is, radio judged to be of high quality by those considered to be capable of making that judgement (mainly broadcast professionals and critics), may also be 'good' according to the first definition (high ratings). More directly, radio considered to be critically 'good' may also achieve high listening figures. A recent example of this might be Mark Radcliffe's 1997-2004 BBC Radio 1 afternoon show, which appeared to effectively combine both notions of 'good'. That is, it was technically slick, it was highly regarded by the few critics that write about music radio, it achieved high ratings, and perhaps incidentally, displayed considerable innovation, creativity and humour.

It is not only designated 'experts' that are permitted to judge the 'good'ness of music radio. There are other significant entities in the model that make value judgements on the quality of music radio: the record industry and the radio audience. For the record industry, music radio *may* be considered good if it falls into either or both notions of 'good' described above (ratings and aesthetics). However, the record industry has another very specific criterion for judging whether music radio is 'good', and that is: does it help to sell records? This

notion is not the main concern of the radio industry [20], but it is central to the activity of the record industry. Therefore, for the record industry, 'good' music radio is radio that plays the new records the industry manufactures and/or supplies to the radio stations. This means that radio stations and individual programmes that play newly released records are 'better' (for record companies) than stations that have a gold format, and play mainly older records. Radio stations have no interest in this distinction because their primary function is to reach an audience, not to sell records (even though this may be a consequence of reaching that audience).

Nevertheless, there is an area of overlap between these 'goods' - if a radio station plays new record releases and the ratings are low, the record company criterion for 'good' music radio is not met. Nor is the radio industry measure of 'good' as a function of high ratings achieved. For both record and radio industries in this example, this is *not* 'good' radio. It is possible to imagine exceptions to this general rule where, for example, the few that *are* listening are powerful opinion formers. RAJAR breakdowns that might indicate if this were the case are supplied only to radio stations - only Ofcom licensed stations and the BBC have access to detailed information (RAJAR, 2007). Thus the record industry cannot make any assumptions about the more specific characteristics of an audience, and must work only from the more general figures which are made public every three months.

The model also represents one more group that is in a position to make value judgements about the merits of music radio: the audience. There are significant problems in assessing how a heterogeneous audience constructs value judgements about music radio, not least of which is the method used for *constructing* the audience. Ethnographic studies, such as that carried out by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in the mid-1980s, have in part addressed this issue (Agardy et al., 1985:25-32), but have also revealed the complexity of attempting to construct an audience notion of what 'good' music radio might be. The criteria cited by a sample of young Melbourne residents in judging a radio station to be good were:

[20] Whilst this is true, record sales determine chart positions, and thus have an influence on hits radio station playlists.

good music; contemporary music; good sound (strong signal); good mix of old and new music; good DJs; not too many ads (ibid:26). The most significant reason for judging a music radio station to be good was the music, which had to be 'good'. So, if a listener likes the music, the listener is likely to consider the radio station also to be good. It would however be wrong to suggest that there are not other criteria employed by a radio audience in assessing the 'good'ness of a music radio station. The Australian research, in focusing on youth, failed to represent the other age demographics, and had little to say about *how* music radio was used. Nevertheless, I tend to agree with the notion that for most radio audiences, music is likely to be the dominant criterion in judging the 'good'ness of a music radio station. It is also the case that for BBC Radio 2, the presenters have significant audience drawing ability, and I address this issue in Chapter V *Production Relationships*.

Good music

It might be suggested that this section should, by my own criteria, be headed 'Good Records'. However, I have chosen 'Good Music' because a small but significant percentage of UK music radio output is in the form of live (or 'as-live') performances.
In this model, for the record industry the abstraction is the concept of 'good' music. 'Good music' may perhaps be an even more complex and slippery concept than 'good radio', but conceals the same ambiguity. It is in some ways attractive to imagine that a world where there are only two kinds of music, good and bad, would solve many of the problems of trying to establish a workable model of UK music radio. If however it were indeed possible to make an unambiguous universal value judgement on the 'good'ness of a record, then much of the richness of the interactions which this model attempts to capture would be lost.

There are four entities in the model that have an interest in defining 'good' music. The most important of these is the record industry, yet the radio industry also has a powerful interest in achieving workable definitions. Radio audiences and record buyers have related, consumer and taste driven notions of what 'good' music might be.
The record industry has (at least) two ways, analogous to radio industry processes for

establishing 'good' radio, of establishing the 'good'ness of music. Music may be considered 'good' if it achieves the objective of the majority of record companies, that is, it sells copies of the recording (CD, vinyl, MP3 or other digital download). This is a use value of the music and is not necessarily related to the second process for understanding 'good' music. In the broadest sense, using this approach, the record company does not particularly care what the music sounds like. Music may, however, also be considered 'good' if it meets a number of technical and musicological standards, or if it meets a number of individual or corporately defined taste profiles. This is an intrinsic value attributed to music, based on what it *sounds* like. Again, in an analogy with the radio industry, these definitions are not mutually exclusive, and music can fall into both categories - that is, if it sells a large number of records and it is considered to be intrinsically good as measured by what it *sounds* like.

For the radio industry, good music is generally that which delivers an appropriate audience, as measured by industry standard RAJAR figures, or by unilateral market research. Thus 'good' in this case means 'appropriate'. The music must match corporate or professional criteria for establishing whether music is 'right' for a programme or a station. This appropriateness is fluid, and often a particular record may change its 'appropriateness quotient' over time, as it becomes increasingly popular, and/or sells more copies. Thus a record considered inappropriate (based on musicological arguments) pre-release, might become entirely appropriate (and therefore 'good') as sales start to register. In the radio industry, music has a use-value that may be entirely divorced from considerations of whether it is in some way intrinsically good. This argument also holds even for specialist stations and programming, which may publicly (and indeed within the corporate structure) declare themselves to be interested primarily in the intrinsic merits of the music. Even the legendary, ground-breaking eclecticism of the John Peel Show on Radio 1 used music to make radio that is *appropriate* for that segment of airtime.

The ways in which record buyers understand 'good' music are fluid and complex, and are not necessarily identical to the ways in which a radio audience understands 'good' music. If a record buyer considers a piece of music 'good' enough they will seek out and buy the

record (for clarity of argument, I am ignoring other, mainly illegal, ways of acquiring music; bootlegs, Internet piracy, copies of CDs or MP3s from friends). It would be difficult, though perhaps interesting, to try to establish a taste continuum from 'not good, will not buy', to 'very good, must buy' (and the less common 'not good, but will buy anyway because I feel I should'). This is, however, well beyond the scope the model presented here.

Since the arrival and success in the late-1980s of Gold format (old hits) in the UK (Garner, 1990), the record industry has been forced to reconsider both its relationship with the radio industry and its understanding of audiences and their record buying habits and patterns. Gold (and several other formats, including MOR [21] and its derivatives) rarely play new releases and almost never play new artists. Gold audiences in fact may never buy records at all, and certainly are extremely unlikely to be interested in new artists. Therefore these formats are of little interest to the record industry, unless it is marketing a re-packaged back catalogue of an established artist. So for a radio audience, notions of 'good' music are not necessarily closely coupled with the economic activity of buying records.

The aesthetic, cultural and even musicological parameters employed by a radio audience to determine whether music is 'good' are complex and variable, and a detailed exploration of these parameters is beyond the scope of this research. Whilst it will be necessary to revisit that argument later in my thesis, for the purposes of the model I describe here, an operational (if deliberately vague) definition of what a radio audience considers 'good' music might be: music is 'good' if an (imagined) audience 'likes' it, and (as discussed earlier) a music radio station is 'good' if it plays music that an audience 'likes'. Further, a music radio station is 'good' if it *doesn't* play music that an (imagined) audience *dislikes*.

Reaching audience and *selling records*

In the Malm and Wallis model there is no differentiation between a radio audience and a

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[21] MOR is an acronym of Middle Of the Road, meaning mainstream pop or easy-listening music.

consumer public which buys records. This assumes that all music radio consumers use radio in the same way, that is, as a record buyers guide. My argument is that there are a number of overlapping and heterogeneous groups within the unit which Malm and Wallis identify simply as 'Radio Listeners'. In the broadest possible terms, these may be gathered into two classes: (i) listeners who do not buy records; (ii) listeners who do buy records. As Frith (2001) puts it … "radio is as concerned as other media to create a community from its listeners and uses music to that end, but it is not necessarily concerned to create a community of record buyers." (Frith, 2001:41).

It is also true that use of the term 'listener' imposes historically derived values related to modes of radio consumption - a 'listener' is by implication actively devoting attention to the act of listening, and is not merely 'hearing'. There is clearly a continuum between these two extremes of radio consumption, but it is a continuum that the radio industry prefers to ignore. It is in the interests of the commercial radio industry (and, to an extent, the BBC) to deal not in qualitative data but in quantitative data, such as those provided by RAJAR. As noted elsewhere, larger listening figures mean the station is more attractive to advertisers. For the BBC high ratings are used internally and externally as a visible measure of success and of vindication of programming decisions and budget spend.

In the context of the model there must also be a third group: record buyers who do not listen to radio, and whose buying decisions are based on information from other mediating entities (television, live events, print media, the Internet, social or professional networks). The actions of this third group do not however isolate them from music radio, despite non-listenership. If their act of buying a record contributes to the success of that record, in sales chart terms, then this action will have an effect on certain formats of music radio quickly (e.g., Top 40), and on other formats in the longer term (e.g., Gold).

Processes, interaction and information flow

This section addresses the interactions and information flows in the model. Some of these

interactions I have already discussed in more depth earlier in this paper, others are noted here for the first time. I have classed each interaction as either WEAK or STRONG, where weak interactions are represented as fine lines, and strong interactions are represented as bold lines.

Broadcasters -> Music Radio

STRONG

Broadcasters at three levels, management/corporate, production and presentation (on-air talent), interact to create music radio, from a radio perspective.

Music Radio -> Broadcasters

STRONG

Music radio feeds back into the production process by a number of mechanisms: media criticism; internal quality audits; professional interaction. An example of the last of these is the annual UK Music Radio meetings between the music and radio industries, organised by The Radio Academy.

Music Radio -> Audience

STRONG

Music radio is delivered to an audience as a mixture of music and speech, normally in the form of terrestrial analogue broadcasting, but increasingly as digital audio broadcasting, cable, satellite, and Internet streaming audio.

Audience -> Music Radio

WEAK/STRONG

Direct interaction (one-to-one communication, public consultation) is a weak process, but audience ratings and market research are strong processes, and can directly affect both form and content of music radio. The dynamics of these processes are complex, and the

research in this paper is not designed to explore these issues in depth.

Record Companies -> Record Buyers

STRONG

This relationship can of course be mediated by music radio (and indeed, other media), but the model also allows for a direct relationship. Clearly the model does not deal with the complexities of record company business practice (see Negus, 1992 and 1999 for examples of these complexities). Nevertheless, it is seems reasonable to argue that record companies have a relatively accurate measure of success (certainly in comparison to radio audience ratings): number of units sold.

Record Buyers -> Record Companies

STRONG

This closes the loop - record buyers tell record companies what they want by buying records selected from what is made commercially available (Frith, 1981).

Record Companies -> Music Radio

STRONG

Here I am in total agreement with the Malm and Wallis model: record companies supply recordings that form the largest proportion of music radio output. Broadcasters that make specialist music programmes may buy (rather than receive free) records, and individual artists or groups may play live on radio shows, but the relationship in the model remains the same.

Music Radio -> Record Companies

STRONG

This relationship works on many levels, and is consequently rather difficult to measure, either quantitatively or qualitatively. For example: A&R people in record companies may

hear new acts for the first time on radio, rather than seeing them live; radio play of album tracks may assist record companies in deciding on the next single to be released from that album; personal contact between radio professionals and pluggers can feed back the opinions of those radio professionals on new records to the record company; whether or not a station playlists a track can indicate to a record company whether their signing policy has been successful, or whether their strategy requires modification. This relationship is addressed in depth in Chapter V *Production Relationships*.

Consumption

In the top right sector of the model there is an arc of consumption linking Radio Audience and Record Buyers. This is clearly a simplified and idealised representation of a complex real world scenario, yet I believe the distinctions I make here remain useful. The limitations are obvious, but acceptable. The model assumes: all radio consumption is the same (which it is not); all buying patterns are the same for all consumer groups (which they are not); there are only three discrete groups (which there are not). I do not think any of these limitations undermine the basic effectiveness of the model, though further clarification of the processes in future work would be desirable.

Music Radio -> Listening Only

STRONG

This audience consumes radio in a way that is not directly useful to the record industry. There may of course be sub-groupings within this class of radio consumers which are useful to other areas of the music industry, for example, live performance or dance clubs.

Listening Only -> Music Radio

WEAK

Although this group do buy records, they express a musical preference in terms of loyalty to

a station, and in direct phone, SMS and email feedback to stations on their music policy..

Music Radio -> Listening and *Buying*

STRONG

This group uses music radio as part of a range of consumer strategies to guide buying decisions.

Listening and *Buying -> Music Radio*

WEAK

Feedback is similar to that in the Listening Only group, but with the additional weight that buying decisions can shape sales charts and thus playlisting of records.

Buying only -> Music Radio

WEAK

This group does not use music radio as a buying guide to new product, but instead uses television, print media and the Internet. Nevertheless, they affect music radio in two ways: buying records can affect the composition of the sales charts; reaction to dance records in clubs can affect record company release policy.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented two models of the relationship between radio and the record industry. The first is by Malm and Wallis (1992), whose model I discuss critically at length. The second is a more complex model that is intended to more effectively represent the processes work to make music radio, largely from the production of culture perspective. Chapter V deals in detail with the production relationship focused through record industry pluggers and music radio programmers, and Chapter VI develops a different aspect of radio and cultural production - how radio works to influence the cultural practices of independent

musicians.

IV METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The model I present in Chapter III frames my approach to the semi-structured interview methodology I describe in this chapter. The model functions in two ways. Firstly, it represents a global view of structures and agency in the relationship between music radio and the record industry in terms of both production and consumption, and the processes which mediate production and consumption. The model thus provides an appropriate and useful context which guides both question formulation and my responses to the information supplied by my participants. Secondly, the model suggests which aspects of the relationship between the record industry and music radio will be the most useful in addressing the central argument of this thesis: that music radio powerfully mediates the cultural production practices of the recorded music industry, (i) through the social relationship between music radio programmers and record industry pluggers, and (ii) in the consumption of specialist music radio by active (independent) musicians. The first of these processes is situated in the lower left part of Figure 2 (production), whilst the latter is in the upper right of the model (consumption), and is a very specific example of the ways in which certain consumption practices feed back into cultural production. Other aspects of consumption (in terms of music radio audience and the purchase of recordings), represented in the upper right section of the model, whilst interesting in their own right, do not contribute directly to an understanding of the relationship between music radio and the record industry, other than in the ways in which audiences and consumers are imagined or constructed by those industries. Consequently, Chapter V addresses production of music radio and the ways in which that process impinges on the production of popular music (including the role of the imagined audience). Chapter VI then offers a close analysis of a specific specialist music show in Scotland and the often subtle processes which modify the cultural production of independent music, as a response to that radio show.

It was partly my own experience as a DJ / Presenter in music radio that provided the stimulus for this research project and on balance, despite some of the methodological issues which I will deal with later in this chapter, that experience has been invaluable. For a number of years my careers as a (part-time) broadcaster and as an academic developed in parallel, but it was not until the mid-1990s that I began to fully appreciated the potential inherent in that parallel development. As my academic interests increasingly focused on the culture and economics of the music industry and perhaps inevitably on the record industry's relationship with radio broadcasting, I realised that in both radio studies and popular music studies that music radio had been somewhat neglected. The gradual development of this research project has been the consequence of that realisation.

My position is unlikely to be unique, though it is certainly unusual - for a little over 12 years I was both music radio presenter and full time academic [22]. My first produced radio package (5 minutes on the popularity of continental lager for a youth magazine show) went out in the same month I started my first contract as a Research Assistant at the University of Strathclyde. The important aspect of this is that neither career came chronologically before the other. So, for my colleagues at BBC Radio Scotland (and for a time in the mid-1990s, Festival Radio and XFM in London) I was a 'professional' broadcaster whom they were often surprised to find had a day job as Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies. Equally, academic colleagues often reacted with bemusement to my career in radio. It is not uncommon for academics to become broadcasters as a consequence of their academic life, but they are always in these circumstances represented as *academics who broadcast*. Similarly there is movement in the other direction - often radio broadcasters can move into teaching and ultimately academia. Yet, even if they occasionally continue to produce professional radio, they are academics who were formerly practitioners [23]. My point then is that I was perceived by other broadcasters (and by contacts in the record industry) as a

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[22] There are many examples of 'insider' research in cultural studies, one of the best of which is Hodkinson's (2002) work on Goth subculture, written by the author as a member of that subculture. Nevertheless, I believe that my specific insider/outsider status in this research area is rare.

[23] This is a feature of academic disciplines which are often vocational in nature, for example, theatre, advertising or public relations.

broadcaster, and by academics as an academic, despite the fact that most parties knew of both careers. It is of course impossible to prove this statement, but my lived experience of interaction with individual's and organisations in both careers suggest strongly to me that this was indeed the case [24]. Becker (2004) argues strongly that an ethnographer should also, if she is to obtain meaningful results, have expertise not only in ethnographic research methods, but also knowledge or expertise in that which is to be studied. Becker was referring to his early participant observer research in the Chicago blues scene, but there are some important resonances in my work with radio and music industry informants.

This all matters for several reasons:

1. My developing experience in academia and in radio led directly to a conceptualisation of the key issues in this research project: what is it that that's going on in the relationship between pluggers and programmers?; why is it working in this way?; what does that relationship mean for the sounds of popular music? As a lecturer in media and culture I was becoming more able to place my activities in radio in an academic context. In other words, I already knew the answers to some of the questions that a new academic researcher might bring to a research project in this area.

2. It means that I have been able to draw on my lived experience as a DJ / Presenter in much the same way as a participant observer might work as part of any social or cultural ethnographic research. It is not, of course, classical participant observation in that I was not recording material in note form. Nor was there any question of what most methodology texts refer to as 'going native' (for example, Bryman, 2001:300) - I was already 'native' in the sense that I *was* a professional broadcaster.

3. During my interviews with programmers, radio producers and record industry promotions people, although all participants were made very clear on the purpose of the interview I was

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[24] On one occasion in the 1990s during a programming meeting with the producer of one of my BBC Radio Scotland shows I was told, "I still can't believe that you're a lecturer." I was never really sure whether to take this as a positive or a negative judgement …

aware that I was being perceived as much as a fellow practitioner as much as an academic. This was also the case for radio people with whom I'd had no previous professional contact, in this case Sarita Jagpal at BBC Radio 1 and Colin Martin at BBC Radio 2. Similarly, in my interviews with musicians (Chapter VI, Consumption Relationships), my status as bit-part player in the Glasgow alternative music scene from the late 1980s onwards allowed my participants to see me as a music scene person first and academic second.

It is not difficult to see some of the issues that arise here, but I believe that the benefits far outweigh the potential methodological pitfalls. I will address some of those issues below, when I say a little more about why critical reflection on my own cultural activity and semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate methods for this research.

CONCEPTUALISATION

I did not enter this research project with a fixed notion of theoretical framework, believing that theory and analytical strategies would emerge as the project developed. Hesmondhalgh (2006) critiques Negus, Nixon and Featherstone in their extension of the term 'cultural intermediaries' to encompass most (if not all) individuals or organisations that perform some kind of mediating function between producers and consumers of cultural products. Hesmondhalgh argues that the term was originally much more specific:

> Bourdieu seems to have intended the term 'new cultural intermediaries' to refer to a particular type of new petit-bourgeois profession, associated with cultural commentary in the mass media, 'the most typical of whom are the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of "quality" newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers'. (Hesmondhalgh, 2006:226).

This is a reasonable argument, but leaves this research project with the problem of describing or classifying the individuals I have identified as key participants in the ebb and flow of power and influence in the production of two closely inter-related cultural products - commercially recorded popular music and music radio. Consequently I have chosen to use then the broader notions of 'cultural intermediary' used by Negus (2002): "cultural

intermediaries as a special occupational grouping linking production to consumption" (Negus, 2002:502). Negus' account of cultural intermediaries frames my approach to the work of pluggers and programmers, whose activities are instrumental in the production of radio and of popular music. It might be reasonable, after Negus, to suppose that what is really going on here is mediation in the production of popular music. Yet this does not account for the imperatives and interaction that work together to produce music radio.

However, like Becker (1998) I have "… a deep suspicion of abstract sociological theorizing; I regard it as at best a necessary evil" (Becker, 1998:3), so in this research project I have focused on the fieldwork and a critical discussion of the data that had emerged from that fieldwork. There is, unavoidably, some reference to key arguments made by previous authors, and where necessary there is historical context.

The primary objective of this research has been to investigate how the interaction of cultural intermediaries in two distinct, but related industries produces music radio and so works to mediate the production of popular music. A secondary objective has been to investigate how a very specific interaction between radio and the producers of a very specific form of popular music (in this case, alternative rock and pop) works to mediate local production within that genre.

The research strategy thus has two strands, based in part on the model described in Chapter III *Models of Music Radio*. The first looks at the centre-left of that model, where pluggers and programmers interact to produce music radio and to mediate the production of popular music. The second investigates an area of mediation that involves the upper right of the model, where music is consumed. In this case I examine the *musician-as-listener* and how this interaction works to develop musician's notions of themselves as producers of a cultural product. This strand was designed to investigate how specialist radio might work to mediate the production of popular music.

The research tool used was semi-structured interviews, discussed in detail below, but there

were other possible approaches. Questionnaires might have yielded a larger number of responses, but this research tool has many problems, some generic, some uniquely related to the area of cultural production I wanted to address. Generically, questionnaires are inflexible and they need a high level of motivation from respondents. The inflexible short answer format tends to yield relatively shallow qualitative information, and the fixed format means all respondents have exactly the same question set. My respondents are pluggers, programmers and musicians, and although I wanted to address similar issues with all of them, the form of questions would be necessarily different for each individual. My social and professional contact with pluggers, programmers and musicians also suggested that the chances were slim that respondents would have the levels of motivation necessary to fill in and return even a short survey form.

Focus groups (or Grays's, 2003, "Group Interviews"), even if it had been possible to arrange such groups, would simply not have generated the kind of meaningful data that would answer the research questions I had in mind. The element of performance (following from Goffman, 1990, originally published in 1959) and social dynamic in group interviews, whilst sometimes interesting in itself, would have been counter-productive in my pursuit as a researcher of one-to-one relationship building, however briefly, in an interview.

Written archives have been used where they are relevant and available, though primarily to support interview material from BBC respondents. Elsewhere, it would have been difficult or impossible to obtain internal record industry documentation or pluggers reports. More importantly, this material, if it were available, would have failed to reveal anything about opinion, belief and attitude in my respondents.

ETHNOGRAPHY

Bryman (2001) argues that the term 'ethnography' took over from 'participant observation' in the early 1970s, but also that the two terms have often been used interchangeably with an

increasing emphasis on 'ethnography' as the more inclusive term.

Participant observation in its strictest sense would not have been possible in this research. The essence of the contact between pluggers and programmers is a series of bi-lateral relationships, so a researcher sitting in on those meetings (even if participant agreement were likely, which it is not) would have changed the character of the meeting far beyond its normal parameters. It is arguable that I was acting as a participant observer in radio and in the Glasgow music scene during part of the period covered by this research, and that my experience in these fields before the commencement of the project also fed into my analysis of the interview data. However, as research was not my primary concern when I was (for example) talking to a plugger or promoting a club night at a local venue, it would be unwise to consider this participant observation in the sense that most social or cultural researchers would understand. Nevertheless, my participation in radio and local music fed directly into a number of research strategies from targeted selection of respondents to my ability to represent myself as knowledgeable about the fields of activity of those respondents.

My primary research tool has been, as noted earlier, the semi-structured interview. Bryman (2001) describes the semi-structured interview thus:

> The researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered … but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees. But, by and large, all of the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee. (Bryman, 2001:314).

This is very much the approach I used in the field, with slightly different question schedules for each set of interview respondents (programmers, other broadcasters, pluggers, musicians). The completely unstructured approach would have been unhelpful, given the specificity of the areas I wished to address, and a rigorous structured approach would not have provided the flexibility I felt was essential to the research process.

There is a strong argument for the semi-structured interview here - it is simply the only effective way of gathering the information I needed. There is also a subsidiary reason for choosing the semi-structured interview - I rather enjoy the interview process, and many years of broadcast interviewing has helped me develop an effective technique, which was readily applicable to the academic process. As a reasonably good interviewer, I feel that the material that emerges from those interviews is more likely to be more useful in terms of later analysis.

Interview subjects were chosen by targeted sampling, based on individuals most likely to be able to give me the best material on which to base meaningful analysis. Having been active in radio and the local music scene I was able to select pluggers from my existing list of contacts, and where I had had no direct contact with other pluggers, through a limited amount of snow-balling (where one participant suggests that I should speak to another who will be similarly helpful). A similar approach was taken with radio programmers, where I was able to identify key personnel at the BBC through existing contacts in radio or the record industry (this was particularly useful in getting to the right people at the BBC national music networks). For the historical material on BBC Radio Scotland's music programming, I was able to speak directly with the three most relevant individuals, again through existing contact networks. And lastly, for the material from local musicians, I was able to contact relevant bands directly, without record company or management mediation, on the basis of social and semi-professional contact during and preceding the research project period.

In short, I had significant levels of insider access to key informants. This meant that I could not only arrange and carry out interviews with individuals who might have been otherwise difficult to pin down, but also that the content of those interviews was qualitatively different to the content that would have resulted from a non-insider interview. The quality of the information I obtained was I believe significantly higher for this reason. Of course, the potential problem here is that the interview subjects with whom I was most socially familiar might have assumed certain levels of knowledge on my part, but where that was the case, I asked them to clarify and explain. I believe I was able to get more honest and open

responses from those respondents with whom I had had previous social contact, though at

no point in the interviews did I feel that I was in anyway suggesting that the interview

recording was for anything other than academic research [25].

It might be argued that my choice of interview subjects seems limited by the approach I

have described here - that I have missed out on interviews with other potentially useful

subjects, outside close or extended networks. While this is possibly true, my argument is

that I have carried out in-depth interviews with highly relevant subjects, at the most

appropriate levels of their respective industries or cultural activities [26]. Gray (2003) refers to

the value of this approach:

> Bob Connell has helpfully discussed his approach in selecting respondents, a process he calls
> 'strategic sampling'. He concentrated on 'a few situations where the theoretical yield should be
> high' (Connell, 1995:90). We can think about our empirical work in this way by asking what
> potential exists for 'theoretical sampling' and how rich a very small number of interviews can
> be. (Gray, 2003:101).

I believe that my approach to sampling and interviewing a relatively small number of key

informants has indeed yielded rich and, in methodological terms, strongly valid material (I

believe the material to be as 'true' as it would be possible to achieve in this from of

research). The other standard methodological metric of reliability is more problematic.

Would another researcher approaching the same (or similar) respondents get similar

results? Probably not, for the very reasons I believe this research to be good, and as

described above. Does this matter? Not for this research project and the conclusions I

draw here, but that is not to say that similar work would not be valuable. In fact I would be

very happy to see much more work in this area that is, even in radio studies, under

researched.

The interviews were between 45 and 75 minutes long, and took place in a variety of

locations, normally as suggested by respondents, including their own office, a coffee shop

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[25] Before the interviews took place several respondents had checked with me that the material I was
gathering was not for broadcast or popular print media.

[26] It is also true that most 'outsider' ethnographers would have approached many of the same
potential informants in both industries.

or café-bar. The majority of plugger and programmer interviews took place between December 2004 and December 2005, with a small number of preliminary, evaluative interviews in 2001. BBC Radio Scotland *Beat Patrol* interviews date back to 1996, and draw on some earlier historical work of mine. The interviews with musicians (in Chapter VI: *Consumption Relationships*) took place in 1999.

All interviews were recorded, either on MiniDisc or on a 3rd generation iPod with a recording accessory (mid-1990s interviews for BBC Radio Scotland *Beat Patrol* history were recorded on a Sony Walkman Pro cassette recorder). For the record, although the iPod was considerably more discreet (interviewees tended to forget about the presence of an iPod more quickly than they did a full size stereo desk microphone), the sound quality was significantly better with the MiniDisk/microphone combination. The higher quality recording made transcription less of a chore. Most interviews were translated where necessary into digital file formats readable on computer (AIFF and MP3), and transcribed from iTunes on an Apple iBook, or from an iPod. I transcribed all my own interviews to ensure that the transcription accurately reflected what was said in the interviews themselves. Most interviews were stored in MP3 format in iTunes and where necessary it was straightforward to refer back to the original source sound recording.

The interview material was analysed by thematically organising responses from interviewees so that it was possible to discuss any emerging discord or concord between subjects. This approach was particularly effective with pluggers and programmers, but also worked well with musician interviews. I did not use any formal social science system of coding the interviews, as for the most part the question schedule effectively organised the themes in the responses. In my analysis and discussion (presented in Chapters V and VI) I present relevant interview quotations in those themed sections, with a critical discussion of each quote and of how it contributes to an understanding of the theme in that section.

Beyond the issues of my status as insider (broadcaster, musician, DJ, promoter) and outsider (academic researcher) there are more general issues of subjectivity in the

interpretation of interview material. These issues, as many authors have noted, are inescapable:

> It is pretty clear that the researcher plays a significant role in any study upon which he or she embarks and whilst neutral objectivity is an impossibility, it is possible to construct a project which accounts for its own framework, its methodology and reflects on changes and developments in the research process. (Gray, 2003:74, drawing on Hermes, 1995).

I believe that I have made sufficient efforts to consider the impact of my own 'subjectivity' on my analysis, and on balance I believe that that very subjectivity lends this analysis more weight.

During the process of developing that analysis I had cause to re-think one of the key ethical questions in any interview-based research, that of anonymity. My informants were offered anonymity both at the time of setting up of the interviews and at the commencement of the interview recording. None of them directly requested anonymity, which I believe is a reflection of what I told them I was doing with the research. I had told each informant that the PhD thesis to which they were contributing would be only of interest to academics and would exist only as an unpublished work in the library of the University of Stirling. I assured them that if the material were to be developed into a published work, that I would anonymise where necessary, if I believed their statements to have a potentially negative effect on their careers. The availability of this research project as a readily downloadable PDF file (a move which I completely support) places the work in a more accessible public domain. I realise of course that in principle a hard copy of a PhD is already in that domain, but it is a question of *accessibility*. Consequently, I have anonymised some quotes in the section addressing payola in this version of the project, in order to protect the trust of those respondents who were disarmingly honest about the status of that often murky area of inducement.

There are a number of limitations inherent in the semi-structured interview approach. The lack of a tightly prescribed question schedule means that the phrasing of questions will not always have been exactly the same for each participant, nor will the order in which issues

are address. This inconsistency may have affected the responses of participants (though this is a more serious issue in structured interviews and in surveys). However, in this research project, the general narrative of the interviews was similar. For example, all music radio programmers were asked the same questions in more-or-less the same order, unless they themselves moved to a later question subject area in the course of an earlier question. When this happened (and it happened more than once), I attempted to re-establish my intended structure where possible.

Other limitations are associated with semi-structured interviews. One of these is the increased amount of time required to analyse transcripts, in that subjects are not always tackled in the same order. Jensen (2002) identifies another, more troubling issue: "The difficulty, of course, is that people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say." (Jensen, 2002:240). There can be no way of solving this problem in any comprehensive way, but it is possible to minimise the likelihood of deceptive or evasive answers. Of course, my own judgement of my ability to achieve that end is by necessity subjective, but it is useful to revisit to a point I made earlier in this chapter regarding my experience of the interview process. Good interview technique is far from obvious for the novice using the technique, but I believe that my experience as a broadcast radio presenter with over ten years of interviewing was a useful basis for using this methodology in an academic context. It was this experience that facilitated more productive interviews for this research and enabled me to form a reasonable judgment as to the extent that participants were, more often than not, saying what they thought, and meaning what they said. However, even if I assume that I have achieved that objective, or been able to decide when and where I have *not* been able to achieve that objective, Jensen correctly frames a more complex issue which arises in the analysis of interviews: "… statements from … biographical interviews … are not simple representations, true or false, of what people think. All interview statements are actions, arising from an interaction between interviewer and interviewee." (Jensen, 2002:240). In my analysis of interview transcripts then, it is has been necessary to consider the extent to which interviewee statements represent a response to their perception of me as interviewer, and their response to the interview

process itself. I will return to this last point in the conclusion to Chapter V *Production Relationships*.

Editing quotations

Quotes are presented as transcribed directly from the original interview recording. Where they have been edited, I have followed the convention of using the ellipsis (…) to indicate where I have removed material to aid the sense of meaning in the quote, by removing interjections or sub-clauses not directly relevant to the main point. When it has been necessary to add my own words to clarify meaning (for example, when 2nd person forms of address are used extensively and meaning is not clear from the context of the quote), my own words appear in brackets.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

I want to end this chapter with a few words on the potentially problematic research technique of critical reflection on my own participation in radio broadcasting and in the Glasgow music scene. Where it has been helpful to introduce such reflection I have done so to support or extend points being made by my informants. Of particular use has been my own experience of relationship building with record company promotions companies and with individual pluggers. I was never in the position of any of my music programming informants, that is, of being plugged regularly in pursuit of daytime playlisting for new records. I was however in regular contact with specialist promotions companies, and often actively pursued the development of social contact with pluggers in Glasgow on tour with artists, or when on work or leisure trips to London. It was during that time that I developed a thorough understanding of the unique relationship that exists between pluggers and programmers (or DJs). Reflection on this experience was invaluable in constructing the question schedule and perhaps more so in the analysis of the results, informing that analysis but not imposing any preconceptions.

My employment in music radio could have resulted in a predisposition to emphasise the power of music radio in my analysis of empirical material. I do not believe that I have allowed that to happen, and I feel that my conclusions are based primarily on the evidence I uncovered. That is not to say that there was no possibility of subconscious bias, merely that my approach was to be aware of that possibility as much as was feasible in the context of the ethnographic analysis.

V PRODUCTION RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the intersection of the record industry and the radio industry in the UK, as defined by the cultural intermediaries that enact that relationship on a day-to-day basis. On the side of the radio industry are music programmers that choose records played on a station or a network of stations. Typical job titles include Head of Music, Music Scheduler, Music Executive and Producer. On the side of the record industry are the in-house and independent promotion companies who employ pluggers and promoters. The dynamics of the social (and arguably economic) interaction between programmers and pluggers is often characterised as 'symbiotic' (Barnes, 1988 and others, discussed in Chapter II), in the crude sense that radio needs music to fill airtime, and the record industry need radio play to sell records and build artist profile. My contention is that radio tends to hold the balance of power in most circumstances, and the consequences of that imbalance extend far beyond the simple equation 'no radio play = no hit record' (or visible artist profile).

These issues are particularly relevant in the UK because of the powerful effect of the BBC as a major cultural organisation working in a broadcasting market that is almost 50% commercial radio. One of the arguments I will come back to is that the BBC actually makes British commercial radio *better*, and this is why the UK is a very useful, even unique place to observe the relationship between music radio and the record industry [27]. The early years of the 21st century is the right time to do this research for several reasons. First, overall radio listening (and therefore listening to music radio) is increasing in Britain, though listening to the BBC stations is increasing disproportionately. To reach any sense of

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[27] In this I make the assumption that innovation and change in popular culture is a desirable end, and that risks are normally incurred if innovation is to take place. Due to its funding model, the BBC is well-placed to make decisions which would be considered risky by the commercial broadcasting sector. Those BBC decisions are however subject to cultural, political and social constraints.

understanding about how this may affect popular music and popular music culture, the relationship between music radio and the record industry requires close investigation. Secondly, contemporary obsessions with how digital technology will affect both record industry and music radio work to obscure the deeper processes in the relationship between those industries, and over-emphasise technology as the dominant determinant in those industries. However, if there is in the near future substantial reorganisation of either or both the record industry and music radio as a consequence of the use of different technologies of production, distribution and consumption, now is the time to capture existing practices and processes.

Much of the work on music radio programming focuses on the role of music radio in making records popular, particularly in North America (Ahlkvist, 2001; Ahlkvist and Faulkner, 2002; Lee, 2004) and addresses the relationship between airplay and record sales / artist media visibility. For a good example of how to approach this issue in the UK, see Hendy (2000b). While the question of how airplay relates to popularity of records is of ongoing concern for both the academy and the record industry, my interest lies in issues associated with choosing *which* records to play. In my interviews with programmers from BBC radio and commercial radio, and with pluggers and record promoters, I show that the negotiated relationship between these key intermediaries has consequences for the *sound* of popular music, not only as it is heard on radio, but in any form of music reproduction technology. There are two aspects of the production of music radio that contribute to the way in which the sound of popular music is modified. The first, and relatively straightforward aspect is that of technical production, and the technological manipulation of broadcast sound. The second is more complex in terms of analysis, but in essence it is that the shaping of the sound of popular music, and of popular music culture, is a consequence radio's choice and rejection of records.

Radio: technicalities and the production of popular music culture

Radio in general and music radio in particular has a set of culturally-driven aesthetic

standards which define how radio should sound. For music radio this means that there are a set of subjective and objective values attributed by radio professionals to the sound of 'good' radio (see Wilby and Conroy, 1994, and McLeish, 1999 for good examples of the technical standards and conventions of radio production). Part of the solution to the problem of making radio that matches those criteria is found in radio stations' application of audio processing to records. This processing is primarily compression, but also includes manipulation of frequency bands, low to high, at various gradations to effect often subtle changes to the sonic characteristics of records. The objective of radio station audio processing is to more closely match the sound of a record to radio industry conventions on what sounds good on radio, and often to more closely match a more specific 'station sound'.   The origins of those aesthetic values lie in the history of radio technology, and the modes of consumption of radio. Compression helps raise the overall perceived loudness of the audio signal, which can compensate for the limited bandwidth of an AM signal or a potentially noisy ambient environment, like a car or a public space.

As music is consumed through radio and associated technologies (online streaming, for example), the sounds of 'good' radio tend to become closely associated with how popular music *should* sound. The consequences of this manifestation of radio's power seem at first to be rather subtle - the audio dynamics of music are flattened out, the music sounds a little louder, perhaps the top end sparkles a little more and the low end pumps with a little more bass. However, I argue that the production process for many forms of popular music has assimilated radio notions of what sounds good, and producers at all levels routinely pre-apply radio-friendly audio processing to a record before it even reaches a music programmer. My own anecdotal experience of broadcasting, and of watching others broadcast, suggests that most radio stations do not use customised equalisation or compression settings to balance the sound of *individual* songs. Therefore the production and mastering process for much popular music must attempt to anticipate potential conditions of broadcasting, and apply a suitable compromise of audio processing which will make the record sound 'good' to a programmer, but not overly-processed when broadcast. Radio then changes the *sound* of records while it broadcasts those records, and the sheen

of radio sound changes two central processes in the formation of popular music culture: the way audiences hear popular music and the ways in which records are produced.

Radio: choosing and rejecting music

If the record industry continues to assume that radio is a key tool in the promotion of new records, the process of choosing and rejecting music for radio broadcast will continue to function like a feedback loop for the record industry. Choosing a record sends a positive signal that radio stations like the record (for whatever reason) and that record companies should produce *more* of the chosen style of music. Rejecting a record sends the opposite signal - produce *less* of the rejected style of music. My informants however suggest that this process is often open to negotiation, and that the choice/rejection opposition is far from clear-cut. Furthermore, the choice and rejection of records depends on a large number of variables, including: the format of the radio station; a radio station's policy regarding notions public service; research-informed or instinct-informed imaginings of audience; the national or international ambitions of the majority shareholder of a station or network. In my view however one of the most significant variables in the choice or rejection of records for radio play is the relationship between the programmer and the plugger, and in particular how both parties conceptualise 'good', or more accurately, 'appropriate' records.

For most radio programmers, understanding of the appropriateness or otherwise of records is informed by their imagining of audience. This notion of audience emerges from the interaction of three factors: quantitative and qualitative market research; direct feedback from audiences through email, text, telephone, letters and face to face contact at radio stations or in public spaces; instinct or gut-feeling. The relative influence of each of those factors in constructing the imagined audience varies according to the economic and ideological imperatives of a specific station or network, but a notion of audience remains at the heart of the majority of music programming decisions. If pluggers are good at their job, according to several of my respondents, they will anticipate a programmer's notion of audience and suggest records that are, to a greater or lesser extent, aligned with a

programmer's notion of what that audience will want to listen to. The problem is amplified in most daytime broadcasting by mainstream radio stations because they tend to want to programme music that their listeners like, but also music that their listeners do not *dislike* - music that might cause them to switch channels.

Thus the imperative to meet perceived audience needs or desires shapes the decision making process of radio programmers. Pluggers must then balance record company imperatives to have 'priority' records played on air against their own perception of a programmer's notion of audience. It is this dynamic in the relationship between plugger and programmer, and thus between radio and the record industry, that shape not only the commercial availability of popular music, but also the ways in which that popular music is heard and made sense of by audiences. This chapter explores this relationship from the perspective of pluggers and programmers and draws on that empirical material to show how radio has become a central influence on the sound of popular music.

Key areas of discussion in this chapter are:

- environment and influence;

- pluggers, programmers and the value of music;

- audiences;

- choosing music;

- plugging music;

- record formats;

- branding;

- power;

- relationships.

Before moving on to a full discussion and analysis of the interviews it is important to address two contextual issues which inform that discussion. The first is mobility and permeability in patterns of employment at the interface between the record industry and the radio industry. The second is change in production context between the time of the

interviews (2005) and the time of writing (2007).

Mobility and permeability

Previous work addressing the relationship between the radio industry and the record industry has tended to avoid addressing the fluid nature of the labour market at the surface where the two industries intersect. A clear understanding of this fluidity is necessary in order to make sense of how pluggers and programmers do their cultural work as key intermediaries. There are two issues here: the first, and perhaps most obvious, is that pluggers can change jobs within the record industry, and that programmers can do the same within the radio industry. A detailed account of the patterns of employment in the record industry and the radio industry is outwith the scope of this study, but in general terms whilst there is relative stability on both sides - the programmers and pluggers I spoke to have tended to stay in their jobs for a year or more - there is also *mobility*. Successful programmers are promoted into more strategic positions within a station or group; successful pluggers may move into other areas of promotion or set up independent plugging companies; others may leave the radio or record industry.

More significantly though, there is *permeability* at the surface defining the intersection between radio and the record industry. One interview subject started his career in RSL [28] radio, moved to major label in-house promotion, then returned to radio programming for a mainstream FM music network.   Another began his career as a independent record label owner, and is currently MD of an independent radio production company, after a number of years with the BBC. This has two implications: the first of these is that that some programmers and pluggers have direct experience of work done on the other side of the dividing surface between the record industry and radio industry. Therefore those

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[28] Restricted Service Licences (RSLs) are short term (up to 4 weeks long) analogue licences granted by Ofcom to permit broadcast at a local level. Typically these are used by special event radio stations, or companies using a short term broadcast to establish their viability as a potentially full-time station.

individuals should, in principle at least, have a more clear understanding of the cultural and economic imperatives of the other side of the relationship. The second implication is that a plugger-turned-programmer will inevitably be approached by pluggers they formerly knew as colleagues in same record company, or as competitors from a different record company. In either case there is there are several additional level of potential complexity: a former colleague may attempt to exploit a previously good relationship, or a former competitor might imagine discrimination in favour of a programmer's former colleagues in the record industry. Whilst there is little evidence in my interviews of either of these latter implications of permeability, it is a rarely discussed phenomenon which is worthy in itself of further exploration elsewhere.

Historical changes in production context

To make sense of some of the interview material, it is useful to touch on some of the changes in economic and organisational circumstances affecting both the record industry and the radio industry. It's not my intention to produce a comprehensive review of the political economy of radio and the record industry in the UK from 2004 to 2007, but some context is necessary.

Radio

In May 2005, Capital Radio Group plc and GWR Group plc (formerly Great Western Radio) merged to form GCap Media plc, which became the largest radio station group in the UK. Other than the name change to the parent company, a number of changes followed. In late 2005, GCap's Central Scotland station, Beat 106 was re-launched as part of the expanding XFM brand, joining XFM London (launched in 1997) and followed in March 2006 by XFM Manchester (MediaUK, 2007). During 2005, Beat moved away from the commercial dance music that had characterised its daytime output for the four previous years, and towards more guitar-based music. The XFM re-brand was a logical continuation of that process.

Emap also grew by acquisition, buying Scottish Radio Holdings in June 2005.

Record industry

Despite the rapid growth of legal music downloading, mainly through Apple's iTunes, the record industry has continued to warn of difficult trading conditions under which the reported decline in CD album sales was not yet balanced by the increase in income from downloads. If there is something approaching a balanced version of this story, it is obfuscated by the competing corporate priorities of not only the record industry, but also the interests of relatively new (music) market entrants like Apple. Whilst that story will undoubtedly be explored elsewhere by others, EMI's announcement of pre-tax losses of £263.6m (Milmo, 2007) in the financial year to 31 March 2007 indicates that there is a developing issue. It's possible to speculate that the on-going stock market interest in takeover bids for EMI may have had an influence on the way in which company trading has been represented by EMI.

The apparent economic pressure on the record industry in the UK means that it is likely to be even more important for pluggers to get records played on radio. To put it another way, there will be greater demand for the finite resource of airtime on successful radio stations. The consequence of this may be that the balance of power further shifts away from the record industry, towards radio and in particular towards the bigger commercial groups and the BBC.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Detail on my approach to interviewing and choice of participants is addressed in the methodology chapter, but a brief introduction of informants from both radio and the record industry is necessary context for the discussion and analysis below. Most interviews were

carried out in 2005, with two preliminary interviews in 2001 [29]. The job titles I use

throughout this chapter refer to the posts held by the participants at the time of the

interview. Where the job titles have changed since 2005, I have noted this. The

participants are presented here in alphabetical order by surname, and by industry (with the

radio industry workers listed first).

Radio

The job titles attached to names here refer to job titles at the time of the interview. For

example, Stewart Cruickshank was Senior Producer (Music) at BBC Radio Scotland when

the interview was carried out in August 2005. Quotations about what the job involves are

drawn from the interviews themselves, and reflect how informants understood their day-to-

day work at the time of the interviews.

- Stewart Cruickshank, Senior Producer (Music), BBC Radio Scotland.

Cruickshank was a Senior Producer, Music at Radio Scotland from 1990 to 2006, and prior

to that a gramophone librarian for BBC Scotland since the beginning of the 1980s.

His job title changed to Senior Producer, Contemporary Music in 1999. Cruickshank

became an independent producer in 2006 and continues to produce documentaries and

music programming for BBC Scotland and other BBC networks. In 2007 he is regular

Producer of Iain Anderson's daily Radio Scotland evening music show.

> The Senior Producer [for Contemporary Music] post is purely a programme making role … any form of music that isn't classical … jazz, folk, pop, rock … (Stewart Cruickshank, Senior Producer Music, BBC Radio Scotland).

- Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network.

Findlay in 2007 is Head of Music for The One Network, GCap Media, the company created

in May 2005 when Capital Radio Group merged with GWR Group.

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[29] Two preliminary interviews that helped to shape the final research approach with Lorna Clarke, then of BBC Radio 1, and Claire Pattenden, then Head of Music at Beat 106 in Scotland.

> I am at the moment looking after the music for 7 radio stations across the UK - they range from Beat 106 in Scotland ... [to] BRMB in Birmingham, Red Dragon in Cardiff, Power in Fareham, Fox in Oxford, Invicta in Kent and Southern in Brighton. What we do with the 6 stations (not including Beat) is we run pretty much one playlist for those stations, which is the FM Network Playlist (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

- Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1.

Jagpal has been in her current post at Radio 1 since 2005.

> [My job involves] looking after daytime music at Radio 1, the playlist process, working with the production teams regarding guests, music features, free choices [record chosen by individual programme producers and/or DJ's]. And what actual music gets scheduled in their show. I work very closely with the record industry, they spend a lot of time here because they want to get records on the playlist. I book artists for our events, like the Chart Show Live event at Shepherds Bush [Empire] … and the Big Weekend we do in May. Fingers in every single pie of Radio 1. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

- Nick Low, Managing Director, Demus Productions.

Low's company, Demus is an independent radio production company which supplied BBC

Radio Scotland with a specialist jazz show, Be-Bop To Hip Hop 1999-2006 and in 2007

continues to produce Janice Forsyth's mid-morning Saturday generalist music show.

Demus' other media activities include radio and television documentaries and comedy.

> Independent radio production is … taking ideas … to the BBC. If they like they will commission it for … a fee, and we will provide that programme. (Nick Low, Managing Director, Demus Productions).

- Kim MacNally, Research Manager, BBC Radio 2 and 6Music.

MacNally works primarily with RAJAR data, but also sets up and uses BBC audience focus

group research. Her role is to analyse research data and to report on that analysis to BBC

management and to production teams.

- Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2.

Martin was Head of Music at BBC Radio 2 from 2000 until his retirement in March 2007.

> My responsibility is to the musical sound of the network which includes what we play in terms

of core output, and what we select from new music. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

- Robert Noakes, Managing Director, Neon Productions.

Noakes' Glasgow-based independent production company is responsible for BBC Radio Scotland's weekly country music show. This show's name was Brand New Opry until 2005 and was renamed Brand New Country in 2006. Neon produce a range of other music and arts programming, primarily for the BBC.

- Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM.

Since late 2006, Smith has been Deputy Programme Controller at GCap Media, the company former by the merger of GWR and Capital Radio Group in 2005.

> I'm across two brands: Power FM is part of the Capital Regional Network, [and] is a younger 'Hot' format; Ocean … part of the Century group [and its format is] is '80s, 90s and Now'. In the past these two radio stations, owned by the same group have crossed over which was detrimental to each of their audiences. The reason I came in was to take Power younger, against its main competitor on the south coast which is Radio 1. I concentrate on the older audiences for Ocean. Both stations focus on female audiences - its not purely a female audience, but that's what radio targets these days. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

- Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio.

Uytman was promoted to Programme Director of Kerrang Radio in early 2006. He has been Programme Director for XFM London since October 2006.

> I programme West Midlands Kerrang and the national digital station. The job involves selecting playlist tracks, deciding what music to play on what list, scheduling music on a day-to-day basis. All the artist liaison, getting guests in, dealing with all the record companies, putting on music events for the station and in general everything else involved in the programming role. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

- Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network.

Following the completion of Capital Radio Group / GWR merger in 2005, Walsh became Head of Music for GCap North, then in 2006 Network Head of Music for XFM.

> I'm responsible for all the musical activity that surrounds [the] network, and also responsible for making sure that we have a coherent music policy that is designed to attract the most in-target listeners we can, and retain them for as long as possible. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Record industry

- Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions.

On A Plate is an independent promotions company which plugs records to commercial

radio stations. Cox has a client list of independent record labels and artists.

- Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records.

Since the end of 2006, Crain has been Radio Promotions Manager for Columbia Records.

> [It's about] making sure that regional radio stations across the UK, both BBC and commercial, have copies of our records and … are playing them. We supply them with content, like competitions, interviews and sessions with bands. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

- Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records.

Jacobs left the record industry in the first half of 2005.

> [My] job … was to get a record on as high a rotation as possible. If [I] can get a song played every hour on a radio station, the chances are that most of the population has heard it and will be inspired to go out and find it or … buy the album it's on. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

- Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK.

Smith left the record business for around a year in 2005, but has been an independent

Radio Promotions Consultant since 2006.

> In the 60s and 70s, the hey-day of plugging, they would phone up a producer directly and plug a specific song or artist. There's so much more to it now - it's no longer just single plays or single bands. You're dealing with such a high turnover of acts all the time - its about forming a business relationship between your company and the media you're speaking to. It's not only about one act, its about developing the relationship so you can play one act off another. You can supply certain content for them for one act to benefit a host of other acts. It's negotiation – its not just about what's good about [one specific] record. (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

- Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records.

Thomson left EMI in early 2007 and is now an independent Radio Promotions Consultant.

> … the promotions team is split into … national and regional. Two of us do regional. I do the north, from the M62 … to the north of Scotland. Adrian does the rest of the England, [and also] Wales and Ireland. The number of stations we cover is about the same. I'm sent [by Head Office] the records, singles, albums, compilation albums and DVDs [and] I have to promote them to radio and TV in my area. Nowadays there's less and less output of music and entertainment on regional TV [so] I mostly deal with commercial radio. The majority of the music we [EMI] have is not suitable for a lot of the BBC [local and regional] shows, unless they're specialist shows. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

ENVIRONMENT AND INFLUENCE

Broadcast radio in the UK operates within a regulated, competitive market dominated in terms of income and expenditure by the BBC and a small number of large commercial radio groups. There are a few smaller, independent radio groups and stations, but their influence and that of community and RSL radio in the market as a whole is minimal. RAJAR ratings for early 2007 show that the BBC was continuing a run of several years in which it has had consistently larger audiences than the combined audiences for all commercial radio. All BBC listening in that period was 56.0% of the available audience, commercial radio overall was 42.1%. In comparison, the figures for the same quarter in 2005 (when most of the interviews here were carried out) were all BBC listening at 54.2% and all commercial listening at 43.8%. The trend of gradually increasing audience share for the BBC has been developing since the late 1990s, with end-March 1999 figures of 50.1% for the BBC and 47.5% for commercial radio (RAJAR, 2007).

Crisell (2001) notes the rapid growth of UK commercial radio in the early-1990s after the 1990 Broadcasting Act and points to the moment in the first quarter of 1995 when commercial radio audience share first overtook that of the BBC. The strength of the BBC response to this unprecedented situation is evident in the late-1990s return to BBC dominance. Accounts of the BBC response to the threat from commercial radio, and the changing shape of radio broadcasting in the 1990s in general can be found in Crisell

(2001), Barnard (2000), Hendy (2000a) and more informally but equally good, Garfield (1998).

My first point here is that commercial radio stations in the UK are under competitive pressure from two sources in radio: the BBC and other commercial radio stations. Every commercial radio station in the UK is competing for a slice of a slowly shrinking market share. On the other hand, generalised national UK RAJAR ratings conceal a number of regional and local variations where the situation is not as bad for commercial radio as the headline figures suggest. Some commercial radio stations are achieving year-on-year growth in audience share - GCap's XFM London, for example (RAJAR, 2007). However, for any commercial radio station, bigger or better quality audiences mean more advertising revenue. Decreasing audience share means that commercial radio stations are more acutely aware of local and regional competition, and this has inevitable consequences for their approach to radio programming. Equally, the BBC national networks, Radio 1 and particularly Radio 2 are, through RAJAR ratings feedback, are reassured that their approach to music programming (and on-air talent) works, and that they should continue to do more of the same to help them extend their lead over commercial rivals (although this assumes that high ratings continue to be a primary objective of both stations).

My second point regards regulation. The 2003 Communications Act (Office of Public Sector Information, 2007) was a major piece of legislation that transformed regulation of communications media in the UK, which relaxed rules on cross-media ownership. The new rules helped precipitate a number of mergers and takeovers in the commercial radio sector, including the formation of GCap Media, from GWR and Capital Radio Group. One of the predicted effects of consolidation, based on observation of the US model of commercial radio addressed by amongst others, Ahlkvist (2001) and (2002), was that it would lead to centralised playlisting and less regional variation in programming. This research supports that thesis up to a point, but notes also that regional variation and local competition also influence music radio programming policy.

So why and how does this matter to popular music? Overall radio listening figures according to RAJAR remain high in early 2007, at around 90% of the UK population. This translates to around 45 million listeners tuning in to radio over the course of a week (Oatts, 2007). From the perspective of a record industry that perceives itself to be under threat in its core business of record sales, that's a large number of potential record buyers. The strength of the BBC in the UK radio market continues to give its national popular music radio stations, Radio 1 and Radio 2, significant power in any negotiation with the record industry. The consolidation of the commercial radio sector has led to a smaller number of larger radio groups, each of which will therefore have more leverage in its relationship with the record industry. The accompanying development of large regional network brands, like Century in the north-west of England, and even quasi-national brands like XFM further enhances the value of radio to the record industry.

The issues around market environment and influence fall into three broad categories, all of which constrain the decision making process for radio programmers: (i) the consequences of radio market consolidation in the UK; (ii) responses to playlists of competing radio stations; (iii) the perceived value of radio as a promotional tool for the record industry.

Consolidation

The processes of market consolidation in models in radio broadcasting have been are explored by McChesney (2003) who warns Britain against following the US approach to media market deregulation through the 1980s and 1990s:

> Since 1996 well over half of US stations have been sold, and a stunning consolidation has hit the industry. One firm, Clear Channel, now owns nearly 1,200 stations. Every market is dominated by two or three firms that own nearly all the stations between them. The firms have stripped radio of local content, especially journalism, and have substituted generic, inexpensive national programming. The amount of advertising and commercialism has increased. (McChesney, 2003:128-129).

It is true that the UK's 2003 Communications Act did relax rules on media ownership but the evidence I present here suggests that the consequences of that legislation have not been

as a swift or as clear cut as those described in McChesney's account of recent US radio history. Chambers (2003), working in the US, supports the argument that with less competition (in a more consolidated market) there tends to be less diversity in music sounds available to audiences. Whilst there is undoubtedly a complex and fascinating story to be explored here, involving cultural differences, the presence of the BBC and evolving approaches to enforcement of regulations, my interest is primarily in the effects of consolidation on music programming. Those dynamics often play out in non-obvious patterns, and in ways that provide an instructive alternative interpretation to more straightforward cause-and-effect accounts of commercial radio music programming. Lee (2004), for example, tackles the conventional thesis that increased consolidation in the radio market leads to reduced diversity of music output.

> … in spite of high market concentration and a centralized system of production [in the US] … radio industry format diversity was sustained because the loosening of ownership rules allowed radio owners to operate multiple stations in a market. This then allowed radio owners to pursue a niche bundling strategy which allowed format diversity to flourish in metropolitan markets which possessed a large carrying capacity (e.g. New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago). (Lee, 2004:339-340).

Put another way, where there are large, highly populous cities, there is a sufficiently diverse set of market demands to create format diversity, regardless of ownership concentration [30]. This can only really work properly in large countries with many large cities (the US, for example) - the only two cities in the UK that come close to population numbers where similar diversity might potentially have the same effect are London and Birmingham. In any case, the presence of the BBC ensures that the British radio market cannot function in the same way as that in the US.

In the UK market there is some evidence for both of these positions - yes, market consolidation tends to reduce overall diversity of output of popular music, but in areas of high population density, there is more competition, with arguably some increase in diversity of music output. However, both of those market tendencies are less significant in the UK

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[30] The corollary of this though is, as Lee points out, that in large, sparsely populated rural areas competition, diversity and choice are significantly reduced as a consequence of ownership consolidation.

than in the US. The presence of the BBC as a large and powerful public service

broadcaster significantly modifies the behaviour of commercial radio. There are two

national UK broadcast popular music networks from the BBC, and one from the commercial

sector (Virgin), all three of which compete against each other and a large number of

regional and local BBC and commercial radio stations. Beyond FM and AM radio, there are

further national BBC and quasi-national commercial digital radio stations. In other words,

there is a *national* dimension for radio in the UK that is not present in the US in any

significant way. Secondly, UK radio certainly understands itself in terms of formats, but

programming within those formats is far from the narrowly focused genre-based approach

typically adopted in the US (Barnes,1988). There have been changes in market regulation,

music genres and radio formats since the period discussed by Barnes, but the

fundamentals remain the same. Mainstream UK music radio formats are typically

constrained by target demographic rather than by genre (although there are a few

ostensibly genre-focused stations [31]), and this market research driven notion of format is

often invoked by my informants.

In the Capital Radio Group, for example, there is evidence that market consolidation tends

to lead to less diversity in playlists across stations operating in different regions. At the

same time there are attempts to address the different market conditions for individual radio

station in terms of local competition and notions of variation in regional audience music

tastes.

> What we do with the 6 [Capital FM Network] stations is we run pretty much one playlist for
> those stations ... the FM Network Playlist. [But] we have been spending a lot of time ... looking
> at ways of making that playlist work better for individual radio stations ... as opposed to
> assuming [that a] record [which] will work in the Birmingham market ... will also work in
> [Cardiff, or] on the south coast. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

So, Findlay acknowledges that a playlist constructed centrally in London is largely what the

6 individual Capital FM Network stations play around the UK, but stresses that the playlist

may be modified depending on local conditions. The objective of that local tinkering with a

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[31] In the Glasgow area, for example, a Classic Rock FM station launched in early 2007 - Rock Radio
96.3FM.

playlist is to maximise ratings in that local area. But Findlay argues that there is more at stake than simply local or regional listening figures.

> I think the crucial thing is that our radio stations are firstly local individual stations but can gain benefits by being part of something bigger, like the FM Network when it comes to bartering for acts for gigs or interviews. I think most of the big [radio owning] groups operate some kind of network playlist and they understand the power of being able to negotiate. When you actually go to them [the record industry] … and say ... 'We've got nearly 3m listeners [across 6 FM stations]' ... that's far more powerful than asking [a label or artist] to do something for [a single station with] 429,000. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

For commercial radio in the UK, this matters. The ability for a station owning group to offer a record company exposure on 6 or more stations strengthens the commercial radio negotiating position to the point where they can more effectively compete with Radio 1 and Radio 2. If this works as the bigger groups expect it to, they can run stations with a strong local or regional identity, backed by national UK levels of negotiating power. In terms of the record industry Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio for Polydor Records, believes that radio market consolidation makes it more likely that he'll accede to a request for a live appearance from a high profile performer with a hit record.

> … if Scottish Radio Holdings want to do a gig with Daniel Beddingfield that each station benefits from we'd be more likely to say yes to that than if [an individual SRH radio station] said ... 'I can help you'. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

However the consequences of having a single point of access to, and negotiation with a number of radio stations are both good and bad for pluggers.

> A good example is Emap, with the Big City Network … eight key city stations in the North-West and the North-East. They [have] a central playlist ... [so] when we plug radio regionally, if [we] can make that one person decide that they like that record, then [we've]got eight stations in a one-er. Which is great, and the influence of [those stations on sales and artist profile] is quite huge. Equally ... if they hate it, you're buggered basically, because you're not gonna get any access to that [radio] group. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

Market consolidation in radio raises the stakes for record companies. The payoff of successfully persuading a network Head of Music to playlist a record is significantly higher in a consolidated market, but the penalty of failure is that a large number of stations collectively will *not* be playing a new priority release. Crain agrees however that minor local variations in a network playlist are desirable, not simply because the local competitive environment is different, but because the record industry view is that there are differences

in musical taste across the UK .

> Music's still regional to an extent … [Emap] found things weren't working in certain towns but were in others. Manchester's a much more cosmopolitan town than Hull is … so Hull would love Ronan Keating and Manchester would love the Scissor Sisters, because they would 'get' them quicker. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

Andrew Thomson of EMI Records has a similar perspective:

> If all stations in a [radio] group have to play the same songs, it clearly doesn't work. For example, urban music is big in Newcastle, but guitar-bands are big in Manchester. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

Adam Uytman of Kerrang Radio, and formerly a music programmer at Scotland's Beat 106, agrees that there are recognisable national and regional variation in taste, but emphasises why that matters to record companies:

> The Scottish market is slightly different because it's still breaking its own records, and is a bit stand-alone. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

What's interesting about Uytman's position here is that there is an implication that *commercial* radio in Scotland plays a part in breaking new records, rather than following patterns of playlisting that are in essence derived from BBC Radio 1 and Radio 2.

Uytman also suggests that the conformity in playlisting across many UK music radio stations is only partly a consequence of centralised playlist decision making. He argues that the similarity of UK hits radio formats (across *different* station owning groups) has at least as much effect on lack of playlist diversity as consolidation of the radio market itself.

> Even though [some of the big radio groups] have devolved decision making to regions, the playlists will still be quite similar … the thing with CHR [Contemporary Hits Radio] stations is that the majority of the records they play will be [national UK] hits … and so they have to be quite similar around the country. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

So, if a station defines itself as a hits radio station then it is most like to play records are hits, or have been hits, or are very likely to be hits (at least in terms of the singles charts).

Overall then, informants in this research suggest that there are several consequences of radio market consolidation for the relationship between record company pluggers and radio

station Heads of Music:

(i) Network programmers are more likely to get what they want from record companies because they can offer bigger combined audiences across a number of regional radio stations;

(ii) The stakes are raised for pluggers because they can achieve greater returns on a single successful negotiation with a network Head of Music, but if the negotiation fails to yield a playlisting for a record, they lose the opportunity to have exposure of a large number of stations at the same time;

(iii) Centralised playlists may be modified according to local or regional conditions, which allows pluggers to compensate for failed attempts to get playlisting at regional levels, by pushing for plays at local level.

Competition

The competition for ratings between music radio stations at local, regional and national levels affects the records and the *kind* of records that are played on those stations. The discussion of market consolidation in radio is relevant here but perhaps in less obvious ways. Competition is associated by some authors with diversity of music format radio in the US radio market (Lee, 2004, for example). In the UK, the growth of commercial radio broadcasting in the 1980s and 1990s was largely driven by free-market ideological notions that suggested competition would indeed increase diversity and choice for the listener. Barnard (2000), Crisell (2002) and others have quite correctly refuted that argument and point to a large number of broadly similar CHR and what are now '80s, 90s and Now' formats. What I want to do in this section is look more closely at how a competitive radio market affects the process of negotiation between pluggers and music programmers.

With one exception all informants from the radio industry and the record industry

acknowledge that competition matters. That one exception is Colin Martin of BBC Radio 2, and I will return later to why Radio 2's Head of Music dismisses the notion of competition. Most interviewees make a distinction between competing stations from the BBC and those from the commercial sector. Similarly, there is a clear articulation of the regional variation in competition.

Mark Findlay, Capital FM Network's Head of Music sees the presence or otherwise of commercial rivals in UK regions as important in terms of a straightforward competition for available listeners. He also supports the argument (expressed earlier in this research project) that his playlist decisions are informed by market research which in this case indicates that often the same records 'test' well (they have positive responses from the audience research sample) across different regions and different station formats.

> The battle that BRMB or Red Dragon face in Birmingham or Cardiff where they're up against some very strong commercial competitors ... and the BBC is very different from a station like Invicta in Kent or Southern in Brighton where there are no major commercial competitors in that market place. [In those areas] the battle purely is against Radio 1, so [we] can do different things with those stations. [However] across the 6 main FM network stations ... most of the records that work really well, as we find out when we test them, work really well on all those formats. It's a constant battle against the BBC ... and it's been going on for 20 years. Radio 2 [is a] huge competitor for quite a lot of our stations. I don't think Radio 2 is sold on a music promise - I think they can get away with playing all the fantastic music that they play... [because] I think [listeners] choose it for Wogan and Jonathan Ross and Steve Wright ... and the music's almost a secondary thing. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay develops his network's position in relation to the BBC by characterising Radio 2 as a station that is able to play 'good' music by employing nationally recognised celebrity voices, which become the main attraction for listeners. This implies that the Capital FM Network stations either do not, or can not adopt the same approach and so must use music policy as a central strategy for building audiences. It is also true however that Capital's London-based flagship radio station employs high profile presenters in key times slots - the Capital Radio's breakfast show for example has been hosted by Chris Tarrant in the recent past and by is currently presented by Johnny Vaughn, both of whom became nationally known through television.

Clearly Findlay regards the BBC national popular music networks as key competitors, and given their UK dominance in RAJAR ratings, he is quite correct in this assumption. What is

perhaps a little more surprising is the contrasting attitude of Radio 1 and Radio 2 to their

commercial competitors. Radio 2's Head of Music, Colin Martin is clearly aware that

competitors exist, but is less concerned about their significance:

> They're not [important]. We decided in 2000 to exist as a stand-alone music radio station, within the UK. We felt that as a public service provider, we couldn't really go down the commercial route and we needed to stamp out some sort of independent ground of our own. Radio 2 had existed as a fairly comfortable, successful station up until that point in time, in which we had focused our output, you might say to a particular genre [of music], which was MOR [32] … we were looking towards an older audience ... We found that this wasn't actually serving a public need, because people like music whatever age they are and they like particular music. What we decided to do was to look at Radio 2 and see what we had missed - not what had gone wrong, because we hadn't gone wrong - but we needed to evolve as a station. The commercial element in commercial stations, they do it very well. But it's either driven by pop or it's driven by a particular genre (rock or hip hop or whatever). So we have gone for a genre-less station where we would embrace anybody who likes music, rather than a particular age group. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

Martin emphasises Radio 2's public service-ness by distancing Radio 2 from the

"commercial element" of commercial radio stations. Most BBC broadcasters would

probably adopt the same rhetoric, but what is more interesting is his contention that Radio 2

is a "genre-less" station. If this were true, it would therefore be either (a) easy for pluggers

to promote records from a plethora of genres, or (b) very difficult, because none of them

could be sure what "genre-less" meant.   It would be more accurate to say that while Radio

2 doesn't conform strictly to radio industry conventions of format radio, during the day it

tends to sound not far from the successful "80s, 90s and Now" format of regional networks

like Century in the north of England (despite Findlay's sense that Radio 2 "get away" with a

more adventurous programming policy). Where it deviates from that format is in its often

very specialist shows, and its wide coverage of diverse genres in evening and weekend

shows [see Appendix 5 for a Radio 2 Programme Schedule].

Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive at Radio 1, responsible for daytime music output,

also distinguishes the role of a BBC network radio station from that of commercial rivals,

and is similarly direct about the influence those competitors have on Radio 1's music policy:

> In terms of playlist, I wouldn't call it competition. We've got a very clear sort of remit …

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[32] MOR is an acronym for Middle of Road, and is generally used to describe any popular music form characterised by smooth sounds, high production values, highly melodic and generally inoffensive.

> supporting new music, supporting British music. A lot of the time, in terms of playlist we do go off on a whim, and do stuff that nobody else is going to do, which is what it should be. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Like Martin at Radio 2, this is statement of the BBC's public service-ness. Jagpal is clear that the BBC public service remit is expressed through Radio 1's commitment to finding and breaking new music and new (British) artists. The implicit point that this is not what the BBC's commercial radio competitors do. The use of the word "whim" captures the significance of the notion of gut feeling or instinct in making music programming decisions.

Hendy (2000b) argues that Radio 1's public service role is more than rhetoric of production staff, and that from the mid-1990s onwards there were a series of initiatives that have promoted innovation and led taste in UK popular music:

> … channels of communication were constructed within the station so that the music thus nurtured could move across a previously impermeable barrier into the mainstream of the daylight hours, with its big audience. Commercial radio, intrinsically more bound to habits of familiarity, has followed tentatively in its wake. In this sense - in extending choice, in reconstructing the British musical identity, in simply 'leading the way' - Radio 1 not only provides a useful contemporary illustration of Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries at work, it also suggests a public-service role for a pop station consistent with the BBC's publicly stated policies. (Hendy, 2000b:760).

According to Jagpal, however, there is more subtle process at work in establishing Radio 1's role as taste leader.

> … every week I will check to see what Capital have playlisted, [and also] Kiss, Galaxy, Beat. It's just good information awareness to see what your competitors are doing - how a record is shaping up, who else is coming onboard, [and if] they [are] playing anything that maybe we're not playing. But I wouldn't call it competing. It's more just information gathering. You've got to be aware of what the rest of the market's doing. I'll [also] look at TV station playlists, to see what MTV are up to, and I read certain press. I check on iTunes to see what's big on that. So there's lots of different areas you've got to keep a watchful eye on to see what music's getting exposed and to see how artists that we've invested in are getting picked up by the [other] media as well. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

The stations and networks Jagpal mentions are geographically spread around the UK, from Capital in London to Beat (now XFM) in Scotland. There is an emphasis on establishing Radio 1's *national* UK role, and resisting representations of Radio 1 as London-centric. This is more than public relations - if Radio 1 is going to fulfil a 'public service' role, it must be aware of national variations in music preference, and local broadcast competition.

Secondly, the representation of Radio 1 as leader of taste, rather than a reflector of taste filtered through market research, is further developed. One measure of the station's success as taste-leader is the extent to which it has correctly spotted new music that is subsequently adopted by other media in general and other radio stations in particular. Jagpal characterises the risk taken in supporting new artists as an investment. But what is being invested and what is the return on that investment? In a quantitative sense, what is being invested is airtime, measured in minutes, and in production costs for those minutes that might otherwise be allocated to less risky or more familiar music. A second risk is qualitative and more intangible. It is the risk of loss of cultural capital associated with making the wrong decision on which new artist or record to back. If the number of bad decisions becomes large enough, the station may be perceived by audiences and by the record industry as losing touch with new music. Radio 1 would then be less able to represent itself as a reliable arbiter of taste, which could damage its position as an icon of national public service radio and also reduce its power and influence *within* the BBC. The third and most important risk is that of falling ratings and leaking cultural capital as a consequence of those bad decisions. If the station is to continue to avoid these undesirable consequences, Radio 1 (and to an extent Radio 2) must continue to balance it's music output between higher risk public service and low risk, more familiar records.

The third point that Jagpal makes is that there is an awareness at Radio 1, that despite its specialist DJs and young, well connected staff, it will occasionally miss a trend, sound or artist that has emerged elsewhere and without Radio 1's patronage.   In order to avoid criticism from both within and outside the BBC, it is clearly wise for Radio 1 not to assume that it alone is a taste-maker for UK popular music. The station must be aware of other routes through which the record industry breaks artists, and to make sure that if Radio 1 *hasn't* picked up on, say, a new artist, there is a reasonable explanation.

Colin Martin at Radio 2 more-or-less rules out the influence of commercial music radio competition on his programming policy. Jagpal at Radio 1 is a little more measured in her assessment of Radio 1's leadership in breaking new artists and records - she

acknowledges that new sounds and trends can emerge elsewhere, even in commercial

music radio. Most respondents, pluggers and programmers, tended to view the BBC

networks as being most likely to be able to break the newest records, but some claimed

that if a suitable new release comes along, they are prepared to risk an upfront decision.

> Some records, [I] just hear ... and [I think], 'You know what, it doesn't really matter if it's not getting played anywhere else - it's just a fantastic record for us' ... and within two or three listens, our target audience will be singing along to it. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Walsh concedes that this doesn't happen often, and later in this chapter, I will be trying to

pin down what it is about a new record that convinces him and other programmers to add it

to a playlist. He is not alone in his argument that commercial radio can lead the way on

programming new records that the BBC national networks have missed, or ignored. Jay

Smith of Ocean FM and Power FM is clear that whilst he does check out the competition,

that there are times when it can be important to be seen to take the lead.

> Do we look at other stations' playlists? Absolutely. I look at everything they do very closely, and I look at the music video channels and I weigh things up … we do take punts with some things before Radio 1. The way it works at Radio 1 is that often [a record is first played on] specialist shows. Specialist producers then bring those records to a playlist meeting and they get it on the daytime playlist. But if we really believe in a record and we think it's great, I'm not waiting for someone else to make a call on it - it's important to lead. There has to be an element of risk and excitement - specially for a young audience, who are really enthusiastic about new music. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

The reward for the risk taken on a new record, for Smith at least is in part being *seen* to

take risks by their target audience, and perhaps by other radio stations. Smith and Walsh

perceive a value measured in cultural as well as economic capital in being judged by their

peers and audience to be *right* about their predictions of hits.

Programmers from commercial music radio and record industry pluggers agree that there is

a considerable amount of monitoring other station playlists, but are divided on the level of

influence of each of the BBC national networks in relation to other commercial stations. Jay

Cox of independent plugging company On A Plate suggests that much of the playlist-

checking process is driven by a desire *not* to be left behind on a hit record (rather than

getting credit for being first to spot a hit):

> Yeah, [music programming is] quite reactive - [Radio stations] do look at other [station] playlists. There's always the fear of being the one not playing [a record] when everyone else is, much more than 'I'm going to play this first because I like it'. It's led by … Radio 2. Gone are the days that commercial radio looked towards what Radio 1 is doing. They look more towards [other commercial radio stations] now. You'll have a lot of smaller stations looking at GCap because if you're a small station you want to be playing something that will be a hit. And if 50 other stations are playing the song, the chances are that it will end up in the chart somewhere. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

For the stations with which Cox is dealing there is a hierarchy of influence and innovation in music programming. BBC Radio 2 is by some margin the most listened to radio station in the UK [33] and Cox believes that it takes the lead in music radio programming for most commercial radio stations. As a corollary he contends that Radio 1 is no longer a key influence for UK commercial music radio and smaller commercial stations and groups look to the larger, more economically powerful groups like GCap to take the lead on new music programming.

Andrew Thomson, regional plugger for EMI Records sees the role of Radio 1 somewhat differently to Cox:

> Everyone looks at Radio 1 … they can go with stuff a bit earlier. Maybe other stations will go with something if Radio 1 has playlisted. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

However, he agrees that commercial music radio station playlists can be used by pluggers in the process of persuading other stations to playlist the same record.

> If [EMI has] … a record on the Galaxy Stations down south, or GWR or Capital - I can bring that information to my radio stations [in the north of the UK] and it all helps [to persuade them]. People at radio stations don't want to stick their neck out and play a record that is going to go in at 85 and no-one's ever going to hear again. If they stick that straight on the A-list 4 weeks up front and they're the only people playing it [they'll lose listeners]. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

Thomson's perception of music programmers as risk-averse appears to be at odds with the positions taken by Walsh and Jay Smith, and more in line with dominant academic and

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[33] Quarter 1 RAJAR figures for 2007 give BBC Radio 2 an average of 13,252,000 15+ year old listeners per week, comfortably ahead of Radio 1's 10,549,000. The nearest single commercial group figure is Emap with all of its stations together totalling 9,422,000. GCap figures are divided into national brands (9,199,000) and local brands (9,308,000). It should be remembered that the BBC figures are for single stations across the UK and the commercial figures combine listening to a large number of regional and local stations.

industry discourses of UK commercial music radio as intrinsically conservative. The risk is primarily economic - if listeners are lost, then advertising revenue falls. This though does not mean that commercial radio programmers will not take *any* risks in playlisting records. It means that the economic imperatives that constrain the choice of music reduce the probability of risk taking behaviour.

One of the solutions adopted by pluggers to attempt to deal with both risk-averse radio stations and those that do not wish to be left behind on hit records is to conceptualise promotional campaigns for new records as developing narratives.   'Plot' or 'story' is shorthand for information on who else is playlisting a record and, more importantly for the record company, *when* they started playing it. Adam Uytman is in no doubt about the significance of Radio 1:

> [Record company pluggers] come to us and play us a record, and I say, this is what I think of it, tell us more about the plot. The plot's very important. If they can say Radio 1 is playing the record that's quite important to the majority of radio stations in the UK. If [record companies] get that national support, they'll start getting those regional plays. On the other hand, if a record is getting massive amount of regional plays, then Radio 1 need to look that and take it very seriously. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Mark Findlay agrees with Uytman - the level of support from other radio stations and other media can be crucial:

> … if I'm going to add a record to the playlist, I need to know that the record label is really behind it … that this song is going to be all over the TV channels, it's gonna be on Parkinson [Radio 2], it's gonna be on Emap, it's gonna be on GWR, all these different outlets. I need to believe the record label when they tell me that this is really gonna be a well-exposed record. Because that then gives me the confidence of increasing its rotation, knowing that every play I give it, it's also got a ubiquity elsewhere, that's making it more popular with my target audience. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

A former record company plugger is more blunt about using commercial radio stations to influence each other's decision making:

> If GWR [now merged with Capital as GCap] started to play a record, and they owned 17 or 18 stations in the south and midlands, we'd then go to [other station groups] and say, 'Look GWR are playing it, so why aren't you?'. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

If it possible to persuade radio stations to playlist a record because other stations are playing it, it is equally possible for radio stations to refuse to playlist a record because other

radio stations are *not* playing that record.

> ... a decision that Beat 106 have made on a record could influence Clyde 1. Neither will admit it, but they know that they are both looking at each other - they're next door neighbours and they're checking what colour [the other's] door is.   They keep an eye on it. There are good sides to that because you can get in the sneaky back door [by saying that the other station is playing the record], and bad sides because it sometimes ruins the whole thing altogether [both stations know that neither is playing the record]. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

So for pluggers, competition in the UK music radio market matters because of the opportunity it offers as a tool of persuasion. It is also a threat to their objective of getting the maximum number of plays for new records because of the effort required to convince the a station or station group to go with a new record before any of the others.

The distinctions between digital audio broadcasting (DAB) and analogue FM broadcasting are interesting, but not central to my arguments in this chapter, mainly because national audiences for digital radio in the UK are still relatively small. One informant though was in a unique position to comment on how the two delivery technologies lead to two different approaches to the notion of competition. Adam Uytman moved to Birmingham-based Kerrang Radio as Head of Music from Beat 106 in Scotland in 2005 because Kerrang brand owner Emap had recently won a West Midlands FM licence to accompany its national digital rock licence. Prior to the FM licence award the UK national digital Kerrang Radio station had used a jukebox format for its rock music programming - back-to-back records between pre-recorded station idents, promotional material and some advertising. The (licence winning) approach for the FM station would be different:

> The FM service in Birmingham … has been designed with an FM market in mind. The sort of stations we're up against in the FM market are BRMB, your standard CHR radio, Heart, Radio 1 (though they don't actually play that much rock during the day), [and] Saga [34]. There's no other rock station. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman maintains that regional variations in taste inform programming decisions, with allusions to the area's historical association with late 1960s / early 1970s hard rock and heavy metal bands like Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple.

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[34] Rebranded across the UK in 2007 as Smooth FM.

> With the West Midlands we take into account the history of the area we play a bit more classic rock, AC/DC, Zeppelin, Sabbath [but also] Nirvana and Pearl Jam … rock is rooted in the West Midlands - there's a lot of musical heritage there. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

There is clearly an anecdotal sense that place matters to rock, and there is a significant and often rigorous body of work in the academy that supports that notion (Frith, 1997; Olson, 1998; Forman, 2002 and many others). If place matters to rock, Uytman's logic is that place also matters to a rock radio station.

The challenge facing the then-newly launched Kerrang 105.2 FM was to do something quite different to the niche-market, brand-extension of the digital-only station - the new station had to capture and keep the FM listener. Uytman's task was to develop a strategy that would allow Kerrang to capture audience from existing FM stations, whilst not alienating a hard-core rock audience.

> We're competing against poppier stations, so we actually widen the musical choice in that we still play Slipknot - but not at breakfast [because] that would scare off the FM listener! We do play [Slipknot] at night, and in the afternoon sometimes. We [also] play Coldplay … to give cross-over with the other FM stations that are on the dial, because obviously FM listening patterns are very different to digital stations. We kind of plan … to pull listeners across from other radio stations. At this early stage we need that bit of crossover, that bit of familiarity with records they'd hear elsewhere - we play it a little bit safer with the FM channel. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

The Kerrang FM launch year strategy was to look at what competing local stations were programming, and move their rock programming at least part of the way towards CHR. Uytman (and other informants) see FM listeners as more mainstream (by which I believe he means 'more female', as will become apparent later in this chapter), less musically adventurous and more wary of what they might perceive as a genre-specific radio station. In that first year the station was also playing some hip-hop records because local competitor, Galaxy FM had a playlist dominated by urban styles. Uytman describes digital listening as niche or specialist, which implies a comparatively small listening audience. In the case of Kerrang FM at least, competition appears to have been a key factor in reducing the amount of generically 'rock' records that made it onto the playlist. The extent to which that was successful in terms of ratings success is evident in RAJAR figures between 2005 and 2007 which show an upward trend in both listener numbers (from 256,000 in its first

quarter to 405,000 in late 2006) and market share (from 2.4% at launch to maximum of 4.4% in the last quarter of 2006, according to RAJAR (2007)). The overall sound if the station in 2007 is more alternative than rock, and there is no hip hop on the daytime playlist (see Appendix 6).

PLUGGERS, PROGRAMMERS AND THE VALUE OF MUSIC RADIO

In Chapter I, I introduced arguments about how and why radio matters to the record industry, and in this section I develop those arguments. As I've noted elsewhere in this thesis, that this *inter-industry* relationship is typically represented in literature from a variety of disciplines as primarily (political) economic. The economic argument has two strands: first, the belief shared by radio and the record industry that airplay will normally translate into immediate sales and/or increased artist media profile (increasing longer term sales); second that airplay generates royalty payments, mediated by collection agencies like PPL, to publishers, record companies and artists. It is the first of these strands that concerns me here because for pluggers and programmers the issue of royalty payments is secondary to their core activities and has little, if any impact on their relationship or decision making process. In other words then, it is someone else's job to worry about that part of the economics of the industry. This is a reflection of what I am really interested in here: the ways in which music programmers and record pluggers understand the *value* of music radio to the record industry. Almost all of my informants remain convinced that radio is central to the process of making records into hits, or artists into stars - but equally they see radio as being *part* of a larger system of channels through which recorded music is made available for evaluation and consumption by fans.

Perhaps predictably the BBC stations represent their role as a public service that adds value to music as culture, rather than economic value to music as industry. That is not to say however that programmers do not understand the economic value of airplay and the power they wield as a consequence of their large national audience.

Sarita Jagpal is pragmatic about the changing competitive environment in which Radio 1 has lost its once dominant position as hit and taste maker.

> Yeah, maybe 10 years ago Radio 1 was the huge beast but now the whole landscape has changed. The amount of radio stations [there are now] … FM … digital stations, the way young audiences use the Internet, the whole MySpace phenomenon. In terms of new music it moves so quickly now. Before, [audiences] had to tune in to Radio 1 to hear what was new, but now if you want to find out about new music there are just so many different ways to consume it. So for us it means … we've got to be on our game, like two steps ahead of our audience. Which is why our specialist shows are really important - they represent the experts in their field … We use our specialist shows a lot as a kind of feed in to the playlist process. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Jagpal's conceptualises Radio 1's value to music in 2005 as being little changed from its role in the past, that is, to find and play new music first. Implicit in this notion of value to music is a sense of service to a 'public' that wants to hear new music, or from a more paternalistic Reithian perspective *should* hear new music. In this account of the 'good' that Radio 1 represents, the economic value to the record industry is incidental. Jagpal emphasises that the many new channels through which music consumers can access new music do not deflect Radio 1 from this central mission. Those new channels mean that to meet that remit, Radio 1 must respond quickly to rapidly emerging new sounds, trends or artists. The station's specialist music shows are represented as the central weapon in that struggle to stay "ahead of the audience". Underlying all of this is the sense that Radio 1's public service role is defined as much by Reithian notions of education and information, as much as by the ratings-driven provision of entertainment.

In contrast to the public service perspective of Radio 1, Adam Uytman of Kerrang Radio sees the function of music radio for the record industry in terms of economics.

> It is incredibly important. At the end of the day, radio is where you actually hear the record that you'll go out and buy. I think it's more important than press - you can read about a record, but you're still none the wiser. It's just one guy's opinion on a record. On radio it's on in the car, subliminally in the background, in shops, in restaurants. With TV you can see and hear the song, but you can't take it with you. [Record companies] obviously see the power of national radio and their priorities are the Radio 1s and Radio 2s and so on. But most record companies understand that outwith of that regional radio is still [very] important as well. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman raises two key issues, the first of which is an emphasis on the unique qualities of radio as a *medium*. He echoes the argument of Frith (1981) and others, which is that the

best possible form of advertising for a record is for that record to be heard. Whilst that is

still essentially true, Uytman's critique of print media should be considered in the context of

a broadband Internet environment in which reading about a new record can quickly

translate into listening to a 30 second clip of that record on iTunes, after which the song

might be purchased online. This is not the same experience as hearing a record in its

entirety on a radio station perhaps, but it is an indication of the changing relationship

between the printed word and popular music. Similarly Uytman's point about the non-

portability of television is also still essentially true, although it now possible to use a portable

communications device to access television programming. However, regardless of how

portable those devices may become, or how successful the concept of mobile television

proves to be, the non-visual audio-only stream of radio will allow it to remain pervasive in

both the public and the private spheres.

The second issue Uytman raises is the power of national radio in relation to that of regional

(commercial) radio. Whilst he adds an "and so on" to his short list of BBC national radio

stations, there is only one more national popular music radio station in the UK - Virgin

Radio on AM. He acknowledges that record companies perceive Radio 1 and Radio 2 as

the preferred radio promotional tools for new records, but that "most" record companies

also value regional commercial radio. This tends to confirm the hierarchy of power and

influence in UK music radio, first addressed in the preceding section of this chapter.

The perception of hierarchy is confirmed by Alan Smith, formerly of Warners Records:

> I think regional promotion to commercial radio is still important for certain types of acts, but
> there's a lot of acts where it's entirely irrelevant. You're gonna break through national radio ...
> national radio is entirely different [to regional radio]. People still listen to it to find out what's
> happening [in new music]. You're not going to listen to Clyde 1 if you want to hear what is
> cutting edge. Radio 2 is absolutely more cutting edge than commercial radio. [For example]
> Michael Bublé has [gone] platinum in this country based on [airplay on] Radio 2 and [live]
> performances on Michael Parkinson's Radio 2 show. (Alan Smith, former Regional
> Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

Smith's hierarchy develops the notion that UK national radio (by which he means Radio 1

and Radio 2) is clearly more important in terms of leading music taste and encouraging

record buying. He positions national radio as "cutting edge" in the sense that it finds and

breaks new records - and therefore this is what regional commercial radio does *not* do. This distinction means that for some artists, for Smith at least, regional radio can be "entirely irrelevant" to the process of breaking new records and artists.

Another record company promotions manager sees regional radio's lack of cutting edge as a positive attribute which allows it to act in a supporting role to national radio, at least as far as record company objectives are concerned (in this case, influencing record buying):

> National radio has a sharper influence on … record buying. Regional radio is a bit more of a wallpaper scenario … [in which record buyers] hear records on a regular basis … [Records] need to be heard lots of times for people to make a decision on whether they want to own that record. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

The record industry may rely on national radio to get new artists or records on air for the first time, but they recognise the value of the repeated plays on regional radio stations over an extended length of time. It is this longer term radio play on commercial radio, after those records are no longer regularly played on Radio 1 or Radio 2, that is less about raw sales of records and more about maintaining awareness of artists amongst the listening audience.

> Radio generally is important in the long term, because well after a single is out and an artist is established, you're still hearing them in the radio … if radio stick with an artist, an artist will survive … classic hits that you hear every day on your local commercial radio station stay alive and survive because radio keep playing them. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

Smith, formerly of Warners, agrees and is more positive here about the value of regional commercial radio:

> ... it's about establishing familiarity with the artist. I remember a [former A&R boss] once said to me '[Commercial radio] doesn't sell singles, it sells albums' … [Most commercial radio audiences] aren't people who will listen to Radio 1, they're not early [adopters] of anything [so] they'll probably come along a bit later when it's not quite so cool. (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

This develops the hierarchy of influence in which are situated national BBC radio and regional commercial radio and their respective audiences. The national public service radio stations are characterised once again as taste leaders with "early adopter" listeners. The regional commercial stations are represented as followers, along with their audience. What is interesting here though is the use of 'cool'-ness as a property possessed more by the

national BBC stations, than the regional commercial stations. The issue of cool-ness, particularly in relation to its desirability or otherwise, will return later in this chapter in the discussion of imagined audiences.

AUDIENCES

Notions of audience are central to both the BBC to the commercial radio sector in the UK. This was not always the case - Rothenbuhler quotes Frith, "The BBC is contemptuously certain that Radio 1 satisfies its listeners, but it can only be so certain because its argument is circular... The BBC moulds as well as responds to public taste" (Frith, 1978:91, from Rothenbuhler, in Lull, 1987:79). Rothenbuhler himself adds, nearly 10 years after Frith, "except as a mental image held by the programmers, the audience enters little into programming decision making" (Rothenbuhler, in Lull, 1987:89). This reflects a mid-1980s US commercial radio market, very different to the early 2000s UK radio environment. For the BBC, the imagined audience is the 'public' to which it has a formal responsibility in terms of its charter. For commercial radio, the imagined audience is a research generated demographic slice of the listening population that is desirable to advertisers - commercial radio notions of who is listening (or who they *want* to have listening) are informed primarily by the audience that the *research* reports. In this section I address the ways in which audiences are imagined by music radio programmers, and how the imagined audience works to shape programming strategies. Previous work in this area has tackled the evolution of programming strategies in the US, where commercial radio is the overwhelmingly dominant form of radio broadcasting. For examples of some of the more interesting work on music radio programming in the US, see Rothenbuhler and McCourt (1992), Ahlkvist (2001) and Ahlkvist and Faulkner (2002). The presence of the BBC as dominant radio broadcaster in the UK means that British commercial radio operates in a competitive environment significantly different to that of the US. This section addresses some of the consequences of that difference in terms of the significance of audience as a core parameter in generating programming strategies.

The perceived value and influence of radio is closely associated with audience ratings, both in terms of total listening figures and in socio-economic status of listeners. RAJAR ratings provide both of those sets of data to the subscribing broadcasting organisations (the BBC and the commercial radio industry) and it is this information that shapes the imagined audience. All the music programmers interviewed in this research place audience at the centre of their programming strategies. The picture of listeners they build matters in different ways and for different reasons, but even those who claim to favour 'instinct' over music research believe that they understand what music their audience will enjoy.

The expansion and consolidation of the radio industry in the UK and elsewhere has been accompanied by a move towards more conservative music radio programming. This process, described by Berland (1990) as techno-rationalisation, is accelerated in the UK by a regulatory environment and historical context which discourages the development of genre-defined format radio and encourages the pursuit of a mainstream radio audience as a strategy for maximising ratings. In most parts of the UK then, most radio stations are competing for very similar audiences. The consequences of this are twofold: firstly the same kinds of records tend to be programmed at the same times of days by competing stations; secondly fine distinctions between audiences become crucial, so the value of audience research increases.

Mike Walsh of the Century FM Network is aware of being perceived as working in a market research driven business:

> Certainly the music industry thinks we're over-researched. I remember sitting in a meeting once with the MD of a record label ... and he said to me, and I think he was unusually honest for a music MD, 'The music industry in the UK is proudly mediaeval - we don't have a fucking clue about research, we never have, and possibly never will'. That's a little bit of an exaggeration because some labels like Virgin are actually quite good at doing research. When Hugh Goldsmith was running the Innocent label, and he produced all those fantastically big albums by Atomic Kitten and Blue … they were all researched. Target audience focus groups were set up [to ask] which are the best songs on this album as singles. That's unusual. But I think the general consensus in the music industry is 'Don't give them what they tell you they want - give them what they don't know they want.' Which in some A&R areas is absolutely the thing to do [otherwise there would be no innovation in popular music] ... But that's not the part of the music industry that I'm in. That's the Fopp end [Scottish based chain of independent specialist music stores, in receivership since early July 2007], and I'm in the Sainsbury's end or the Tesco end. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Walsh believes that the record industry sees music radio as being "over researched", but this accusation can seem disingenuous when some pop labels do extensive market research themselves. For Walsh, a former plugger for EMI, the record industry doesn't normally take the research approach, preferring to give record buyers "what they do not know they want". This may sound more than a little Reithian, but it is a long-established strategy in a record industry where getting to first to market with new commercially viable sounds or artists can deliver large financial rewards (Frith, 1981). There is a conceptual gulf between market research driven commercial radio, which attempts to give their audience what they know they already want, and a record industry that needs radio to be open to novelty. This then is a tension in the relationship between pluggers and programmers - as in so many relationships, they want different things. The different imperatives of programmers and pluggers are the defining characteristic of that relationship, and much of the rest of this chapter is about how those differences are conceptualised and negotiated. The last point Walsh makes here is instructive. He sees his commercial music radio stations as analogous to the most mainstream of mainstream retailing of popular music - the supermarket. Supermarket CD retail is characterised by a very small number of the highest selling releases, aggressively discounted and purchased by casual or impulse shoppers alongside the weekly groceries. In contrast, Walsh invokes the relatively specialist independent record retail chain, Fopp. Although far from the exclusivist environment so accurately represented in Nick Hornby's (1995) *High Fidelity* (in print and on the screen), Fopp's customers are more likely to be music fans than grocery shoppers. Walsh is happy then to compare his network to mainstream supermarket retailers, with connotations of the mainstream middle-market, serving an apparently clearly market researched consumer demand.

There are ambiguous responses amongst music programmers to the value of music research. In some cases, programmers can be defensive about suggestions that music research doesn't present an accurate or useful picture of audience taste:

> We do the 'Call-Out' [telephone survey] research and we're now doing a lot of stuff online. We [also] put 100-150 people in a room and get them to listen to 500 clips of songs and measure [the audience reaction]. I've heard so many arguments about how music research is bollocks -

> well, if it was bollocks, why would it be that all across the UK, in different radio stations in different groups, we all find that the same records test [positively]? (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

The music research to which Findlay is referring is normally called auditorium testing, commonly carried out by market research companies on behalf of radio stations or networks. Typically a radio station indicates the demographic they wish to target (based on preliminary market research), and the research company finds a sample of listeners and non-listeners to music test within that demographic. The clips of music are short, usually around 30 seconds, and are normally the chorus or hook of the song. Research subjects are normally asked how much they would like to hear that song on the radio, which is a subtly different question to 'How much do you like this song?'.   There are of course methodological issues here, as there are with any focus group research. How are non-listeners found? What is 'non-listening' anyway?   What does it mean to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 how much one would like to hear a song on the radio? These are real issues, but in many ways they are a distraction from more interesting questions: what do music programmers *do* with the data from this form of market research? How does it work to shape their notion of audience? How does that inform their programming strategy? It the answers to *these* questions that have consequences for the sound and the culture of popular music, and it is these issues I explore in the following pages.

Findlay's point that research works because the same records test well all over the UK is interesting. The argument is deployed here to support music research as a fair and accurate tool for helping programmers to choose records. If it is true that the same records do test positively across regions and formats, there are two depressing implications. The first of these is that the research methodology may be flawed at some level and tends to produce a bias towards a certain set of results, regardless of other variables. This may be the case, but the international professional association of market researchers, the Market Research Society (MRS), spends time and money attempting to reassure their members' clients that the research data produced by their members is as accurate and reliable as possible (Market Research Society, 2007). If the research methodology is indeed flawed, the results produced may not be valid, and will tend to reproduce and reinforce notions of a

conservative listening audience.

The second implication is that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with music testing methodology and that audiences across the UK really do want to hear the same relatively familiar unchallenging sounds in their commercial music radio stations. This however contradicts a number of my informants who maintain that there are regional UK variations in music preference. In both cases though, commercial radio programmers tend to construct a notion of audience that constrains their choice of music, and the effectiveness of those decisions is reflected in the quarterly RAJAR ratings.

Again, the important issue is not whether there are flaws in market research methodology, it is what music radio programmers do with that data that matters. For example, radio audience research reported by my informants tends to emphasise the dominant role of women in certain strands of consumer decision making. Consequently many music programmers for mainstream hits radio conceptualise their target audience as being women:

> Let's just say ... our target audience was 25-34 and we wanted to target predominantly females, because women are much more pernickety about what they listen to ... [Our research shows] that if men are going to pick a radio station for the music, the chances are that they aren't going pick one of our stations. They'll pick XFM or Choice or Kiss - they'll go for a specialist format rather than just a commercial hit radio station, which is what we are. So if we get the music right for the females that are listening to our station, the chances are that the men will come along with them. We've been doing that for a long time - we've always had music focused towards women. But most of our stations are balanced, when RAJAR comes out, pretty much 50/50. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

There are several gender-based (and contradictory) characterisations here. Findlay's market research data suggests that women are apparently both more and less discerning in what they want from a commercial music radio station. They are not driven by an interest in specialist music genres (as Findlay suggests that men are) but at the same time they know what they like from a generalist hit radio station. There is an implicit judgement here that in a communal listening environment, public or private, that women call the shots on radio listening decisions and the men around those women will therefore also listen to those chosen stations. Programming strategy then is to target women listeners in order to attract a gender balanced set of RAJAR ratings.

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM puts it less formally:

> … once you get the women in, you get the men in. They make the decisions on radio stations and the partners listen in. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

Mike Walsh at the Century FM Network describes refinement of this programming approach, commonly used in UK music radio, by commercial stations and by the BBC.

> Marketing Directors and Programme Directors talk about a 'brand focus' ... [ours is] a 25-44 demographic, both male and female. Within that there are lots of different types of people. So [we] focus on a slice of that demographic that becomes the central cell of who [we're] targeting. I think Radio 1 still talk about a 19 year old female. I know that the Capital Contemporary Hits network talk about a 27 year old female. We talk about a 33 year old female, who [is] … married with two kids. ... And we've given her a name - we call her Debbie. And quite often, working within my network, [I'll] hear people [ask] 'Will Debbie like this?', 'Is this Debbie-friendly, is this something that will engage her emotionally?' It's almost like she's the filter ... that we put a lot of our programming and marketing decisions through ... by being incredibly tight in your focus on a particular demographic, you actually produce a far better product, that is attractive to people outside of that demographic. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

So, many music radio programmers have an imagined audience which is built on an idealised notional individual who becomes an archetype representing the collective values and tastes of a large number of demographically desirable individuals. If market research has become so central to music playlist decisions, to what extent are music programmers able to exercise professional judgement outside of that data? More directly, why does it matter who a music programmer is if all they are doing is filtering market research? Music programmers are divided on the answer to the first of these questions - there is a sense that variables like format, ownership and corporate policy constrain programmers' freedom to make judgement calls. There is less ambiguity from programmers on the second question - part of their perception of their own professional activity is that they *are* able to exercise judgement and make decisions that are not contingent solely on market research. In this model of how these professionals understand their work, it *does* matter who programmers are, and the core attributes of a good music programmer are intangible notions of instinct and gut feeling:

> As a company we spend just short of 3 million pounds [every year] doing research into our product across all of our brands and a lot of that money is spent on researching the music that we play ... but in terms of selection of songs, that … has to come down to gut feel, about what we think is right for our radio stations. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

> Some of it is instinct, based on experience of working in music and music radio for 15 years … and having an idea of what is commercially effective and what isn't commercially effective, when you're trying to attract a mass audience. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Findlay refers to "gut feel" and Walsh to "instinct", which in this context represents their subjective experience of internalised rules constructed over many years in radio. What they 'know' is that certain records, certain *sounds* have helped their stations achieve their primary objectives - increased audience and so increased revenue.   Music research can provide raw data, but programmers understand their work in terms of the interpretation and application of that data.

The attitude to, and use of research at BBC Radio 1 is similar to that of the large commercial station groups represented by Walsh and Findlay, above.

> We have a research department that researches audiences, like how often they go gigging or do they go to the movies? We do call-out research once every 3 weeks, which is where we phone someone up and play them hooks down the phone. We've also been trying out online research which we get every week, but to be honest … we don't really share that information with anyone in the building because it's just something we've been trying out and it's not really working. So for us, music research is just part of that massive pool of information that we tap into. We test 25 records on 250 15-30 year olds from across the country. Some of them heavy Radio 1 listeners, some of them lighter, split across male and female. We only test records that are on the A-list or the B-list, or [we find that the records] are just not familiar enough [to the audience sample]. It's [just] a tool that we use … when we decide to playlist a record, [we] have a pretty good gut feeling if the audience will like it or not. When we decide we're going to playlist an artist, it's almost [despite] the research. When we first started to play Coldplay we got such poor results for the first 3 singles, Shiver, Yellow, Trouble. But we have a belief in [certain] artists,that the audience will get there. It was months and months later that we started to see them researching well. [Music research] is a tool, but it doesn't dictate the play list. It is massively important in commercial radio. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

There is some ambiguity in this attitude to research. On one side of the argument there seems to be a lot of it: call-out research, auditorium testing, online research. On the other there is a clear position that, as with commercial radio, research is represented as being only part of the "pool" of information used by Radio 1 programmers to make decisions on playlisting. Jagpal emphasises the contrast between Radio 1's public service approach to music research and that of the commercial music radio. Research for Radio 1 does not "dictate" the playlist, but it is "massively important" for commercial radio. As a former commercial radio employee, Jagpal may well be in a good position to make a judgement on that contrast of approach. But as a current employee of the BBC she is likely to reproduce

differential arguments that positively distinguish Radio 1's popular music provision from that of commercial radio. The example of Coldplay is used to demonstrate this point more clearly - Jagpal describes how the first three singles from their 2000 debut album were playlisted by Radio 1 despite poor music test results. The Reithian message here is clear - the public (represented here by the 'audience') did not know they wanted Coldplay until at least 3 singles into their career. The implication is that commercial radio would not have been able to play a part in breaking Coldplay, because if the records has tested badly, there was little chance that they'd be added to playlists. The BBC's position as a taste-leading cultural organisation is again reproduced.

At BBC Radio 2, Colin Martin had taken the public service argument to new levels in the 5 years to 2005.

> The first thing I did, when I started this job in 2000 was to stop all music research. We don't do any. And the reason I did that was I thought it was not a fair indicator of what people really like. [Music research] companies ring up people and play them 20 seconds of something and expect them to make a quality judgement on that music. We thought that was wrong. We thought we needed to get back to where good radio stations has always existed which was gut feel. If we thought [a record] was good and right for the network, then we would go with it. So we stuck our necks out and that's worked really well for us. I'd been a producer for many years on Radio 2, before that I was a drummer. I [also] felt like I was a listener, and as a listener I felt sure we could do this (music programming) better. The record industry love the fact that we do this. They get driven mad by radio stations track testing everything …. I get a track, I feel there's something about it, I'll live with it for a couple of weeks, then it'll grow. If you just track test things you get an instant turn off on [records] that deserve better than that. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

This a most unambiguous statement of commitment to traditional Reithian values of public service embodied in a paternalistic belief in professional instinct over market research data. Martin is specifically referring to music testing here, but his strategy is still a major break with radio industry convention.   His first point is a reasonable critique of radio call-out research methodology - it is, he says, unreasonable to expect anyone to form and record an opinion on a piece of music, after hearing only 20 or 30 seconds of each record. His second point is that the "gut feeling" approach to music programming makes qualitatively better radio stations. Martin justifies the privileging of his instinct on music over market research by positioning himself as part of three different stakeholder groups: broadcaster ("many years" of programme producer experience); musician (experience as a professional drummer); listener (he feels able to listen to Radio 2 with the same ears as a non-radio-

professional audience member). There is some resonance here with Schlesinger's findings

that BBC journalists often wrote as if they themselves or their families were the audience

(Schlesinger, 1987).

The last of these three may be the most difficult to accept objectively but in this context it

represents an attempt to get at a notion of public service by claiming membership of a

specific 'public'. This approach to programming, alongside other changes in the network,

contributed to a steady growth in RAJAR audience ratings, and that in itself may seem to

validate the "gut feeling" approach. I will examine the potential flaws in the "it works

because it worked" argument in a moment, but Martin's last point deserves some attention.

He suggests that the record industry is enthusiastic about Radio 2's lack of music testing.

This is not particularly surprising - record companies have had, since 2000, access to a key

playlist decision maker (apparently unconcerned about music testing and its tendency to

favour the familiar) at Britain's most listened to music radio station. Therefore the entry

barriers to Radio 2's playlist are less defined by the musical conservatism of music testing

data, and more about record companies' abilities to develop artists that match Martin's

notion of what his audience want to hear. This has important consequences for the balance

of power between the record industry and music radio (in this case, BBC Radio 2). Those

consequences are explored in more detail later in this chapter, in the section *Power*.

Martin makes the point that Radio 2 does not do music testing. That is not to say that

Radio 2 does not do audience research - Radio 2 and 6Music make use of the BBC's in-

house Radio Research Department:

> We have done some music research since I've been here [BBC Radio Research Department], and it's quite useful. But it's very expensive and we felt like it was just telling us what we already knew, because the producers [of individual shows] kind of know their audience so well. There doesn't seem to be a problem [with audience figures, but] I think it would be different if audience figures were struggling a bit more - we'd probably do more music testing. Because it seems like we're on the right lines and it seems to be working, we don't do it. But Radio 1 do - they have a lot more playlist stuff than what we do. We do have a playlist but not as many tracks. Radio 1 has a much higher rotation than us too. A lot of [Radio 2 and 6Music] shows are so specialised, specially at the weekends or evenings [and therefore] reliant on the producers knowing their stuff. (Kim MacNally, Research Manager, BBC Radio 2 and 6Music).

This is a more nuanced version of Martin's argument that the "gut feeling" approach is good

because it works. MacNally's first point here is that music testing research was perceived

as an expensive luxury because for Radio 2 at least, it was simply confirming that

programme makers had already made the right decisions on music programming. The

suggestion is that the audience imagined by BBC music programmers is more than

sufficiently accurate without the need for guidance from music testing data. MacNally is

however, realistic. This model can only work while listening figures remain high, and she

admits that a return to music testing would be likely if audience rating faltered.

Although there is no formal music testing at Radio 2, MacNally's department uses other

research methods, some of which were developed in-house by the BBC as long ago as the

1930s (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991; Crisell, 1994; Crisell, 2002):

> We do a lot with RAJAR. I do a lot of analysis over a Quarter on various things to give us an overview. Then I'll look at certain slots in a lot more detail. We break it down by age, by quarter hour, by region. I look at how our main competitors are doing. [But] RAJAR can only tell us so much - they can't tell us *why*. If we're looking to change a slot we use focus groups, and [we] do that before a new presenter comes in, and can feed into how the show will sound. We also have an online panel where people fill in Appreciation Indexes every day, and give a mark out of 10 how much they appreciate a programme they've listened to, and we track them over time. We can also ask specific questions, for example, quite soon after Chris Evans' first shows we were able to get a response back for people on how they considered he was doing. [BBC Television] look at AI's every day and we look at them monthly. Working online we can respond much more quickly and it's also very good for deputy presenters. We get AIs for them. In the past we had a bigger questionnaire. We [also] do bigger bits of research looking at our brand or looking to future audiences. (Kim MacNally, Research Manager, BBC Radio 2 and 6Music).

The sound of Radio 2 then, is shaped not only by the instincts of experienced broadcasters,

but by an extensive array of audience research data generated both within and outside the

BBC. The RAJAR figures allow producers and management to see how their policy

decisions reflect in terms of total listening and across age breakdowns. More importantly,

those figures are considered in the context of a competitive radio environment. The BBC's

radio research department is interested in the market presence of competitors, even if

some of those in music programming policy seem less concerned. There are several ways

of interpreting this apparently conflict. First, it is in the interests of the BBC to represent

itself as distinctively different from its commercial rivals. The discourse of instinct and

professional judgement around music policy is one way of doing this, recalling as it does

long established BBC ideologies of educating and leading public taste. The rejection of

music testing also clearly distinguishes Radio 2 from the market research orientation of commercial music radio in the UK. Both of these methods are effective in representing Radio 2 as meeting its Charter prescribed public service remit. Of course, the fact that it is politically important for the BBC to be seen to be distinctive and to be serving a public, doesn't mean that it is not actually achieving both of those objectives, at least up to a point. Despite the presence on air of a number of gold hits, particularly in the morning shows, in my view Radio 2 is a distinctive listening experience partly as a consequence of its music policy. Its distinctive music policy is recognised by the record industry - elsewhere in this research pluggers are positive about the role and influence of Radio 2 in breaking new artists. Radio 2 exists therefore at the centre of a series of complex arguments. The most interesting of these is the balance between *being* 'public service' (with all the ideological conflict around what that term means) and being *seen* to be 'public service'.

To paraphrase Dayan (2001), who then is this public that is also an audience? There may be a case to be made that the BBC's 'public' is not the same as commercial radio's 'audience'.   The evidence here however, suggests that BBC radio and commercial radio broadcasters imagine audiences using very similar conceptual tools, and music programmers feel (or perhaps, *need* to feel) that they know their audience.

For all radio there are several processes that shape music programmers' imagination of audience, from decisions on who the audience *should* be, to who they believe the audience to 'really' be, based on a series of feedback channels.

Mike Walsh of the Century FM network explains the process of establishing the parameters of the target audience:

> We decide through a process of consultation internally … that means that we will speak to the commercial side of our organisation, people that sell the airtime, and we will find out from them what is the most commercially valuable demographic within the format restrictions of our network ... Our format for the Century FM Network is an Adult Contemporary network, and that means that we have to target 25-45 as a core demographic. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

So, for commercial radio, the process of imagining audiences starts with an evaluation of

the estimated economic value of demographic sub-groupings within the constraints of a

relatively loosely defined format. A commercial radio format in the UK is a blend of music

genre and proposed target audience, and Ofcom as regulator allows a certain amount of

latitude in how that may be translated to on-air sound [35]. Therefore music policy can

usually be adapted to try to attract the largest number of the most potentially valuable

listeners. It is of course as potential consumers that audiences are valuable to advertisers,

and if an audience is valuable to advertisers, then it matters to a radio station. The patterns

of (music) consumption of a target audience then become the defining characteristic of that

audience:

> Target audience for us is people who buy one or two CD albums a year, maybe a bit more than that ... But they're buying Will Young albums, they're buying Dido albums, Hairbrush Divas compilations … they're not out there getting into Sigur Ros. A big part of my job is leaving [my] personal taste at home and really working hard on getting under the skin of the musical taste of the mass market ... [which is] a lot more complicated than you think, in that there are so many songs out there. Of the millions and millions of songs in the world, how do you pick the 800 that are going to the most emotionally connecting? (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

The records to which Walsh refers (Dido, Will Young, the Hairbrush Divas compilation of

sing-a-long party hits) are records that become the really big sellers over time - if an artist

can attract the attention of consumers that buy very few albums in a year, the very large

numbers of those consumers can make a record into a huge long-term hit.

There is an important point here - music programmers of mainstream stations attempt to

sideline their personal taste and to second-guess the tastes of their target audience. Walsh

suggests that this is far from easy. One strategy used by many music programmers and

producers is to meet with listeners face-to-face. Here the concept of the idealised listener

('Debbie') is extended it into a real world where the imagined can be assessed against

reality (or a version of reality, at least).

> We meet 'Debbies' a lot. Several times a year I do ... auditorium music testing … [and] I do more regular smaller, informal focus groups. We just email [potential focus group participants]

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[35] See http://www.ofcom.org.uk for recent rulings in respect of format violations or format modification. In early 2007, for example, Saga Radio re-branded as Smooth FM, with a subtle refashioning of its music policy and station sound, seemingly intended to distant it from the Saga image of radio for retired people.

> off the [radio station] website. We have a VIP club [which fans of the station sign up to] on the website … we have a text VIP club as well. It's just basically core listeners that listen to the station a lot and want to interact with the station, have a relationship with the brand. They're more than happy to come in and tell us what they like and don't like, because they genuinely care about the sound of the station. Which is great … we do feel close to our listeners, yeah, we definitely do. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Walsh's closeness to the audience is constructed through focus group research, where the constituent members of the focus group have self-selected as fans of the radio station. The extent to which these fans of the station are representative of a broader listening audience is difficult to determine.   These fans would normally (though not always) become aware of the VIP club through listening to the station. They must have access to the Internet to access the station website and they must want to join the club, encouraged by suitable inducements (in the from of "exciting offers" [36]). A sample of those members is selected to be approached to join a focus group, and that sample that could refuse the invitation or ignore it altogether. So the final focus group is likely to comprise regular listeners, with internet access and a high degree of motivation to become involved in the future of the station. For Walsh, and for other programmers that employ similar strategies, that is close enough to their idealised target listener to make focus group findings valuable.

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM, with a similar target audience, has a very clear research-informed notion of the lifestyle and consumer preferences of that audience, and the attributes that characterise the station:

> For Ocean it's all about being very familiar - it's sing-along radio. It should be accessible. It's not meant to be credible in any way in terms of the credible cool of Radio 1. It's meant to be down to earth and a lot of presenters are hired for that reason. It's meant to be fun, feel good [with] songs from the 80s and 90s [and] a smattering of … more contemporary artists. I was at a focus group recently and it was 30-39 [year old] females. We asked them what one album they'd bought recently, and it was the Scissor Sisters. And that's a band that started off in cool world and crossed over to the mainstream, and they're a bit aspirational as well. The lifestyles of a lot of these women involves looking after kids or working part-time. They're family orientated and on not-very-high wages. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

Smith sees his audience rejecting the cool-ness of Radio1 as exclusivist, even inaccessible. For those listeners being cool and credible are synonymous with being 'elitist' and 'fun-free'. Positive attributes in one context then become negative in another. It is not surprising that

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[36] http://www.1054centuryfm.com

the core record for that audience is the Scissor Sisters 2005 debut release. This was a album from a band perceived as left-field and cool in the Manhattan club scene from which it emerged, but which achieved huge sales in the UK. Smith characterises the band as representing a care-free lifestyle to which many of his target listeners aspire, and develops this notion of his audience by characterising them as having low income, probably with young children. This demographic is imagined (perhaps correctly) to need a radio station that is unchallenging and familiar, yet escapist and fun. All four of those descriptors might of course be applied to the Scissor Sisters, and so there is a close match between artist and the station's imagined audience.

At Radio 1, Sarita Jagpal is aware that the perception of Radio 1 as "cool" is a double-edged sword.

> For us, our audience have to be into their music, otherwise we're just too tough a listen [laughs]. In the last year and a half we have had a new strategy of 'warming up' the mainstream and the specialist [shows] being about the new music. But at Radio 1 I think maybe we had become a bit 'Too cool for school' and [had been] losing touch [with the national audience] a bit, becoming a bit too London. And that was recognised and addressed. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Jagpal's sense of Radio 1's (day-time) audience is that they are more passionately involved with music than the casual listener to a commercial music radio station, and so the latter may find Radio 1 a "tough" listen. The "warming up" policy is presented as a response to an internal Radio 1 assessment which concluded that the elitism embodied in 'cool-ness' was a bad thing. Underlying this 'bad' is Radio 1's need to be seen to be meeting its public service commitments. The BBC interpretation of 'public service' in this context is manifested as an emphasis on higher ratings, suggesting that as more of the 'public' become 'audience', Radio 1 becomes more 'public service'.   So an internal audit would look for reasons for low ratings and strategies for increasing ratings. According to Jagpal, two of the reasons identified were the more challenging 'cool' playlist and the perception that the station was focused on London at the expense of the rest of the UK.

The two are not unrelated: London is the economic centre (and arguably, the cultural centre) of the record industry, and Radio 1 is based in London. The solution was therefore

to mainstream ('warm up') the daytime playlist, to become more aware of regional tastes in popular music and to be more sensitive to the national character of the station. The extent to which this strategy has been effective is evident in the upward trend in Radio 1's ratings in the 5 years to 2007, and perhaps in the station's contribution to the BBC's 'distinctiveness' and 'public service' prior to the renewal of its charter in 2006.

Jagpal's construction of her audience has been informed by formal research, but more direct reaction to music programming from listeners using SMS text messaging can feed into that imagined audience.

> Texting made a massive difference, it's so instantaneous. Any reason to text in, [listeners] will, prompted or unprompted. We get constant audience feedback and we can look back at all the texts we get whenever we want … Often when people hear new music for the first time… [we] know it's probably going to take them time to get used to it. The big exception was Nizlopi's 'The JCB Song'. When Jo [Whiley] played that 6 weeks ago [mid-October 2005] it was just such a huge positive reaction [37]. That really made us [think] 'Wait a minute, maybe we should be taking this record more seriously, more than just a potential spot play'. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

This is an example of programmer instinct being out of step with mainstream audience taste. Audience preference was expressed first through a critical mass of positive SMS responses to a record, then through large numbers of record sales. As I've discussed earlier in this research project, radio audiences and music buyers are not necessarily congruent grouping. 'The JCB Song' example is unusual, but it illustrates how quickly electronically-mediated audience feedback can challenge a programmer's notion of audience. Kim MacNally of BBC Radio Research explains how Radio 2 producers can manage conflict between a broadcaster's imagined audience and the audience constructed from market research data:

> It doesn't happen often [that there's a problem with programme producer instincts disagreeing with research data]. There *was* an instance where a new presenter came to the network and he thought he'd be presenting to a much younger audience. But the producer asked for the RAJAR figures [to show him/her]. RAJAR's been telling us that audiences are getting slightly younger for Radio 2, which reflects the changes in programming policy … We might have expected to alienate older listeners as we brought in younger listeners, but that doesn't seem to have been the case. From our research it seems that the older listeners aren't that different.

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[37] The largely acoustic, folk-flavoured 'The JCB Song' by Nizlopi, went to Number 1 in the singles chart for Christmas 2005. It is, even for the open minded, not a typical Radio 1 song, so Jagpal's surprise at the Radio 1 listener reaction is perfectly reasonable.

> They're similar in what's going on in their lives, children, jobs. What a 30- or 40-something will like (musically) won't actually be that much different to what 60-somethings like, but some producers that have been working on the network for a long time might not have appreciated how the audience is becoming younger. Generally though people here are very open to research. (Kim MacNally, Research Manager, BBC Radio 2 and 6Music).

MacNally's combines external audience research from RAJAR with the BBC's internal data to argue that music taste doesn't vary as greatly across age demographics as previous convention (and commercial radio formats) would have suggested. That partly explains the ratings success of Radio 2, but it is clear that producer/programmer experience can conflict with the data available. MacNally suggests that in cases of conflict, it is normally research that is more convincing than arguments based on instinct.

As I have noted, the problems with the instinct argument only tend to emerge when research data doesn't support gut feeling. Colin Martin at Radio 2 develops his earlier point on *knowing* his audience with a metaphor that personalises the listener, to much the same effect as Century's 'Debbie'.

> You have to start from the premise of thinking you know who your audience is. And then you have a closer relationship. It's a bit like when you buy someone a present - you [think] 'I know they'll like that'.   So if you have an idea of what your audience is, you can feel sure they'll like [a record]. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

Martin, like Walsh at Century FM, has opportunities to find out how his imagined audience matches to a sample of 'real' audience. Without the auditorium testing of the commercial radio sector, Martin relies on live music events, inside and outside the BBC, and (like Jagpal at Radio 1) on electronically mediated feedback:

> Yes, we do [meet our audience, at] 'live and exclusive's in which audience [members] are invited [to see a small scale live show], mostly through a competition. We [also] see [our audience] at bigger events like the Proms at the Park. Certainly they have access to us on email, and the telephone log. A lot of our DJs run clubs like Terry [Wogan]'s Old Geezers or Sarah Kennedy with her Dawn Patrol and we hear from them a lot. Terry and Sarah read out a lot of listener feedback. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

There is (unfortunately for radio programmers) no way to be certain that audiences attending live music events staged by a radio stations are representative of that radio station's listening audience. For large outdoor events, the audience is likely to be attracted by the artists playing on-stage, and they may or may not be regular listeners. It's a little

easier with in-house events, but even then there is no guarantee that a competition winner is a regular audience member.

Wogan's and Kennedy's on-air "clubs" work to consolidate listeners' sense of community, both with other listeners and with those presenters. Listeners self-identify as 'special' members of that audience, and Martin's implication is that their feedback is taken more seriously as a consequence of that special status. It is at this point that music testing arrives by a sophisticated back door. Listener feedback, mediated through various electronic media, is likely to make more sense when a record is heard in the context of radio station output. So Martin is probably right - music testing of 20-second clips of songs in an auditorium will not produce feedback as useful as that from real-time station listeners during or immediately after a song is played.

Whilst it is unlikely that any commercial radio station in the UK would take risks like that on daytime playlists, they make use of mediated listener feedback in constructing their imagined audience. Adam Uytman of Kerrang Radio is ambivalent about the weight he feels should be attributed to SMS text messages from listeners:

> [The audience who text, email and phone in are] hard core. They are representative and they are very important. We don't want to lose them. But they are a minority in the bigger picture. We're not gonna suddenly take the hip hop off just because we get 5 texts in a day saying, 'We don't like it' … [Presenters] say 'Why are we playing these records?'. I say 'You've got 3 texts there. Let's look at the figures for your show - you've got 50,000 listeners in this hour, [and] only 3 of those texted.' Yes they feel passionately about it. But we obviously do a lot of research to find out what the mass market thinks of these records. And there are people who like these records, and they don't text to say they hate it ... because they like them. Simple as that. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman knows that listeners who send SMS text messages are highly motivated, but balances that against what RAJAR tells him about his audience, and how that matches against his target audience. The parent Kerrang brand is a rock and metal specialist magazine published in the UK since 1981, and with average weekly ABC circulation figures of over 85,000 in the second half of 2006 (see Appendix 7). Uytman's problem is that Kerrang readers coming to the radio station as listeners initially expected to find the same emphasis on rock and metal in the playlists. They are disappointed when they find a much more generalised alternative music station. His argument for that difference is that the

regional FM radio market is unlike the national music magazine market, and this informs his

attitude to text interaction from some listeners. RAJAR figures suggest to Uytman that he

drawing an audience valuable to advertisers, and somewhat different to Emap's dominantly

15-24 year old readership for Kerrang magazine (Emap, 2007).

> On RAJAR we have a higher proportion of ABC1s than C2DEs. Age-wise I think a lot of our
> listeners are 50-quid bloke, early 30s, disposable income, probably buys 5 CDs a month.
> Tends to be into general bands like Franz Ferdinand, the other new bands that kind of remind
> him of what he used to like when he was more into music. But now he's got money to spend.
> (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

In contrast to the market research driven notion of audience, Uytman also draws on

anecdotal day-to-day experiences to add detail to his perception of who is listening to the

station:

> I was getting my hair cut and the girl who was cutting my hair said, 'Yeah I really like that
> Kerrang [radio station]. I like the fact that you don't just play heavy rock. It's not too full on and
> you play some hip hop stuff. I really like the hip hop, but I like my rock as well.' But it's a fine
> line - if we play too much [hip hop] the hard core rock fans are gone. Too little and we're not
> spreading out enough. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

The Kerrang brand is both a strength and a weakness for Uytman - its strength is that it

nationally recognised and historically deep; its weakness is its close specialist association

with rock and metal. These are challenges for Uytman, as he attempts to build a new

identity for Kerrang on FM radio. The real challenge is not so much in the task of

convincing new listeners to join the Kerrang audience, it is in persuading advertisers that

the ABC1, 30-something audience is real and can be reached through a new alternative

music station. The audience is again, as discussed by Frith (1981), Berland (1990) and

others, the key to driving up advertising revenue.

The Kerrang experience illustrates the difficulty of achieving this objective with a genre-

format station in a UK environment where generalist hit radio stations have dominated for

decades.

> My job is to service the listeners, but clients [advertisers] are very important, because that's
> how we make money at the end of the day. We like to bring clients along to our events, but [in
> the beginning] the sales teams were a bit scared [about doing that]. They said 'We're trying to
> convince them that the average Kerrang listener is not a 16-year-old Goth with black hair and
> piercings all over and smells and only listens to Slipknot.' They were worried that that would
> be the sort of [listener] that would turn up [to the station's live events]. In fact it was a mix of

> people, ([and we] get a 35-year business guy who's just taken his suit off) ... Which is good because that's what we're aiming to get. If we just went for a traditional Kerrang audience we wouldn't get a big enough audience to sustain the station. That's why we're doing this - it's not like we're trying to be too populist and not true to the brand. We just need it to be wide enough to bring in more people ... to sell adverts. It's as simple as that. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman is direct about both the nature of commercial radio (it's about the bottom line) and the preconceptions of advertising clients about his brand (black clad teenage rock fans). He knows that the station has to make money if it is to be sustainable, and that his ability to attract the right kind of audience is central to achieving that objective. He is also aware that Kerrang has a set of values embedded in the brand - broadly 'rock' - and that in moving the station sound away from modern or classic rock and metal risks being seen as 'populist' by Kerrang magazine readers.

The challenge Uytman faces is also clear to programmers working outside commercial radio:

> Kerrang magazine is a very different proposition to Kerrang the radio station. If they made a radio station that reflected the magazine, nobody would listen. It would have the nichest of niche markets [laughs]. Of course they're going to be playing Oasis, because if they didn't, who would listen? (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

What Uytman is doing is not in principle very different from programmes on other commercial radio stations - selling an imagined audience to advertisers. It is the brand connotations of Kerrang and the novelty of a rock-formatted FM station that generate unusual complexity in that process. He has had to adjust the expectations of a core rock audience he doesn't want to lose, whilst managing the preconceptions of advertisers and a new more generalist audience. The problem for Uytman, as for other commercial radio station music programmers, is that the only audience he can be absolutely sure about is advertisers.

BBC regional specialist music programming and *audience*

Outside national BBC music radio and regional commercial FM music radio are BBC Local

Radio and the middle layer of BBC radio, the so-called 'national regions' [38] served by BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland. None of these are music radio stations and broadly speaking all conform to the Reithian notion of 'mixed output'. Specialist and generalist music programmes are made for these stations both in-house and independently, and producers of these shows normally have almost complete control over musical content. They are unconstrained by playlists and programme music they believe their audience both want to hear, and *should* hear. There are of course other examples of this approach in BBC national radio specialist shows, and to an extent in BBC local radio. But the geographic specificity of Scotland adds further nuances to the process of imagining audiences for three interview subjects in this research, Noakes, Low and Cruickshank.

Robert Noakes is an independent producer who supplies BBC Scotland with its weekly new country music show. As a former BBC staff employee, Noakes puts his notion of audience at the centre of what the show does. He also rather neatly demonstrates an attitude to audience that appears to be in some ways contradictory, but in others to be a very BBC way of conceptualising listeners.

> The most important thing is to not underestimate the audience - don't think that what you know is everything … The best music shows can carry dense esoteric information without it sounding too off-putting. The sequencing [of music] is where it all works - you can [play more difficult records] then … a sing-along and they stick with you. I think you're mad if you lose sight of the audience … it's not an ego tussle with the audience [but] I would encourage any producer to take charge. Don't let the audience lead you all over the place so that every letter that comes in, you pay attention to that. We get a lot of 'instructive' emails - stop playing that crap, more of this, more of that. More often that not, what they ask for more of, we feel there's about the right proportion in the [programme already]. You have to kind of resist that and say true to the [show]. At the same time you can't ignore the audience. Sometimes audience comes through with a pithy comment ... it's like reading a review. Pay attention to some of the bad ones. It's a transaction in that respect. (Robert Noakes, Managing Director, Neon Productions).

Noakes makes the reasonable assumption that audiences for a specialist country music show are likely to be knowledgeable about their genre of choice. A second assumption he makes is more obviously Reithian - that the audience will want to learn more about country music, and that if done well, a music show can be educational and entertaining without

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[38] 'National regions' was a term devised by the BBC in an attempt to smooth the ruffled feathers of BBC broadcasters in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who felt that their respective bases of operations were more than simply local or regional. The term was being used as long ago as the early 1950s by Coatman (1951), and is probably even older.

losing listeners. Noakes' third assumption is that a more difficult or unfamiliar record will not alienate more conservative tastes provided it is preceded or followed by a well-known song. This is a common music programming strategy across formats and funding models in radio, but the assumption is probably more likely to be a safe one in an appointment-listening weekly specialist show.

Where Noakes' approach to audiences becomes more interesting is in urging other producers to emulate his cautious approach to listener feedback. The implication is (not dissimilar to Uytman's, above) that listeners who contact a show or station directly may not be representative of the 'real' population of listeners. The music show is thus positioned as a cultural product (like, say, a concert or a theatre performance) that has a relatively immutable artistic vision, yet may also respond to articulate or literate (negative) criticism. Noakes' final suggestion that the specialist music show is like a transaction further develops the show-as-cultural-product notion. The imagined audience brings its commodities (time, attention); the producer and presenter (as proxies for the BBC) bring entertainment, information and education; a small number of 'real' listeners close the loop directly with feedback in the form of email and letters. A larger number imagined audience members also provide feedback by choosing to listen or otherwise, though of course this feedback is mediated by the methodological uncertainties of RAJAR and the length of time (every 3 months) for the feedback to return to the source.

Nick Low is also a former BBC staffer who, at the time of writing, supplies BBC Scotland with a generalist weekly Saturday morning music show produced by his independent production company, Demus. At the time of his interview for this research he was also producing the weekly specialist jazz show for BBC Scotland ('Be-Bop To Hip Hop'). Low's imagined audience for the latter show has similarities in its defining parameters with Noakes' country music audience, and in its construction to that of other music programmers. It is informed by a mix of (BBC) audience research, active audience feedback through email and letters and a strong sense of BBC public service responsibility to an 'audience'.   Unlike Uytman and Noakes, Low expresses confidence that the listeners

he hears from through various mediated channels are in fact a fair sample of his 'real'

audience. Listener feedback confirms earlier BBC audience research, which for Low

strengthens the credibility of both feedback and audience research as being accurate

representations of a larger 'real' audience.

> The audience splits into two and I'm quite convinced about that. This comes from BBC research from about [the year] 2000. And it absolutely mirrored our experience of people getting in touch with the programme … there are people over 40 who are experiencing jazz for the first time, Ella Fitzgerald, etc … The other audience is 16-30 year olds that are going in and buying old Blue Note re-issues, [more dance influenced artists like] St Germaine … The ones that get in touch are the ones that are buying records. The thrust of the show is like … 'I'm on this journey of discovering jazz, and you can come with me'. It's not preachy, like a big jazz education lesson. As a producer, I personally make the programmes for the listeners, otherwise we'd just play our favourite tracks and that would just get boring. (Nick Low, Managing Director, Demus Productions).

Low's emphasis is on the listening audience, with (like Noakes) a Reithian underpinning of

information and education. The two demographic and taste audiences identified here might

intuitively be expected to be uneasy listening partners for a single radio show. If Low's

interpretation is correct however, they are likely to share an interest in hearing new music,

back catalogue or contemporary artists, so perhaps less difficult to accommodate than one

might expect.

Low also asserts that listeners who contact the show are also active record buyers. This is

clearly an important factor in the imagining of his audience:

> With email we get a lot more feedback. We get negative mail about the music sometimes. I've got a rough idea when I hear a new record that people are going to want to know about it. A few years ago we played an album by a Scottish artist called Saint Andrew. It was quirky, and since we first played it, not a week goes by when someone doesn't email in asking where they can get the record. (Nick Low, Managing Director, Demus Productions).

Here Low is talking about his weekly Saturday morning music and talk show, but music

programmer notion of instinct and gut feel are also evident. His years of experience of

producing music programming have left Low with a sense of which record releases are

likely to trigger a response from his audience. There is an emphasis on positive responses

but also an acknowledgement of how negative responses contribute to his notion of

audience:

> We have a very clear view that the listener of the Janice Forsyth show is 30-40 something that

> still buys Uncut and Q magazine and Mojo. They have an interest in the history of rock music. It's the Mojo readers that I'm going for in particular, so I won't play Natasha Beddingfield [or] Avril Lavigne - it's not our audience. (Nick Low, Managing Director, Demus Productions).

Low defines his listener by the same kind of demographic and consumption parameters used by Walsh at commercial network Century FM (with its idealised listener, 'Debbie') and other music programmers in the BBC and the commercial sector. A senior BBC Staff Producer at BBC Radio Scotland develops the role of feedback in shaping programming, and imagining audience:

> [Our] best programming tool is [our] audience … We get feedback not just from ex-pats but from disaffected listeners from the US, India, Japan, wherever. People who are searching for radio which has some kind of substance, which isn't afraid to break new artists, but continues to play [well known] artists with a big core following. With [our daily afternoon music show] our audience is very articulate, they talk to us about how music works in their lives, and it's not a nostalgic thing, it's [also] about new acts that are coming up … Over the years the strength of Radio Scotland has been to understand its audience - not to go for the biggest audience, but to go for a variety of audiences who are not being served regularly elsewhere. (Stewart Cruickshank, Senior Producer, Contemporary Music, BBC Radio Scotland).

Cruickshank is more sure than Noakes and Low that the listeners who contact his shows are representative of a larger imagined audience, in this case a global audience accessing Radio Scotland's output through the Internet. Cruickshank places new music in the context of the familiar, but emphasises the contrast between his BBC audience and that of commercial competitors. He implies that BBC Scotland's audience understands music in a more sophisticated way than the 'nostalgic' listening of oldies commercial radio. This is wrapped up in a restatement of the BBC's public service remit - that its role is not simply about achieving large audience, but in providing programming for audiences that are not addressed through the commercial radio system.

Role of the DJ

Thus far I've been discussing music programmers and their imagined audiences - DJs and presenters have yet to appear in the argument, other than as subjects of audience research. In much mainstream music radio presenter/DJs have little or no choice in the records they play, and this is true as much for the BBC as it is for the commercial sector. Daytime Radio 1 and Radio 2 presenters have, over the years, had a limited number of free

choices of records. When choice is available, the records are normally negotiated with

producers and are carefully selected to fit the tone of the show. The so-called 'free' records

are in fact drawn from a list pre-selected by station programmers (Sarita Jagpal, Music

Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1). Mark Findlay of Capital Radio Group sees presenters as

playing a significant role as the listener's point of contact with the radio station. Presenters,

he believes, contribute to the success to any music policy by contextualising the records:

> In terms of call-out research normally it's just the hooks of records that [audiences] hear ... and we ask do you know it, do you like it, do you hate it, would you switch it off? Somebody did ... an experiment where they did the same kind of thing, but they got presenters like Jonathan Ross … passionately selling the hook before it was played and the favourites and the positives for that record went through the roof. And the exact reverse was true, when they got someone like Chris Moyles doing the thing that he normally does, going ... 'I dunno why I'm playing this record, someone's picked this record, I hate this record' ... the [audience] passion levels fell. And when you show the presenters how powerful they are in terms of scores we can get on records, you start to get more buy-in from them on what it is we play and why we play it. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

In this model, mainstream presenters and DJs are central to audience response to music.

Findlay's research suggests that audience tastes or expectations can be massaged by a

positive context (or "passion"). This modifies the role played by the mainstream DJ - far

from simply playing music and attempting to engage an audience between those records,

the DJ becomes complicit in supporting corporate goals, as expressed through music

policy. It is somewhat ironic that a term that connotes authenticity - *passion* - is here being

deployed as a mode of performance analogous to that of an actor playing a role on stage or

screen. The more proficient a DJ's artifice, the more likely it is that s/he will be perceived

as being 'real'. This may not be a startling revelation in any critique of contemporary

commercial music radio, but there are also threads of this argument in public service BBC

radio.

My own experience as a rookie presenter was that I (initially at least) had little control over

the choice of records in the show I was fronting. My then-producer insisted that I should not

express any negative feelings about any of the music being played. We agreed that the

solution to my concerns about seeming dishonest in my music taste would be for me to

supply on-air the most basic information on artist and song, for those records I disliked.

Later in my career I found this to be very much BBC orthodoxy, in Scotland at least. I also

learned over the years that apart from a handful of specialist music DJs, a majority of

mainstream presenters were more interested in their careers as *DJs*, rather than as fans of

music. This may be a little depressing for enthusiastic music consumers, but allows space

for the model of music radio presentation described by Findlay to work without major

disruption.

My experience of choosing records for a specialist indie show, then for an electronic and

dance music programme on BBC Radio Scotland, has been useful in framing questions for

music programmers. The audience I imagined throughout my career as a DJ was both

vague and very specific. It was vague in the sense that I did not see RAJAR figures or BBC

research on my shows (though the producers always did), and the small numbers of

postcards (latterly emails) that arrived weekly were my only regular connection to 'real'

listeners. I occasionally met competition winners, and more rarely a larger audience at live

broadcast events. At no point was I convinced that this was my 'real' audience. My specific

notion of audience was someone like me. I imagined music fans, keen to hear new music

and cleverly chosen back catalogue, listening with an open mind and genuine enthusiasm.

For me, playing new music on the radio was analogous to having some friends over to

listen to a pile of new releases that I'd already checked out and decided which were the

best records. I would play the record, tell them why I liked it, maybe say a few words about

the artist if it was a debut recording, and ask them what they thought about the record. The

model for this approach was what I believed had been the way that John Peel approached

broadcasting. As a Peel listener I felt the best that I, as an aspiring DJ could do would be to

emulate his enthusiasm and commitment to music, and still be true to my own voice and

taste. I *knew* that Peel had an audience, and that if I was doing something similar that I

must also have an audience. The few RAJARs that I heard about suggested that my

audience was numbered in the thousands, rather than millions, but that was rarely

something I was concerned about. What I cared about was the quality of the music, and

how much informed talk I could squeeze around those records.

In 1996, around two years after I'd finished doing my indie show, Bite the Wax, I was in a

hallway at a house party in Glasgow's West End. A friend grabbed my arm and pulled me into one of the rooms. He pointed at a shelf stacked with neatly labelled audio cassettes, all of which were recordings of Bite The Wax. The young hostess of the party had come from the Western Isles of Scotland to go to University in Glasgow, but had been a regular listener to my show whilst at school. It was one of the very few times I'd met a member of the audience that I had imagined when on air. I assumed that this was the kind of thing that had happened to Peel on a fairly regular basis - I myself had a small pile of Peel Show audio cassette recordings. It was nonetheless something of a surprise to encounter evidence of a 'real' audience. I realised later that part of the reason for my response to that meeting was that at some level, I had felt that almost *no-one* was listening to the show despite the audience research which told me that there were thousands of people out there when I was on air.

CHOOSING MUSIC

I have argued above that some notion of audience is at the centre of how music is chosen for music radio - how then do programmers decide which records and artists are the most appropriate for their 'audience'?   If music policy is the central issue for radio listeners, then the choice of records is crucial to the objective of maintaining or growing audience numbers. The records played on music radio (BBC and commercial radio) fall into three broad categories: new and current hits; recurrent records (recent hits played on lower rotation); old or back catalogue records. My hypothesis is that despite the same superficial (and somewhat vague) imperative that a record should be right for an 'audience', records from those three categories would be heard by programmers as having different attributes that make them more or less likely to be chosen. In other words, beyond audience research and gut feeling, there are objective and subjective characteristics that make a new or current hit record more likely to be playlisted, and those characteristics are different from those of a recurrent record or an oldie.

What are those perceived qualities related to the sound of records or the values associated

with song or artist, that influence the decision-making process of music programmers? To a degree, if it were possible to give a reliably unambiguous answer to that question, the ratio of hits to failures for record companies would be significantly higher that it is now, or has been in the history of commercial recorded music. The consequences of the choice or rejection of records are however significant in both economic (sales) and cultural terms (the sound of popular music), so the pursuit of the answer to that question still matters.

New records

Most programmers in this research spend a large amount of their time listening to new music and making decisions about whether those new records are going to be played on air. I wanted to know what programmers thought they were listening for in new records, partly because of my own experience of listening to thirty or more new releases every week for a one-hour specialist music show. In the early part of my career I would listen to the full length of a single, or around a minute of an album track. Within months I became adept at listening for no more than 30 seconds of any track before deciding whether or not it would work for the show. I knew from the *sound* of a track whether it would fit with the show aesthetic, without having to wait for a middle-eight, a great guitar riff or percussion breakdown on an electro-beat record. In some cases, three or four seconds was enough. There was always a chance that I'd miss something excellent, but it was a reasonable risk to take when I had only 52 minutes of airtime to fill in a week. This would be the process I went through *after* pre-filtering for records in approximately the right genre - indie rock, for example, would not have been considered for the electronic music show [39].

None of my informants deconstructed the process to that level, but all were clear about what they wanted from new records.

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[39] On a more personal note, it with some small amount of envy that I listen to the sweep of new music genres on a show like Nic Harcourt's KCRW, Santa Monica show, *Morning Becomes Electric*. More information on KCRW's shows is at http://www.kcrw.org.

> When records arrive we'll go 'Do we think that audience will like it?'. And there's no way of knowing until we've started playing it and that record's in the public domain. Once the record's in the public domain and it's known, then you can start researching those records. The problem is that I constantly have to justify to everybody why we're [playing] a record that ... looks like it doesn't work. Every time [a station plays] a song with the potential for the audience to switch off, that's a huge risk. The main reasons that people tell you they switch off radio stations are: adverts; DJs who talk nonsense; and a song I don't like. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay illustrates the problem of choosing new records for a network whose playlist is heavily influenced by music research. What he needs more than anything from new records is a sound that will not encourage the audience to switch channels. A strict interpretation of the perception of an audience that only likes what it already knows would be that *any* new music brings a strong risk of listeners switching channels. What is it then that programmers hear in record that helps them to take the gamble of adding that record to a playlist?

> Probably the most important thing … is the song … Even if that song is produced [or] sung unusually, if it's a great song, it'll always come through. A great song, for my target audience, is something that they can sing along to within about 3 or 4 listens, so it's … the infectiousness of the hook. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

The likelihood of a new record making Walsh's playlist then is partly determined by the speed at which he thinks audiences will be caught by the hook of the record. The implication is here is that the strength of a song as a 'great' song lies in how quickly the hook becomes memorable and how easy it is for audiences to sing along with that hook. This is a somewhat reductionist notion of what constitutes a 'great' song, but it is common in music radio. Walsh is however aware that an 'unusual' record falling outside a perceived mainstream range of commercial sounds might also be a great song.

Colin Martin at Radio 2 has a more critical view of commercial radio's ability to deliver new sounds:

> [New artists don't break on commercial radio] because track testing is such a big part of what they do. They're less likely to take risks on things, whereas the BBC [has] a completely different ethos. We're not there to deliver a listener to an advertiser. We're there to deliver the best music to our listeners. We love to find and embrace new artists, and try to help them along because it's our life-blood for the future. We're not there to make any money, or to support the commercial music industry but we need each other. Without those new artists we can't move on as a network … [but] the key factor driving our whole music policy forward [is] melody. Good songs and melody. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2)

As before this is a clear statement of the BBC's public service remit, contrasted against commercial radio. Many music radio stations use the phrase "the best music" to describe their on-air sound, but what they usually mean is "the music which we think is most likely to attract the largest number of our target audience". Less snappy as a jingle, but just as appropriately used here by Martin as it is by his commercial rivals. Martin is however navigating some problematic areas in this statement. The public service-ness of finding new artists (or new records from artists who have been producing music outside the mainstream music industry) is represented as something implicitly, but definitely good for the audience-public. Finding new artists with long-term commercial potential means that Radio 2 derives cultural capital associated with the discovery of that artist. If the artist continues to be successful, they will go on to produce more recordings which are suitable for Radio 2 playlisting. Furthermore, if those artists continue to be enjoyed by Radio 2's target audience, the sounds associated with the station will tend to be more stable and this should result in stable or growing listening figures. A stable or growing audience is good for the long term viability of Radio 2 and depending on prevailing notions of what might constitute 'public service' is also likely to be good for the BBC.

The second potentially difficult area is that of the economic role that Radio 2 plays for the commercial record industry. Martin is formally correct when he states that Radio 2 is a not-for-profit station and that its role is not to help the record industry make money. Nevertheless helping the record industry to make money by breaking new artists is exactly what Radio 2 does - as has done Radio 1 since its launch in 1967. This is potentially difficult, because a Reithian BBC should probably not be involved in this way with the commercial world. Pragmatically though, the BBC has been involved in promoting commercial interests for many years, whilst maintaining a strong public service rhetoric. For example, sport as entertainment is a massive commercial industry in the UK and BBC coverage has been historically extensive, particularly of football, cricket and rugby. Leaving aside the BBC's recent losses in coverage of some sporting events, BBC money has gone directly into sport-as-business to pay for broadcasting rights. BBC sports reporting also indirectly supports sponsors and advertisers at major events, in sound and vision. In my

view this duality (public service and indirectly commercial) is as inevitable as Frith's binding

of the creative and the commercial in popular music (Frith, 1981). The BBC cannot fulfil its

notion of serving a public by broadcasting the products of popular cultural without an

involvement with the political economy of the creation and selling of those products.

Adam Uytman of Kerrang Radio, agrees with Martin that commercial radio is a difficult

place to break new records:

> … to a certain extent if [we're] the only station playing a record, we're probably going to struggle a bit … [Listeners] are looking for … records that they know and like - I'm talking about the majority obviously. If we're the only station with a [new] record, they'll probably go 'Oh, I don't know what that is' and tune back to Radio 1 where they do know the Bravery record or the Killers record or whatever. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman worries about losing listeners because of a single unfamiliar song (perhaps even if

by a familiar artist). Kerrang is not in a position to lead on new music unless there is

support for the record from elsewhere, notably in this example from Radio 1. Not all

commercial radio programmers use the same cautious rhetoric about new music (though

there may be flexible interpretation of the adjectival 'new'):

> This is why I have fun with Power [FM] - I can play a lot more new music there - we have a couple of new music slots every hour …with Radio 1 as a main competitor on the south coast we need to push the boundaries a bit because [Radio 1] is very new music focused … Commercial radio has always played safe and avoided risk … I don't think you can increase your audience by playing safe - there has to be an element of risk taking, and commercial radio don't really take risks. Obviously you don't want to lose audience, but you can't gain unless you're actually giving people something quite interesting to listen to. They can get [something interesting] elsewhere. A lot of BBC stations which don't have a commercial remit can afford to be more experimental and benefit from that. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

While Smith acknowledges the convention that commercial radio is conservative in its

programming, he sees Radio 1 as the competitor that will encourages him to take risks at

Ocean. He understands that the 'more experimental' edge of Radio 1 is possible because

the station has no 'commercial remit', yet paradoxically this give Radio 1 a commercial

advantage. So a logical response might be to meet Radio 1 with a music policy which

attempts to adopt some of that risk of the new. This supports an argument I made earlier,

and one which I think is crucial in understanding the unique characteristics of music radio in

the UK - the BBC makes commercial music radio less conservative and more likely to take

(limited) risks with new music. In short, it makes commercial radio *better*, in part because it gives commercial radio programmers more confidence to stretch programming policy a little further, beyond the familiarity that tends to emerge from music testing research.

Recurrent records

The 'recurrent' record is the backbone of British commercial hit music radio, and plays a major part of programming policy at Radio 1 and Radio 2. Definitions are fluid (as will become apparent below) but in my view the important aspect of the recurrent is how it is rarely discussed in analyses of music radio. This seems strange for two reasons. Firstly, the recent-hit status of recurrent records allows stations to maintain a sense of continuity for an audience - the record is familiar and its popularity has been established. Moreover, the presence of that record on air over a longer period of time allows radio stations to establish a stronger association with an artist or sound. Those stations then continue to be the place where one might expect to hear, for example, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, regardless of the time elapsed since the album's release date. Secondly, the recurrent does something significant, if less obvious for the record industry - it maintains audience awareness of an artist whose album may have been available for a year or more. In economic terms this is likely to promote 'long tail' sales that are relatively low on a week-to-week basis, but are cumulatively important (Gibson, 2007b).

Mark Findlay of Capital Radio Group describes his network's approach to recurrent records:

> The traditional thing is that it [is] a record that's about a year to 18 months old. And that record might get played ... maybe once or twice a day. But those records are ones that are gonna hang around. They have a longevity - your audience still want to hear them. When you go back and test them in three months or six months, the audience is still [really into them]. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay's definitions of recurrents is based on time elapsed since release, and on audience testing. The "longevity" of recurrents here is based on market research assessment of what audiences still want to hear, but unfortunately for my thesis, there is no indication of *why* members of an audience sample might want to continue to hear one older hit in

preference to another.

Mike Walsh's Century FM Network has a more conservative approach to refreshing its playlist:

> [How long a record stays on our playlist is] an interesting question for us, because for us it's a lot longer than it is for other formats. We hold onto records forever. It is possible, within our format, that something can stay on the A-list for 6 months. Sometime pluggers views on this are positive, sometimes they're negative. It's positive because that record is constantly selling albums. So they're aware of how effective that can be. But secondly, it can be very negative, because [we're] not playing the follow-up singles, [we're] staying with the first one ... One of my criticisms of the music business is that they sometimes release singles too quickly, and they're not in step with the radio. They would say that it's their job to be ahead of radio, in terms of leading into the next single, but quite often if you look at the airplay chart, they try to get a new single away because they've had a new video delivered from the States, or they've got a tour coming up or whatever. When actually there's a few months left in the first single … so what happens there is that less experienced programmers take off the single that's been the most popular with their audience at the time, introducing the new single, that's unfamiliar and less popular and actually no-one's really winning there. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM agrees with Walsh that the priorities of record companies are clearly different to those of radio stations, with consequent conflict.

> A good example of [record companies being out of step with radio stations] is The Killers' 'Somebody Told Me' which was a huge A-list record. And then [the record company] want the next single [to go on radio], but the stations aren't budging on [the previous single]. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

Much of the Century Network programming would be considered by other music radio stations to be recurrent-heavy and Walsh reflects on the consequences of that for his relationship with pluggers. His assessment of pluggers' attitudes to the slow turnover of playlist at Century may need some clarification - most pluggers are likely to find the Century programming approach frustrating for many of the reasons that Walsh identifies. Long term album sales are good for the record industry, and much commercial radio programming contributes to that objective. The record industry however has a problem when it becomes more obvious that music radio has its own, quite different, set of commercial objectives. Walsh sees this as a record industry that releases singles "too quickly" for radio because of the long-established promotional strategies of single, followed by album, followed by tour. His priority then is extending the on-air life of a single because his music testing research tells him that this is likely to increase the chances of attracting and holding his target

audience demographic. He argues that this is also good for the record industry, which

benefits from those longer term record sales.

Grant Crain, at Polydor records concurs

> [Recurrent records are] very important. We don't sell records for 1 week or 2 weeks, we sell them for 365 days of the year. We know we're onto a good thing with a new artist particularly if they stay on the radio after their release … if [radio stations] keep playing [records] then it means they mean business and they trust the artist and trust the record. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

Crain recognises that the record industry is not simply about short term sales and chart

placings, but needs to sell music throughout the financial year. The continued presence on

air of a record maintains audience awareness of an artist, which is an important part of

breaking that act as a long-term album seller. Whether a recurrent record necessarily

indicates trust in an artist as well as the individual song is more difficult to assess than

Crain suggests, but it is not unreasonable to imply the linkage.

At BBC Radio 2, Colin Martin again rejects formal music testing designed to establish

whether a record has outstayed its playlist welcome:

> All other stations, as far as I'm aware test for the 'burn' factor [whether a record has burned out, lost it's appeal] - we don't do that. If [I] listen to the network I know that if I hear [a record] much more, I'll get tired of it. So we take it off before we get tired of it. We don't let tracks burn - it's just a matter of listening and instinctively knowing a track has to come off. There are tracks I might rest for 6 months, or I might rest them for a year, but I go through everything every so often and I decide whether I should start playing a record again, or a lower or higher rotation. It's having a kind of qualitative feeling about what [I] should do with tracks. Some become recurrent, some don't. Some you know are burned, that people are fed up with them. You just KNOW that stuff, it's very unscientific, I'm sorry [laughs]. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

Martin contrasts his gut-feeling approach to decisions on when a record becomes a

recurrent, against the "scientific" approach of the commercial stations. There is, though, an

instructive discrepancy here between the apparently qualitative decision making and the

quantitative validation of that gut-feeling approach - RAJAR figures show steady growth

during Martin's tenure at Radio 2. Martin is far from alone in his struggle to deconstruct his

own professional instinct - there are echoes of Schlesinger's (1987) work on BBC news

journalists' notion of news judgement, and those journalists' problems in deconstructing

their own decision making.

At Polydor Records, Grant Crain develops the notion that the record industry is not adapting to music radio's model of programming, and that a better understanding of that model might be mutually beneficial:

> I think it's an art that could be developed, in terms of radio plugging. There are two [types] of recurrents. [The first approach is to] playlist it 'til it's out, then play it a lot more, then put it on a high recurrent and kill the record. You're so bored with it, you never want to hear it again. [What] most ... sensible radio stations do ... is … play it post-release to a certain level, then drop it and bring back in three months, or a month, or whenever they feel the demand is right for it, or summer comes around. Those sort of [seasonal] influences on radio stations, we don't take enough advantage of ... [but] we try and stimulate some recurrent play before we go to radio with a new single [from an established artist] … by issuing a radio promotional-only CD with a past hits and airplay chart positions. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

The kind of promotion that Crain is suggesting might not result in sales, but would show up on the national airplay charts. There would be relatively small amounts of promotional resource required to focus on back catalogue because the major expense for any album release is the upfront recording and promotional costs (Negus, 1992; Burnett, 1996). The advantages of keeping artists on air and in the public imagination are likely to be reflected in long term unit sales, performing rights payments to record company and artists, and perhaps in more unpredictable ways, like licensing of music for advertising or other media. If Polydor, for example were to (successfully) re-promote recent back catalogue, those recurrent records that returned to airplay would not be keeping new releases from playlists - they would probably tend to lock out the back catalogue of *other* record companies.

At Radio 1, Sarita Jagpal is less explicit than Radio 2's Colin Martin about the balance between instinct and research in making decisions on recurrents, but a little more clear on which records become recurrent and when it happens:

> Radio 1 has 'hot recurrents' . They're tracks that come straight off the playlist and go to recurrent. So they've done maybe 14 weeks on the playlist, but the audience probably still want to hear them, we'll carry on playing them at a high level. This year it was The Gorillaz, White Stripes and Kanye West - we could be playing all their tracks … when [we've] got artist tracks that are working so well for [us], [we] don't want to be chucking them away just because they've had a lifespan on the published playlists … so we'll have hot recurrents up to 3 or 4 months post release, then it just sort of dies away after that. So tracks from a year ago you'll hear less often on the station, and so on. Then we get to the 'Spice' category [oldies]. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Radio 1 has a clear focus on current and recent records, and decisions on which releases become recurrent seem to be based at least in part on audience reaction to those releases. The relatively small number of older records on air at Radio 1 emphasises the station's public service commitment to new music - fewer old records played means more space for new releases. Jagpal suggests that only certain artists are likely to become recurrent:

> Some records when they come off the published playlists, it's like 'Who cares?'. Nobody's bothered about hearing [long pause] the last McFly record [again] … whereas there're some records like James Blunt's 'You're Beautiful' will hang around forever. It is about the artist. But if you've got a great record you need to play it regardless. Like The Caesars' 'Jerk It Out' - we still play that. It was just a great pop record which worked well, but really, The Caesars … nobody cares [about the band]. It was just a record that had a [TV commercial] with it. Sometimes it's just about the record. And with dance acts, that's definite - it's not about the artist. We'll be playing Bob Sinclair for ages - we get so many requests for the whistling song. But The Gorillaz can do no wrong by our audience, or Coldplay. Sometimes there's a sound that they love, like a certain artist or a producer. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

For Jagpal there is an obvious difference between artists whom are likely to make records that become recurrent and those that do not, though her perception of when an audience "love" a song is probably directly informed by SMS, email and telephone feedback to individual shows on the network.

At first glance Jagpal's position appears to mirror long-standing music and media industry notions that represent rock as authentic (and timeless) and pop as inauthentic (and ephemeral). Throughout the history of commercially recorded music the social construction of authenticity has been central to establishing the cultural value of artists and sounds (Peterson, 1997). Since the late-1970s constructions of authenticity have become increasingly complex and multifaceted (Frith, 1981, 1996) and here Jagpal illustrates that dynamic and flexible use of authenticity. Records that tend to become recurrent are the 'good' records, the 'authentic' records. 'Authentic' values may then be associated with either a one-off record, which is often the case in dance genres, or with 'serious' rock artists.

There is a far from a clear line of argument here though - the 'goodness' of a record, at least in Jagpal's list of examples, is not related to the sounds on the record. McFly (a

'manufactured' guitar-based pop-rock band whose first single was released in March 2004) are considered to be so 'pop' that their records are unlikely to become recurrents. A record by Bob Sinclair, a proponent of commercial dance music since 1996, is considered to be similar to one by Swedish alternative rockers Caesars (first recorded in 1995) - it is a recurrent, but Jagpal understands the audience as being interested only in the *record* rather than the artist. Those records are seen (or heard) as being one-off hits, whilst the recurrent *artists* like Coldplay and Gorillaz will continue to release hit records that will become future recurrents.

This model of how hit records become recurrent records is relatively straightforward at the opposing ends of the pop/rock continuum. 'Manufactured' pop (or rock) is less likely to become recurrent, whilst 'authentic' rock (or pop) is more likely to become recurrent. But between those extremes the rules are significantly less clear: a record from a genre associated with ephemerality (dance, Bob Sinclair) is on equal footing with a one-off hit from an alternative rock band (The Caesars). What the Radio 1 approach has in common with that of the commercial stations addressed earlier is that those decisions, despite their apparent dissimilarities in ideological underpinnings, are framed by the perceived needs of the imagined audience.

The notion of the recurrent record at Kerrang radio is similar to that of mainstream commercial pop stations, but there are arguably elements of the BBC approach here too - there is a sense that recurrents maybe either one-off "classic" tracks that are emblematic of a place, time or feeling, or they may be records that are released by well-loved artists with a long established career.

> We generally go with records a bit earlier, so we tend to come off them a bit earlier than [other stations] as well … that comes through research and feedback. There are certain records that we're gonna keep playing, like Green Day or U2's 'Vertigo' … just because they aren't current singles doesn't mean people don't want to hear them … some are right down at 1 play a month. They're meant to be wild-tracks where you go 'Great record, turn it up' but you wouldn't want to hear it again at the same time the next day. If it's a good record, keep playing it. If not, and people are getting bored of it, or it wasn't really that big a hit, don't play it. A lot of records get forgotten. You've got to see what records stand the test of time, what are worth continuing to play in a year or 2 years or 10 years. You've got to work out which ones it still makes sense to play. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman begins by arguing that Kerrang plays new records before other commercial stations and that decisions are informed by audience research and the kind of feedback discussed earlier in this chapter (email, SMS messages, letters). The argument is subtly qualified a little later - the station will continue to play the record if it's 'good', but the process through which this 'goodness' is established is ambiguous. A record that is not 'good' is partly defined by forms of direct audience feedback (they are "bored" with it) and indirect feedback (the record was a lesser chart hit). Direct audience feedback must play some part in building a consensus on which records "stand the test of time", but the longer term resonance of a hit record will also depend on a number of variables external to an individual radio station. Those variables might include quantitative data on airplay, which is a consequence of cumulative audience research at other music radio stations. Similarly, the presence of a record in other media or cultural products (television, film, computer games) will contribute to its viability as recurrent radio record. More qualitative and slippery is the potential for a record to become either emblematic of its era, or to become a more timeless representative of a sound, style or set of values. There is also the issue of the degree to which a station wants to be associated with a particular artist which represents something of its self-defined brand values - U2 and The Red Hot Chili Peppers seem to be leading contenders for many rock-inflected stations.

Grant Crain is realistic though about how most record industry promotional effort is focused on new releases:

> We don't do enough with recurrents and the radio stations rarely communicate [to us the reason that recurrents matter] … the identity of their station is pretty much the recurrents. If a record's a radio hit, it'll be a recurrent. If it's a short term radio hit, it's unlikely to come back again, apart from in a retro show. The airplay chart is worth watching though - because in the top 100, every so often you'll see a little batch of records that pop into the 100 again, say between 75 and 100. And you're like 'Blimey, they're still playing that?'. And you look at how many times its getting played across the stations, and it's 100-plus [in a week]. And it's something that's suddenly brought back into the psyche again. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

Crain correctly in my view distinguishes the key role of the recurrent record for FM radio - it's about station sound and identity. He uses the airplay chart as a guide to the sounds that commercial radio considers to be important and long-lasting, and his reaction to the that chart indicates the distance between record industry priorities and those of music radio.

Crain also sees the route from contemporary hit to recurrent as being less complex than some radio industry informants - if a record is a big airplay hit over a longer period of time (which is not the same as being a chart hit) it is much more likely to become a recurrent record.

Whether it is possible to predict which records those might be, even after a period as an airplay hit, is more difficult to assess. Crain acknowledges that unpredictability in his description of surprise at the lower reaches of the airplay chart. The sudden reappearance of older hits in the airplay chart may appear to be some kind of reflection of audience preference as refracted through music radio programmers. It might be feasible to trace the history of a specific record over time through playlist archives, sales charts, airplay charts and interviews with many dozens of music radio programmers. That data could contribute to an understanding of how *one* specific record may become more embedded than another in the popular cultural imagination. But even if it did, and that would depend on a large number of variables, any research would have to address various different records if meaningful results were to be achieved.   My point is not that it would be difficult to do this research (although it would be), it is that this very difficulty leads to a perception in the record industry, the radio industry and elsewhere that some records just 'become' classics or regularly recurrent. Crain makes the point a little more succinctly:

> .. it's just that they are classic records - people will know them. It's like a trusted friend ... you hear it on the radio and you're not gonna turn it off ... some records work better second time around, because you've had 2 or 3 singles in between, and you remember that as being the classic song from that album. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

If he is correct in his assessment that first singles become fondly remembered by audiences and programmers after perhaps a further two or three single releases then the speed at which the present moves to a nostalgic past in popular music culture may be increasing. It may be hard to establish the importance of nostalgia in taste, but it is less difficult to observe the development of what I call a *perpetual now* in the form of a permanently available online electronic back catalogue. The perpetual now of iTunes is the end-point of a process that began with CD back catalogue reissues in the 1980s, a process that moved the purchase of music away from the temporary availability of most records

which had characterised most of recorded music history.

Alan Smith, former regional plugger for Warners, develops the notion of what makes a good recurrent record, part of which is the issue that it shouldn't be too "recurrent", or too familiar:

> A good recurrent makes you go 'God, y'know I haven't heard that in ages'. You'll be driving around and a record will come on the radio and you think that … 'That's brilliant … haven't heard it recently. Get it on the iPod!'. I think that the majority of recurrents come from Heritage Acts … that are still making records, or if they aren't, they have a big enough catalogue that people know them really well. A heritage act is one [we] have to re-establish, like maybe New Order, someone that has been popular at some point in the last 10 years ... [we] have to re-establish their connection with their audience. [We] have to say [to music programmers] that this band is still relevant to your audience, and here's the reason why, here's the music, here's what they're doing ... they're still cool, they're still where you're at, they're still where your audience is at. (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

Old records

For the most part the record industry doesn't promote older back catalogue to Gold or "70s, 80s and More" [40] formats. Yet older back catalogue albums continue sell, according to Andrew Thomson, former plugger for EMI:

> … the back catalogue of Pink Floyd, Kate Bush is just flying off the shelves. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

It may be a little unfair to use artists as big as Pink Floyd of Kate Bush in this example, but those sales are at very little expense to the record company - those albums recouped their costs years ago. The cost to the record company is mostly in storing unsold warehouse stocks of back catalogue, and that overhead is disappearing as music fans move to legal downloading from iTunes and other online stores. But in the period of my field research, my record plugger respondents were in agreement over their industry's lack of interest in back catalogue:

> You don't really … plug to Capital Gold or Clyde 2 ... they're only really playing recurrents and a very, very thin layer of new stuff. It's just the most accessible stuff so therefore in terms of where their format is with new music, is that there's very little, and it's very, very safe. (Alan

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[40] An example of the "70s, 80s and More" format is the Smooth FM network (formerly Saga Radio) in several UK regions, including Central Scotland.

Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

Smith's position reflects record industry priority promotion of new records - if stations do not

play new records, they are of little interest to record companies with new acts to break.

Roger Jacobs, formerly of BMG develops the point:

> The record industry doesn't really do that [plugging back catalogue] at all. Every year the majors look at their catalogue and put together packages of say, greatest hits, or a theme album like 'acoustic hits' or something. But there'll never be much weight attached to promoting that to radio. Copies will be sent out to radio stations and they'll run a few competitions, but [record companies] never seem too interested. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

It is not the case, Jacobs suggests, that the record industry does not market back

catalogue. On the contrary, there are regular themed compilation album releases and

periodic repackaging of classic albums. Yet beyond on-air competitions, there is little

attempt made to promote the product to the radio station formats that would play that

material. This may reflect the short-termism of the record industry, or perhaps a sense

inside the record industry that the economic benefits of 'long tail' sales are unrelated to

promotion.

EMI's approach to back catalogue is similar to that of BMG:

> We wouldn't plug an old record, but we would promote an new greatest hits package. Most recently we did Iron Maiden and Robbie Williams. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

'New' greatest hits packages however tend to be treated more like artist album releases

and often contain one or more new recordings or remixes, partly to demonstrate added

value for the potential buyer and partly to give radio a new song to play in support of the

package.

Some older artists though are more marketable at certain parts of their career, than at

others:

> I did an old thing recently, Donovan, with his 60th birthday and re-issued albums. The obvious stations for him are the BBC - commercial radio wouldn't touch him with a shitty stick … [maybe some] AM [stations] in certain places. You're not gonna get Galaxy or Clyde 1 playing

> Donovan. Clyde 2 [maybe] at a very big push. You concentrate on the stuff you know you can get. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

The problem for Cox was that commercial radio, even Gold formats, were not interested in a repackaged series of albums from a 1960s British acoustic artist not remembered as a major musical figure (despite contemporary comparisons to Bob Dylan). In this case the industry is attempting to actively promote back catalogue, but is faced with a commercial music radio industry that considered Donovan to be insufficiently legendary. On the other hand, it would be unlikely that late-1960s or early-1970s Bob Dylan would feature on many playlists, even in Gold formats. In this example, Cox's only realistic options are the BBC (Radio 2 and BBC local/regional stations).

Good radio records

Stewart Cruickshank of BBC Radio Scotland has programmed music as a producer for over 15 years. His concept of the good radio record is all about content:

> A good radio record? … Certain words spring to mind: musicality, memorability … a degree of innovation … [and] melody. (Stewart Cruickshank, Senior Producer, Contemporary Music, BBC Radio Scotland).

The notion of the 'good radio record' underlies all of this discussion, and it is as difficult to pin down as the idea of a truly 'authentic' sound. My hypothesis was that there would be some characteristic or set of characteristics of a record that my respondents would understand as contributing to their decisions about what they judge it to be good for radio. It was less clear whether music programmers and record pluggers would be able to *express* what those characteristics are, even if they are consciously aware of them. For me there is a distinction between how these cultural intermediaries understand their decision making process and what might emerge from a content analysis of successful playlist records. It is the interpretation of the content (and context) of a record that directly affects decisions about how that record is exposed on radio. This is not to suggest that musicological analysis of hit records is irrelevant - it those musicological elements that many of my respondents frequently use to frame their notion of the 'good radio record'. Most frequently

though, pluggers and programmers struggle to express what it is they feel they *know*. In many cases the strategy which allows them to answer the question is to point to examples of artists or records that have retrospectively *become* good radio records through airplay and, at least in part, through sales. Addressing that problem of expression is central to understanding the relationship between record companies and radio and it is the dynamic of that relationship is what feeds back in the culture and sound of popular music.

What is it then for Capital Radio Group's Mark Findlay that makes a good radio record?

> I don't know actually. That's a really tough question. A band that we all absolutely loved ... was Maroon 5 … we went to see [them] ... and we were all standing watching [them] going 'Jesus, there's about 4 or 5 fantastic records on here that our audience is gonna love!'. And sure enough … they're our biggest testing songs and we're loathe to take them off the list because they're still working. So ... I don't know ... it's usually just a ... I just think 'that'll work'. I don't think you can put your finger on it. And we don't always get it right ... we [sometimes] play something that doesn't work ... [or] we hang back a bit longer than we should have done, on something we should have played. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay, like many other programmers, feels that he *knows* when a record will be good for his network but he also acknowledges that instinct is not always right. There is further evidence that the idea of instinct requires reinforcement, in this case by audience research.

The notion of audience is still central to Mike Walsh's 'good radio record'.

> [There are] so many different factors as to why that song is or isn't going to connect to your audience. Sometimes it's the production, sometimes it's the hook, sometimes it's the perception of that artist. Good examples are really fantastic pop records, by artists that I just know carry negative perceptions in my audience. Girls Aloud have done some great pop records but we know that Girls Aloud are not particularly liked or respected by 38 year old [mothers] in council estates ... somebody a little more grown up, like Natalie Imbruglia or Natasha [Beddingfield] is far more appealing. So yeah, artist perception is important, definitely. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Walsh differentiates the good radio records that appear to work for his target demographic from the good radio records that are simply 'good'. His research tells him that his audience has 'negative' perceptions of some artists, in this case Girls Aloud, despite his personal feeling that the group make great pop records. The point here is that the musical characteristics of a record are only part of what makes that record good for radio. It is irrelevant that Girls Aloud songs are full of great pop hooks and that the production sound of those records has been successful with both critics and record buyers. The research

generated notion of 'artist perception' by audiences easily over-rides those musical qualities for Walsh's target demographic - playlisting of records is often about finding artists with whom an imagined audience can identify. Research on how emotional attachment to artists functions is largely framed in terms of fandom (Lewis, 1992) - it would be useful to see research that attempted to unravel the issues of attachment and identification as mediated by music radio.

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM returns to the issue of gut-feeling and instinct in deciding what makes a good radio record:

> Well, it's feel. Like the new Black Eyed Peas record. I was just like 'Bang. You're in.' It's the feel of the record, it's the hook, the way the song has been put together. And because I'm searching for a particular sound for the station … hit records aren't always as obvious as that, sometimes you need to give things … time to bed in. Obviously the instantaneous things we want to get on straight away, it can take a while for audiences to get new music and you have to really sell it into them. Yes, they might be hearing it elsewhere - like the Black Eyed Peas record will be played in other places, and before you know it you have an airplay hit. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

There is a frustrating vagueness about many programmer responses to the question of the good radio record - Smith includes an example of a track by The Black Eyed Peas that he immediately playlisted. Such examples can help work towards establishing a canon of records that have been both hits in sales and airplay, but Smith also refers to the hook and the production of the record. There is a different between Walsh and Smith in emphasis: Walsh explicitly builds his notion of a good radio record around audience research; Smith implicitly addresses audience when he refers to the 'sound for the station'. The former approach suggests that the imagined audience dominates the programming of music, and shapes the sound of the station; the latter suggest that the 'sound' of the station helps to shape audience perceptions and tastes. In practice I suspect that these are not discrete processes and most commercial radio stations mix strategies according to market conditions, competition and corporate objectives.

It might be reasonable to expect BBC notions of a good radio record to be a little different to that of the commercial music radio industry. Sarita Jagpal sees Radio 1's corporate notion of a good radio record as being a balance between public service commitments to the

promotion of new music and not scaring off listeners [41]. Is there a peculiarly Radio 1

version of the good radio record?

> [It's] something that's a bit different, something that's got a hook, something that's exciting. It might not always be [my] personal cup of tea, but when I first [heard] Antony and the Johnsons, I thought 'What the hell is this?', but y'know when certain people you respect, like Zane Lowe, are going crazy about an artist … In hindsight now, y'know they won the Mercury, and it was very good that we playlisted them, blah blah blah. But on first listen I [thought] 'Woah. I don't get this at all' … then there're certain tracks that are just so obvious like the first Arctic Monkeys track. It just had such an instant sort of hook, [I knew] that it was going to really work. So when I listen to music, I listen with an open mind, but I do have in the back of [my] mind an ear for what is really playable on [Radio1] on daytime … For us it's not as simple as what makes a good radio record because our job at Radio 1 is to challenge the audience, to take risks with music. Sometimes it does horrify me, the records we end up playlisting because in terms of building an audience share and RAJAR figures, you can hear the audience switching off when we play the sort of music that we do. But if it's an important piece of music or an important artist, or a scene that's developing, we have to play these pieces of music that if we were a commercial radio station we just wouldn't go near. When I worked at commercial radio I found it a lot easier, a lot easier [laughs]. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

It's not clear how an artist or a piece of music might become "important", here at least, but

referring back to Jagpal's earlier quotes, she discusses her on-going monitoring of other

music media outlets. An "important" record will only become such if it garners sufficient

critical acclaim early in its life, or if later it becomes a huge hit (perhaps even a recurrent

"classic"). It is politically (and culturally) convenient for the BBC to be able to say, "We

were the first to play this (now important) record", so Radio 1 must attempt to stay close to

sites of innovation and be aware of media activity around a new sound or scene.

The remit to find new music and to 'challenge' the audience competes with corporate

objectives to build audience figures. This is not a new problem for the BBC (Hendy, 2000b)

but the two examples that Jagpal gives are instructive. Mercury Music Prize Winners in

2005, Antony and the Johnsons do not much sound like the rest of Radio 1's daytime

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[41] I have already said something about the extent to which the economic role of the BBC is wrapped up with its cultural role. Radio 1 and Radio 2 frame their public-serviceness in their commitment to finding and broadcasting new artists and new sounds, because that's good for audiences and popular music culture in general. But the creative-cultural unity of the record industry means that the BBC's apparently ideologically driven cultural activity has inevitable commercial consequences - it creates hits, stars and income for the record industry. Those hits and stars often (but not always) become the material from which are constructed commercial radio playlists. It is this last point that tends to be overlooked by large commercial radio interests complaining about the 'unfair' market power of BBC radio. For a brief introduction to recent criticism of BBC radio by the commercial radio sector in the run up to the Charter renewal of 2007, and the BBC's reply, see *Commercial Radio's Response to the Green paper: A BBC commentary*
(http://www.bbccharterreview.org.uk/publications/related_pubs/BBC_Response_to_CRCA.pdf).

output (or in fact *anything* else) and Jagpal's 'What the hell?' reaction is absolutely justified. In the summer of 2005 playlisting Antony was a brave decision, but ultimately this was an example of a critically lauded artist with less commercial cross over potential for radio than his fellow New York night club scene band, The Scissor Sisters. The Arctic Monkeys, on the other hand, followed in the wake of Franz Ferdinand's opening of the charts, and daytime radio to intelligent, British, guitar-driven pop songs, and so much less risky.

Jagpal's experience in commercial radio clarifies her role at Radio 1 - making decisions on which sounds are just challenging enough to fulfil the station's perceived public role, without causing damaging losses to ratings. If making playlist decisions in commercial radio was easier for Jagpal how then does her notion of a good Radio 1 radio record differ from a good radio record for commercial radio?

> Interesting question. I think … commercial radio … probably … do too much audience research, so they get a certain sound, a certain type of record. And it just ends up being that all the commercial radio stations are playing the same small handful of records. But what we're finding is that people are getting a bit bored of hearing the same records on all the radio stations. Maybe the traditional idea of what makes a good radio record isn't actually something that is [a good radio record]. [But] there are some records that are so obvious. Like when you hear Beyonce's 'Crazy In Love' you just know that's a great record and everybody's going to be able to play it. It's the hook … the production, the melody … If people want to listen to the radio it's usually there on in the background, they're just going about their business, so [it shouldn't be] something that's like this loud noise coming out of the little box in the corner. That in a traditional sense is a good radio record. Yeah, good production … simple lyrics … easy to sing along to. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Jagpal is correct about commercial radio's use of audience research as the dominant influence on programming decisions. She refines earlier respondent discussion of production values and hooks with an understanding of the listening context for music radio in general - audiences are normally doing something other than simply listening to the radio. Jagpal suggests therefore that for the commercial sector in particular that the soundtrack supplied by music radio should not be too"loud" or distracting. Music radio is represented here as "usually there in the background", so a 'good radio record' is something that doesn't unduly disrupt that background-ness - it doesn't require active attention from the listener. Roger Jacobs, formerly of BMG Records, agrees:

> What radio stations are scared of is the 'switch-off' factor. And I have seen people do it. They'll hear a slightly noisy record and they'll change the station. It upsets their background listening. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG

Records).

I do not think that Jagpal is dismissing the sound of commercial radio per se, it is rather the lack of choice across different radio stations that make Radio 1's role so important.

Colin Martin at BBC Radio 2 shares, as before, Jagpal's commitment to new music, but schedules records according to presenters on shows at different times of the day.

> What makes a good radio record is … knowing [our] network, feeling secure that whatever [I] pick, most of [my] presenters are going to go along with it.   Certain records fit certain presenters in certain parts of the day. Eva Cassidy [for example] sat very well in that early morning [timeslot], Sarah Kennedy, Terry Wogan. And somebody slightly more rocky or more west-coasty would fit more into Johnny Walker. So we know we can play a record [at a particular time of the day and the presenter] will love it. It's [about] having a very versatile radio station. A lot of radio stations programme music where they pick a track and play it across the whole network. And some presenters don't like it, but they have to play it, but we don't do that here. Some tracks are universal and we can play them everywhere, other tracks are great for one presenter or another. So [I] can't define what's a great radio track except you sort of know. It's back to gut feeling, if you get that feeling then you know it's a good track. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

Martin is implicitly alluding to the 'presenter as friend' - the role a presenter can play for the listener to a radio show (Scannell, 1989; Tacchi, 1997). Where there is the kind of para-social interaction Scannell has discussed at some length, listeners feel that they understand a presenter's personality. If that is the case, then listeners may also feel that they have an insight into the kind of records they would associate with a specific presenter, and Martin's approach acknowledges this - Terry Wogan would simply sound *wrong* back announcing a contemporary Americana artist. Martin is also suggesting that Radio 2 is unique in having a music programming policy which considers the tastes of its big name presenters as well as that of its imagined audience. Martin claims that it would be unusual for Radio 2 presenters to have to play a record that they do not like. It would be rather difficult to establish the degree to which this the case for all presenters, at least while they are still employed by the BBC.

It is also unclear whether a record sounds to Martin appropriate for a specific time of day (Eva Cassidy in the morning) or appropriate for a particular presenter (Johnnie Walker in late afternoon). It is more obvious that the appearance of presenters being able to honestly say that they like a new record can have, as discussed earlier in this chapter, important

repercussions on audience reaction to the record. Martin returns then to the gut-feeling

argument - but what is it about certain records that Martin responds to instinctively?

> We can take a record to our playlist meeting and say, 'Well, the production isn't good enough, it sounds like a demo'. It's not just a matter of playing it in my office … by the time it goes through all the processing and the optimods [audio signal processing technology], it's actually really important that when a listener turns on their radio, specially now with digital, it's got to sound right, professional. And that even goes for more rock'n'roll bands. If it's Babyshambles you'd expect more of an open sort of garage-y sound. Production values are really important … not with everything, but melody is the key thing, good tunes, good songs. That's why singer-songwriters are back now. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

Martin develops a more structured argument for the importance of production values in new

records. A new release needs a set of sonic characteristics that will enable it to sound

good after the audio processing between the song file or disc and the reproduction of sound

on a radio receiver. Martin uses the terms 'right' and 'professional', by which he means a

set of sounds or standards for sounds that constitute radio and record industry notions of a

high quality audio experience. In practice this expectation of experience means that

notions of professional sounding records reproduce themselves. In some ways it doesn't

particularly matter so much what those audio characteristics are - what matters is the

imperative for new records match those characteristics closely enough to not sound out of

place on mainstream radio stations. Martin agrees that, beyond production values, it is

melody and song structure that make a good radio record. Whilst he doesn't expand on

what the constituent parts of a 'good' song or a 'good' tune might be, he makes an explicit

connection between the importance of both descriptors and the emergence of a wave of

successful solo singer-songwriters in the period 2000-2005. It is not coincidental that Radio

2 has supported many of those singer-songwriters, of which more later in this chapter.

Adam Uytman of Kerrang, like other informants, finds it difficult to deconstruct his notion of

what makes a good radio record:

> I think you're trying to analyse it too a bit too much. I was at a gig last night with a lot of radio people - a [record company] guy was taking us out to see this band so we could give him our opinion on it. Mark [Findlay] started going into the construction of the band and the way they performed, and the drum sound and the guitar and the way the bassist stood and the way he plucked the strings and so on. And sometimes you have to remember that the people who listen to your radio station and buy the records are just music fans. They like records. It's either good or it's not [good] to them. It's not like they'd say 'I'd like that if it didn't have that wavy bit in the middle that makes the song a tiny bit dull for 2 seconds'. I don't think they critically analyse it that much. It's a good record, it's not a good record. It's suitable, it's not

suitable. What is it in the sound of a record? I'm not sure [laughs]. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman implies that there is nothing to be gained by deconstructing the concept of the good radio record, and offers the example of Findlay's detailed review of a new artist. This form of early feedback to the record industry from music programmers is not unusual, and hints at the balance of power issues I will address in the final section of this chapter. The question of whether a new artist looks or sounds right for radio is a little different to that of what makes a good radio record, but Uytman's point is that fans and radio audiences do not listen to music in the same way as producers and mediators of that music. Yes, I believe that it's true that for most music fans a record is either good or bad, but that doesn't in anyway get at the question of what it is that fans hear in a record (or a radio station) that makes them *like* it. Uytman comes back to gut-feeling argument about feeling that he *knows* the audience as well understanding the music genre and radio format in which he works.

It's not guess work. But it is instinct, it's knowing the music, it's knowing your audience. There is no definite, scientific way of doing it … It's just knowledge of what works and what doesn't. How do you get that knowledge? You just do [laughs]. It's my job. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman finds it difficult to deconstruct how he uses his experience and knowledge when choosing records, but he implies that having seen which records have succeeded and which haven't, he can extend that observation to new releases. He argues that there is no foolproof quantitative method for establishing whether a record is good for radio or otherwise.

In contrast Roger Jacobs, formerly of BMG, suggests that radio programmers often use a more analytical approach, and even uses the same adjective to describe it. Pluggers develop this analytical approach in the course do their job - having an ability articulate statistics about a record (and how this relates to its appropriateness for radio airplay) is part of the array of rhetorical strategies that they employ as they seek to persuade programmers to play a record.

> There's a very scientific way of looking at the song. [I] think, first of all it's 3:35 long and that's radio length. Second, does it start straight away with a catchy hook? Or how many seconds in [to the track] before we hear the chorus? 30, 40 seconds? Sometimes [we the pluggers are given a song] with really strong melodies, a belting record.   And after the first [promotional trips around] the radio stations [I might] think 'Why isn't that working?'. And then [I realise] 'Ah, you can't actually make out the lyrics'. There might be an amazing singer, but because [people] can't actually understand what the sentiment of the song is, it doesn't connect with the audience. There's also the general sound of a record, lush, well produced - that should work. But then you've got to have lyrics that convey a sentiment that's very familiar and universal. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

As a plugger, Jacobs seems to be able to reflect back at programmers the characteristics of a record that make it good for radio. Only one other respondent (also a plugger) mentioned length of song, perhaps because the standard accepted length for a single has been in the region of 3-and-a-half minutes for several decades. Length of song is still an issue for mainstream radio: record companies still supply stations with singles edited for length, which makes those records more likely to be playlisted.

Jacobs also argues that a candidate for the description of good radio record should hit the chorus either as an introduction, or as early as possible in the song structure. He touches on the same issues of production value raised by other respondents, but he makes a new point about the need for simple lyrics and universally understood (that is, non-complex) sentiment. These characteristics of structure and content are not dissimilar to those identified in the KLF's part-satire / part-exposé, *The Manual - How To Have a Number 1 The Easy Way*:

> [Singles] must be no longer than three minutes and thirty seconds (just under 3'20 is preferable). If they are any longer Radio One daytime DJs will start fading early or talking over the end, when the chorus is finally being hammered home - the most important part of any record … it must consist of an intro, a verse, a chorus, second verse, a second chorus, a breakdown section, back into a double length chorus and outro. [Finally], lyrics. You will need some, but not many. (Drummond and Cauty, 1988:16)

Drummond and Cauty's intentions were both serious and anarchic - *The Manual* was partly an attempt to irritate the record industry establishment, partly a demystification of the record making process from the perspective of the late-1980s. However, the basic form and content of the good radio record they describe had changed little since the late 1960s, and has changed little more in the early 21st century. Strictly speaking, it is a manual about having a hit, rather than getting a record onto daytime radio playlists, but at the time of

publication the two concepts were effectively inseparable.

Another plugger, Andrew Thomson at EMI, also emphasises the hook, lyrics and potential for emotional connection as being important. He also flags up another useful characteristic for the candidate 'good radio record' - familiarity:

> It's totally about the hook ... everyone just waits for the killer hook. When you hear a great record you want to feel moved ... melody, lyrics are really important. There was 'Love Freaks' on Positiva that went top 10 with an ELO sample in it - the older Programme Controllers and Heads of Music recognised the sample and added it to a lot of playlists because they thought that their listeners would also know it. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

A recurring theme in this work (and indeed that of other authors) is the tendency of music radio to encourage similarity in sound, or perhaps to discourage radical breaks from conventions of 'good' sound. Much music radio audience research reported here by programmers suggests that not only do many listeners prefer records they already know, they also prefer sounds with which they are already familiar. The use of samples of part or all of previous hit records increases the sense of familiarity for both programmers and their audiences.

Jay Cox, an independent plugger for major and indie labels, was the only informant to point out that the notion of a good radio record varies over time:

> Tastes change … what's a good radio record this year may not have been a good record 5 years ago. And definitely won't be in 5 years from now. But records that hit the top end of the airplay chart will generally stick around on radio as recurrent records. I don't think there's a particular sound that makes a good radio record - a couple of years ago you wouldn't have got Futureheads on regional radio, even in Newcastle where they're from. Gwen Stefani's electro-pop stuff is quite out there, but the mainstream can absorb a lot of things when they become popular. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

As a record industry professional, Cox has seen the co-optation of sounds and styles from the periphery into the mainstream of popular music culture. What is less clear is how the web of popular cultural cause, effect and influence brings alternative artists to the mainstream, or allows innovation to break through into the pop charts.

Cox's argument that there is no "particular sound" that characterises the good radio record

is really about not being able to predict how that process of co-optation will adapt to

particular new sounds or styles. Future sounds of good radio records may indeed be

unpredictable, but Cox contextualises the present and the past in terms of the airplay chart.

Records that score well as airplay hits will, he suggests, tend to have an extended life as

recurrent records. The presence of those familiar airplay hits on a radio station not only

become part of the station's branding, but also works to stabilise the notion of the good

radio record. There is an element of circularity in this argument. If the question is 'what is a

good radio record?', the answer often seems to be 'a record that has proved itself to be a

good radio record by staying on the airplay chart'.

Despite the inherent conservatism suggested by this circularity, Cox acknowledges that

some of the records he has plugged have had unexpected radio play success:

> … '21 Seconds' by So Solid Crew surprised me. Akon's 'Locked Up' too - it's about crack
> dealing, and it was getting played at 11 in the morning on [commercial] radio. Because [the
> record doesn't contain] swearing, [and it doesn't] have any religious issues or obvious
> homophobia, people don't care what the song is about. Street slang doesn't normally make it
> to the ears of radio programmers. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

These examples seem to imply that the notion of the good radio record may develop in a

manner analogous to Stephen Jay Gould's punctuated equilibrium theory of evolution in

which dramatic changes can happen quickly, followed by long periods of relative stability

(Gould, 2002). As attractive as this hypothesis is, it would require a longitudinal study to

establish its viability, and that is outwith the objectives of this research.

Good music

If the negotiation of the notion of the good radio record has been complex, how then do

issues of taste and preference impinge on that negotiation? In what ways does it matter

how programmers and pluggers make value judgements about the good-ness of music?

Most interviewees found it particularly difficult to address this question:

> What is good music? Good music is … er, that's such a subjective thing really, isn't it?
> Something I do find frustrating about the industry that we're in is that, y'know, people will, er,
> be very negative towards manufactured pop acts. However, quite often, it's those

manufactured pop acts that are paying the wages of the record label that can afford to sign the next Radiohead. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Walsh, like most music fans, understands good music as being a subjective judgement unrelated to general critical discourse and consensus. Unlike most music fans however Walsh is a former EMI plugger and is programming a network of FM radio stations. His position on good music is framed by critiquing 'serious' music fan attitudes to pop acts - Walsh understands the political economy of the record industry, which needs to generate income from current artists in order to sign and develop new artists. This makes it possible to see 'manufactured' pop acts as good music, alongside critically acclaimed and fan approved artists like Radiohead.

Colin Martin at BBC Radio 2 is reflective about the difference between good music and good radio records:

> Good music is different again. You can get a track that has a great hook, and it is a bit of toe-tapper, and you know it'll only be around for the 6 or 8 weeks of it's life but it it's instant there and then. That's not good music, that's a good radio record. You can have other tracks that you [think are] beautiful, lovely but that won't stand rotation [on a playlist]. [We] could play it once or twice and that's it. [I] know the audience like it now, but I [also] know that they'll get fed up with it. You just KNOW, I can't qualify it. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

The length of time a record remains viable on a playlist is for Martin one of the differences between good music and a good radio record. This is an oblique restatement of the traditional divide between pop (of its time, transient) and rock (timeless, classic). Hook-heavy mainstream pop records work well, even on a station like Radio 2, but Martin implies that more 'serious' music wouldn't work in the same way. There is some conflict here - it is not that the imagined audience does not want to hear more "beautiful" or complex pieces of music, it is that it does not seem to want to listen *often* to a record with those characteristics. How he makes those decisions though remains hidden within ideas of instinct and gut feeling. Martin attempts to clarify by listing artists that represent his (and by extension, Radio 2's) notion of good music:

> When I put the playlist together I don't think, oh this is young or this is old, I think this is good music. So whether it's KT Tunstall, or Madonna or Stevie Wonder, or David Gray or Goldfrapp or Bob Marley or Franz or Katie Melua - they're all on our playlist because they all make great music. The younger generation came along and they wanted something different to what their peers had been listening to. Good music and melody and songs is what they have discovered,

which basically what Radio 2 is all about.   (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

It is also true that younger music and radio fans will have access to (and use) channels other than radio to become familiar with new artists - they may already be familiar with new-ish artists or records *before* they choose Radio 2 as the station on which they can hear those records.

Martin's mix of established and more recent artists underscores the sense that 'good' music is 'timeless', but also there are many records that can be both 'good' music and good radio records. Martin also makes the not unreasonable assumption that his audience want to hear "good music and melody and songs". The correlation between his music policy and the growing ratings of his station makes it possible to ignore the more complex questions of how Martin's notion of 'good' might differ qualitatively from that of his audience or from that of other professionals in radio or the record industry.

Adam Uytman of Kerrang is more direct:

> Well, I'm a music fan to be honest. It's very easy to spot what a good record is. A good record is a good record. That's my personal taste, and [programming music] is not about my taste. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

The circularity of this argument is far from unusual - a good record is obviously a good record because it's good. Uytman's point though is more that personal preference in music shouldn't impinge on his professional activity as a music radio programmer, despite the fact that he describes himself as a music fan.

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM responded to the question of the difference between good music and a good radio record with a more elaborate version of Uytman's argument:

> It's really funny - I've got an ear for both [good music and good radio records]. My first ear is for radio. There are things that are good for radio that I personally don't like but I know that they'll work [on radio], and there are records I love that really work well on radio. There are things that I think are great pieces of music that I love to listen to at home that wouldn't particularly work on the radio. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

Smith's three classes of records are defined not by what they sound like or what values

they might represent. They are formed by the way he processes the music he hears every

day as music programmer. These ring true to my own experience, not as a mainstream FM

station programmer but as a specialist music DJ - all new music is passed through the filter

of 'will it work on the show/playlist?'.   The first category (good for radio but disliked by DJ or

programmer) is the one least likely to trouble the specialist DJ, yet on many occasions I

played records that I considered to be interesting, important or innovative but for which I

had little personal affection. For the mainstream commercial music radio programmer it is

likely that the second category (good music which is also good for radio) will vary in size

and content depending on the format of the station being programmed. The strength of

programmers' understanding of their own professionalism works to prevent the movement

of records from the third category (good music that wouldn't work on radio) to the second.

From the record industry side Jay Cox's perception of the value of music is straightforward:

> There are two types of music in my book, good and bad. Stuff you like and stuff you don't like.
> Stuff I'd listen to on the radio I wouldn't necessarily put on at home [and vice versa]. [Long
> pause] if you do have a good radio record, the chances are that it's a good song. But that's
> not always the case - some of the biggest radio records of the year are records I don't like.
> Daniel Powter's 'Bad Day' for example was a number 1 airplay record, I can see why other
> people like it. Does that make it a good record? To other people yes, to me, no. Radio
> stations like it, people must like it [or it wouldn't be a number one airplay record]. Whether it's
> good music or not is very subjective. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

Cox, from outside the radio industry, describes music he'd be happy to listen to on a radio

station but wouldn't necessarily play at home. Despite his experience as a plugger for the

record industry, Cox's notion of a good radio record is anchored in his experience as a

radio listener, rather than as a programmer. His record industry perspective is more

evident in his suggestion that a good radio record is probably also a good song, even if he

doesn't personally like that record. In this situation he is prepared to accept that if other

people (programmers, audience) believe a song to be good, then it probably is, despite his

personal antipathy to that record.

PLUGGING MUSIC

Plugging records to radio is normally part of a promotional campaign designed to raise awareness of a new artist or record, and it is still a central plank of those campaigns in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. In this section I explore the tools of persuasion and how those tools frame the relationship between pluggers and programmers.

Plugging strategies and practice

There is a number of well-established techniques that pluggers routinely use to persuade programmers that a new record should be added to the playlist. The employment of these techniques is central to the relationship between pluggers and programmers, but it is not the tools of persuasion in themselves that are interesting. It is the dynamic of how those tools function within existing or new professional and social relationships that really matters. Moreover, the simplicity of the objective (getting a record onto a playlist) obscures the complexity of the social, cultural and economic negotiation that characterise its attainment. That these tools of persuasion exist is not news. What *is* new is an investigation into the ways in which pluggers and programmers (as cultural intermediaries) understand the deployment of these tools as part of their professional interaction and their respective balances of social, economic and cultural capital.

Plugger Jay Cox introduces some of the basic tools of the pluggers trade:

> As an independent it depends on the label and the budget that goes into a record. When I worked for other companies we'd have an expense account and we'd take people out for gigs, drinks, whatever. That's one tool. Another is time with the artist, be it interview or gig or whatever. Also merchandise, promo stuff - whatever is around the campaign, you can use. You can sway and influence with a couple of drinks at the bar, or an old relationship with [a certain] person. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

Broadly then pluggers can offer an experience (a gig for example), material product (merchandise) or a mixture of the two (food and drink). There is also a version of the

'experience' model which offers that experience to a third party - the audience, or part of it

at least.

Alan Smith, formerly of Warners, had become sceptical about the effectiveness of some

promotional inducements towards the end of his time at the label:

> There're so many records out there and there's so much to be gained by getting good airplay,
> that the people making these decisions are offered everything. [But] you can offer all these
> inducements that you think will make the top people who make these decisions sit up and take
> notice … [but] they've become so jaded with it they don't really [take notice]. For example, the
> last couple of trips abroad I organised for Warners, it was a case of being down to my 2nd and
> 3rd reserves. The top people would say 'I'll come, I'll come' and then a week later they're like
> 'There's a meeting, I'd love to come but I can't.' (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions
> Manager, Warners Music UK).

Smith offers an explanation for both the level of inducements to music radio and for the lack

of response to those inducements. If the potential rewards of heavy rotation airplay are high

(in the form of associated album sales), the record industry will continue to put promotional

resources into achieving that airplay. Smith implies that the number of inducements

available to key radio industry decision-makers is such that those inducements are no

longer uniquely attractive.   That is a possible explanation, but it is just as likely that music

programmers increasingly see certain kinds of inducements as eroding their perceived

independence from the record industry.

Payola

The term 'payola' has been around since the 1930s:

> The term "payola" was coined by Variety in 1938 to refer to gifts, favors, or cash surreptitiously
> dispensed by record companies to get orchestra leaders and disc jockeys to play their songs.
> By the 1950s, influential disc jockeys were receiving hundreds of records to listen to every
> month. Payola was a good way to get their attention. (Altschuler, 2003:142).

Altschuler's thorough history address the widespread use of payola in the 1950s and a

series of investigations throughout that decade, culminating in the involvement of the

Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission in 1960. By

1961 the chair of the FTC announced that the practice of payola had been "pretty well stamped out" (Altschuler, 2003:149).

Payola, as it turned out, did not really go away forever. In the last two years, during a series of investigations (led by then New York Attorney General, Eliot Spitzer) into payola and inducements for airplay, all major labels in the US and the four biggest radio owning companies parties made a number of large settlement payments (up to $12 million) to the US government, whilst denying any actual wrong doing (Leeds, 2006; Spain, 2007).

These stories had little media exposure in the UK, and my informants, in both industries, were united in the belief that US levels of payola were simply not an issue in the UK, despite the use of various levels of other inducements. This was not, according to one record industry informant, necessarily the case elsewhere in Europe.

> In some countries, I know Spain is one of them, I think Japan is as well and some of the other Asian countries) [record companies] actually just have to do … marketing deals. They're actually just paying for plays. And they'll just do it for a period of two or three weeks and then that's it - it's quite refined. In America, despite what the Americans say, it's been like that for years, and they just find … ways to get around [payola legislation]. So it's not very obvious that they're paying for plays, but they are. The UK's still got quite a straight bat to that sort of thing. In the UK the record companies all run competitions with the radio stations to inspire loyalty and plays and so on. … [The idea of buying advertising to get records on the radio] was suggested to me [by managers] at quite a few meetings. In my job I had to broach the subject with various radio programmers, but we never went down that avenue, thank goodness. (Record industry informant A).

My informant describes a process that is completely legal, but works indirectly unlike the direct approach of financial inducement - record companies buy advertising time in exchange for airplay. His optimism about music business ethics in the UK is based more on the response of the radio industry to overtures from the record business: in my informant's experience, commercial music radio in the UK appears not to have been swayed by the suggestion that they might adopt the same 'ads for plays' model as some of their foreign cousins. It would be pleasant to imagine that this represents a position on admirable moral high ground for the music radio industry in the UK, but it is more likely however that a refusal to entertain 'ads for plays' as a realistic option says more about the strength of the radio industry in relation to the record industry in the UK. British commercial

music radio bases its playlists, as discussed earlier in this chapter, largely on audience

research and music testing, so it is simply not interested in negotiating playlist sovereignty

in exchange for advertising income. More importantly, neither individual stations nor their

parent networks would wish to be seen to involved in a practice that might suggest outside

influence on their core business.

A record industry plugger agrees that plugging in the UK is less morally ambiguous that it is

elsewhere. He cites the 2005 case of Sony-BMG US in relation to offering flights and other

inducements to radio stations in exchange for airplay (reported by David Teather in The

Guardian, 26.07.05), but he alleges that British radio is not beyond reproach:

> Recent reports have been about America [Sony and Franz Ferdinand]. Over here it doesn't
> work like that really, I don't think. [In the US] I heard stories of Death Row Records buying
> everyone Rolex [watches] with Death Row [logos] on them. It was like 'What's the time?' -
> 'Time to play [a Death Row] record again'. Over here I think we're just a bit more cynical, and
> not like that. [However] I know that there are certain people that you can buy. I'm not saying I
> have [done that] but I've heard [the gossip]. Yeah, trips to New York, or back in the day it
> would be alloy wheels or tyres for your Porsche. But I don't think Brits are generally like that -
> it can be done, everyone can be persuaded to do something, and mostly for a price. But I
> don't think payola is the issue here that it is in America. From [the radio industry] side, they
> lose if they start taking [payola]. Because they become susceptible to whatever. It's like
> 'You're our bitch - you work for the record label now!'. At the BBC they're quite [strict] about
> things like that [with] rules governing foreign trips or in fact taking anything from anyone.
> Commercial radio less so. They like to give away prizes and stuff. (Record industry informant
> B).

He does not suggest that quasi-legal inducements have never happened here in the UK,

but is quite clear about why it is an uncommon practice. Firstly there is the loss of

professional independence (real or perceived) that a music programmer would experience

and also the potential loss of social capital if the acceptance of inducements becomes

public. Secondly, the BBC's public service remit and clear charter obligations mean that

any form of ambiguous inducement would be rejected. My own experience at BBC Radio

Scotland in the early 1990s is that it was not a problem to accept a meal and drinks from a

record company plugger, nor even a flight to an album launch in Brussels. I was unaware

of any expectation of providing airplay in return but I was also aware of being a small player

in a rather large game. My understanding of those record industry events was that they

were about persuading me to listen to a record, and about building relationships between

me as a broadcaster and pluggers as representatives of the record industry. By the time of

my return to broadcasting as dance and electronic music DJ in the late-1990s, there were

noticeably fewer grand gestures, at least at my level, though typically there were any

number of club and event guest listings not directly related to any one record company.

Travel

I have already mentioned my early-1990s professional experience of the foreign trip as a

promotional tool, but the fly-away is still considered a viable strategy for building support for

a new artist or record. Often, as Roger Jacobs notes, they are in the form of competitions

for listeners rather than being pitched directly at music programmers:

> … if there was a record that was 50/50, it might fit on the playlist, it might not, and if we had a competition where we could take some listeners to New York or New Orleans to see the act, and that might tip the balance then that would be great. But having said that, as soon as the competition was over [snaps fingers] usually the radio station would whip the record off. Which was frustrating for me and my superiors who would then lambast me about the situation. But without the competition [we] wouldn't have had any plays anyway. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

Jacobs is sanguine about the system despite the frustration of its limited success. One

reading of his example would be that a radio station dominates that particular relationship.

A station or network appears to offer a record company what it needs (airplay) in exchange

for an audience-pleasing competition, but radio would seem to have a very different

understanding of the exchange rate. For radio the competition was worth two weeks of

airplay for a record. If that record had tested well with an audience sample it would have

been much more likely to stay on a playlist, but in the absence of positive market research

few commercial radio stations will stay with a new record.

Alan Smith, formerly of Warners, is confident that foreign trips for music programmers do

work (that is, if he can persuade them to accept the trip):

> If it's an impressive enough one, like if you say 'I'll take you to LA for 3 days' ... if you had a good relationship with the person you're taking, you'd discuss it up-front … you'd say 'We'll do this' and it would be a given that they'd have to support the record, because they realise that we didn't spend three or four grand taking them and others away just for the sake of them getting a sun tan. But you wouldn't do it for smaller acts where you couldn't guarantee the support - the marketing team aren't giving you money just to piss against the wall, they expect results. There'll still be trips and money spent on programmers ... you're spending it on a meal

> or taking someone to see a band. It's not like 'Here's two grand, go and have a family holiday, and by the way play the new Corrs single' (for example). That may go on but not in the world I existed in … me and most of the people [I] know in the music industry are fairly straight and wouldn't get involved in that kind of thing.   (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

For Smith the foreign trip (the fly-away) works *because* it is so costly for the record company. The financial commitment from the record company is clear to music programmers who will have discussed the exchange rate before accepting the offer.

Andrew Thomson at EMI has a different perspective:

> A lot of other record labels might send someone to Chicago to see a band but that money's just being wasted ... they're not always going to play it just because they got taken to Chicago. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records)

Thomson suggests that the foreign trip is not a useful promotional tool for the record industry, but Grant Crain of Polydor records sees the use of travel competitions as a longer term investment in artists:

> If you send two [radio competition winners] to America for two nights, that's £1500 pounds already spent on that. But the value [we] get is not only the promotion of the competition itself, but also support for the artist, which [we] have to kind of demand nowadays. And I think the measure of a good record company is sometimes knowing that the pay-off is long term, rather than short term. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

For Crain the "pay-off" is both short term (the record company can "demand" support for an artist) and long term (if the short term support works for the radio station in music testing and audience research, it is more likely to offer long term support). The most significant word used by Crain though is "demand" - he must insist that in exchange for the promotional benefit to the radio station of an international travel competition, that the record company receives a guarantee of support for an artist.

Mark Findlay of the Capital Radio Group, perhaps not surprisingly, argues that accepting foreign trips from record companies does not affect his approach to music programming:

> It makes no difference to me at all. Quite often if … I don't go to very many of the trips abroad, and I do try and share them around my team. But if record companies would be pushing for me to go and do something, like we did, we went to Chicago for Maroon Five, I wouldn't have gone to that gig unless I already believed that the act were right for us. I don't want to be in that horrible compromised position where we come back and they go 'What about it?' And I'd

far rather, and I have quite often gone, 'D'you know what? There's not a hope in hell that we're gonna support that record, I hate it! And I don't think seeing them live in Chicago is gonna make any difference.' And they might say to me 'Well, y'know, we still really want you to come'. And I'd say, 'Okay, but as long as you totally understand that this is not working for me' and they go 'No it would just be nice for you to be there, it would be a bit of a laugh'. And I go 'Fine'. Yeah, I think to me that's absolutely fine. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay is careful to distance himself from the possibility that international travel would in itself encourage him to playlist a record or support a new artist. He agrees with Cox that an explicit connection between accepting travel and music policy decisions would be detrimental to perceptions of professional integrity. Foreign trips nonetheless take place, but Findlay's position is that those do not affect his music programming strategy. This is problematic.

Crain, Smith and others in the record industry maintain that foreign trips are useful promotional tools, but none of the music programmers I spoke to were prepared to confirm that this was the way that the system could work. My view is that both sides of this apparent conflict are correct, and that Crain's more nuanced view that the foreign trip is about long term support for artists rather than short term playlisting is a fair reflection of reality. It is reasonable to speculate that for programmers, seeing a new artists perform live in New York rather than in say, Camden Town, means that they are more likely to be focused on the band rather than going back to the office to deal with day-to-day management politics.

It also works for the record label, regardless of whether or not they extract a commitment to support a new record from music programmers. This is an opportunity for record labels to hear feedback from radio stations programmers en masse and to use that feedback in shaping their promotional campaign for a new artist; it gives record companies some indication of the potential popularity of, or market for a new artists; it works towards building the artist as star ('if the record company is prepared to fly me to New York to see this band', a programmer might think, 'then they must be putting in major resources to promote this band. Perhaps we should take them seriously').

The over-riding concern for the programmers in this research was not to appear to be influenced by record company inducements that might be construed in any way as record companies paying (however indirectly) for plays. This obscures two points: the first is that low level gift giving between businesses is far from unusual in other sectors and gifts might range from bottles of whisky to guest passes for sporting events (see, for example, Hendon, Hendon and Herbig, 1996). The second and related point is that business gift giving, whilst mired in a complex of motive and interpretation, is largely about relationship building at a level somewhere between the social and the economic. The underlying assumption is that the development of (positive) social relationships will have economic benefits for one or both parties. This is a more useful way of understanding the place of foreign travel in the dynamic between pluggers and programmers.

The question then becomes not 'is this form of inducement a legitimate or an illegitimate tool of persuasion?', it is 'in what ways does this practice affect the production of popular music?'. The answer is partly in the ways in which feedback from music radio changes what the record industry does, of which more later, in the sections *Power* and *Relationships*.

Promotional tours

Foreign trips, although high profile, are not part of the everyday array of record industry promotional tools, partly due to upfront costs, partly to the uncertain levels of return on that upfront investment. There are other more common and more immediately effective tools available to the plugger, and other than sending out records themselves, one of the most common of these is the promotional tour. The promotional tour is distinct from a formal concert tour on which artists play in live performance venues in different cities in that it is set up exclusively for radio and television (normally with either an invited audience, or no audience at all). Interviews and short live sessions (normally in simple acoustic formats) are short and artists can fit in five or six in a day, as opposed to a single concert performance. Interviews and live sessions with various media do of course happen

alongside formal live tours, but the promotional tour is distinguished by being both short and cheap. It is possible for regional radio stations to do interviews with artists anywhere else in the country through high quality telecommunications links (or even mobile phones), but all the pluggers in this research believed that taking an artist to a radio station in person was considerably more effective. Andrew Thomson of EMI sums up record company motivation in the promotional tour:

> I stick by the rule that getting an act to walk in the front door of a radio station, going in, shaking hands, everything from meeting the receptionist and being nice to [him/her] to meeting the Programme Controller or the Programme Director or Managing Director even, can make a hell of a lot of a difference. [It's much better than] just putting [the artist] in a studio in London doing ISDN [interviews] for 2 hours around all the stations … I do it with a lot of artists where I get them to fly up to Aberdeen on the Monday morning [I drive them down the country through the week] and drop them off at Manchester on the Friday afternoon … we'll cover the whole north of the country, get them in everywhere, do dinners ... (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

Outwardly the promotional tour is about getting radio airtime, in the form of interviews or live performances for an artist with a new release. Record industry logic argues that the more often an audience hears a record or an artist talking about a record the more likely it is that an increase in sales will be the result. While it may be true that artist exposure on radio will have some correlation with sales, Thomson indicates that the promotional tour has a more subtle intent. It is, like the foreign trip, about developing the social and economic relationship between record company and radio, and about making the artist's name familiar to decision makers in the music radio industry.

To a listener in Aberdeen there would be little difference in terms of sound between an artist talking and performing from a studio in London connected to a local or regional radio station, and that artist *being* in Aberdeen. So there must be, as Thomson suggests, other advantages to the promotional tour. Local radio station employees *like* to meet artists in person because, in my experience in radio at least, it develops a sense of connection to the centre of the record industry. That sense of connection can be developed from reception to board room, depending on the level of fame of the artist in question. Photographs of DJ and artist are deployed internally and externally to reinforce an impression of connection between radio station and the perceived glamour of the record industry. Internally there are visual reminders of the artists, and often aural reminders as DJs subsequently re-tell stories

about the visit of that artist to the station. The overall effect then of the promotional tour is long term as well as short term. In the short term a record company can generate media exposure for, and radio industry goodwill towards an artist (provided that the artist plays ball) and in the longer term the promotional tour helps radio stations develop their social and cultural capital by suggesting closer association with (emerging) stars.

Grant Crain at Polydor acknowledges the formal record company objective of the promotional tour, but explains why the acoustic session (typically voice accompanied by acoustic guitar and in some cases percussion) is important beyond its ability to have an artists perform on air:

> Things like interviews and sessions are all about influencing the station to like the artist ... or prove their worth. Sophie Ellis-Bexter was a good example of that, actually. We tucked away her acoustic capabilities for a good while before we brought them out, which was when we needed it. We went into radio stations and performed ... and [the broadcasters] were ... shocked that this pop/dance thing could turn into a real cool acoustic session that real talent shines through on. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

Crain refines the point made by Thomson - the promotional tour is not about the record, it's about persuading radio stations to "like" the *artist*. One way of achieving this is to stress the 'authenticity' of an artist. His example of Sophie Ellis-Bextor makes the point rather well - Ellis-Bextor had an apprenticeship of sorts in indie band The Audience, though her solo career was developed in dance-pop with the 2002 hit single Murder On The Dance Floor. In traditional rock constructions of authentic value, dance-pop with connotations of transience and the 'manufactured' does not score highly.   Having an artist like Ellis-Bextor perform live acoustic versions of her pop-dance hits not only plays to the artist's strengths as a live performer, but confronts (rock) preconceptions of dance music as studio constructed and fake. The acoustic format is particularly charged with authentic value having been associated for decades with the 'honest' self-expression of folk and blues. There is an underlying assumption in Crain's example: it is that mainstream FM music radio stations and their listeners share common notions of authenticity in live music performance. If there were indications from radio stations or audiences that those notions were not shared though, it is unlikely that acoustic session format would continue to be desirable for record companies or successful for radio stations. On the contrary, BBC Radio1's Live

Lounge on Jo Whiley's mid-morning show remains a popular segment, often featuring well-known artists playing acoustic cover versions.

Live music events

Live performance is increasingly becoming part of contemporary music radio, beyond the acoustic sessions discussed in the previous section. A live performance in this context is one that is co-promoted or presented by a radio station or network, with a radio audience normally the primary objective, but with a co-present live audience in the venue. Performances by artists can consist of anything from one song to a full-length concert set, but are normally between two and five songs. Regional commercial music radio networks typically organise an annual event with a number of artists aimed at a youth audience. Andrew Thomson of EMI records describes the annual Scottish 'Live and Loud' day organised by Scottish Radio Holdings (now owned by Emap):

> SRH do Live and Loud at Hampden [Stadium] so you get 45,000 kids who are standing there from mid-day until 6pm and last year it was Busted and a great pop line up. But SRH is 8 stations all over Scotland, so if we book an act for that event [to perform] two songs, every station [that SRH own] will play that record. So the record company pay whatever it is to get the band and dancers up to Scotland. [But I think that] some of the radio stations should cover some of the costs - because some of the events are pay-to-get-in, like Live and Loud is £15 or something. So parents are paying £15 and it was sponsored by Irn Bru and is now sponsored by HEBS (Health Education Board Scotland). [And] SRH always says they don't make money ... [even though a] lot of the English events are totally free. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

In Thomson's account of the Live and Loud event the uneasiness of the relationship between the record industry and music radio is obvious. Radio stations need the biggest name artists they can get to guarantee the largest crowds and to maximise sponsorship income on the day of the event.   Record companies want the exposure not only of the live performances at the event itself, but also airplay of the featured artists on networked radio stations in the weeks before the live show. The benefits of the exposure are normally such that record companies are prepared to cover the cost of getting the artists on stage for only two songs. Although these events bear a superficial resemblance to more traditional out-door live music events or festivals, the negotiations between radio and the record industry

mean that they have more in common with plugging and playlisting of records. Increasing

radio involvement with traditional festivals like Glastonbury and T In The Park muddy the

waters somewhat, but with those longer established live music events it is the live concert

audience, rather than the radio listener, which is the primary target of the performance.

Mark Findlay of Capital Radio Group returns to an earlier theme of integrity in music

programming decision making.

> I've heard about all these horrible deals that are done and again, going back to that thing about
> being honest and open with record companies, yeah absolutely, we have playlisted lots of
> records from artists who have done our events, but I've heard the records first. Because I
> don't believe I want to, or should have to, compromise any of our playlists, to be able to get a
> full line-up for our Party in the Park. You know, if you look at the line-ups that we had, there
> was nobody on any of the bills that were not artists that we would support. (Mark Findlay,
> Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay suggests that other programmers may have made deals with record companies to

offer playlisting for access to artists for large out-door live events, but distances himself

from any implication that he would do the same. A recurring theme in this work is the

argument that music radio holds the balance of power in the relationship with the record

industry. It is only in perhaps two months of the summer during which the big out-door

radio live shows take place around the UK, when it is arguable that record companies have

the upper hand. I will return to this issue in the section *Power*.

Findlay illustrates the complexities of negotiating with the record industry in the weeks prior

to a major radio live event, in this case in Birmingham for the Capital FM Network station

BRMB:

> [BRMB Programme Controller] Adam Bridge ... wanted Lionel Richie to do Birmingham. I went
> ... to the record company and said, 'Look, I know Adam's really keen for Lionel Richie to do it,
> but I've got to be honest with you, I don't like the [new record] ... if Adam wants to spot play
> him in Birmingham, that's great' and they said, 'Hmmm, it's going to be very difficult for us to
> do it [give Lionel to Capital for the Birmingham show, unless airplay is guaranteed]. At which
> point [the record company] said to me, look we've got this fantastic new artist, that we're going
> to be championing in the next six months' ... Lucie Silvas. ... And they played me 3 or 4 songs,
> and I said 'D'you know what? I'm quite happy to support this project.' And ... (and I don't care
> how they sell that to Lionel) if that helps to swing that he does the gig, and the record company
> are happy, then I'm happy to do that. So that to me is not any kind of underhand deal,
> because no-one's compromising anybody else. The record company get an artist supported,
> we get music we want to play, and Birmingham gets the Lionel Richie performance. I think
> that's fine and I hate that kind of 'You got to have this … and do this' and it's a shit record! I'd
> rather not have to do that. I rather just say 'We don't need them on the bill, we'll get someone
> else'.

Without the driver of the live show in Birmingham, the Lionel Richie record would only have made 'spot' plays on BRMB, meaning it would not be playlisted and would have a very low on-air profile. BRMB want Richie for the live show and this gives the record company sufficient leverage to suggest that the Capital FM Network might want to playlist a new, unknown artist in exchange for Richie's live performance. The record company (Island, part of Sony-BMG) are happy to sacrifice playlisting of the new Richie record in exchange for playlisting and support of another artist. Findlay argues that the new artist is one that fits his station sound and audience profile, so therefore there is no compromise. He also makes it clear that he would prefer to lose an artist from a live show rather than play a record he feels is wrong for the station.

The negotiation and what it says about the balance of power is in itself fascinating, but more interesting is what this example illustrates about how the *sound* of mainstream pop music radio evolves. In this case, the rejection of a new record by an established artist leads to the acceptance of a new record by an unknown artist, with a very different sound. The station is happy with the sound of a female singer-songwriter, but the negotiation reported here by Findlay shows that one record company can influence a radio station's decision only over *which* female singer songwriter to support, rather than whether to support any at all.

Mike Walsh of the Century FM Network addresses another variable whose value can be influenced by the offer of a live show by a record company:

> Quite often a decision's made if it's a record you're going be able to play or not, quite early on. When you play it is important for the record labels and debateable for you. So it's like for example, they say 'Right we can give you a gig with Natalie Imbruglia' and you go 'Brilliant!', and the gig is [whatever] date and it's all confirmed. In that case, what I'll do is I'll bring the 'Add [to Playlist]' date of that single forward two weeks. Which means that we're playing the single earlier. And the listeners are aware of it prior to this gig happening, which makes a lot of sense for everyone. But it also means that the investment of time and money that the record label has put into giving us that great piece of content, is being paid off by the fact that we're playing that record more [and] earlier, which is what they want and what they need. And that happens quite often. That's when a juicy bit of content can oil the wheels of a playlist. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

It is not only a question of *if* a record is added to a playlist, for both record company and

radio station, the central issue is *when* a record is added. In Walsh's example the decision

had already been made to support the Natalie Imbruglia record, but not on when it would be

added to the playlist. The record company (Sony-BMG) offers a live show with the singer

on a date which will encourage Walsh to add the record to his playlist two weeks earlier, so

the record receives more pre-release airplay which allows the network to plug its own

coverage of the Imbruglia live show. If Century goes early on the Imbruglia single then it

increases the likelihood of other radio stations adding it to their playlists as well, so the

record company negotiation with one network can have assist in its negotiations with other

networks and other programmers. The anticipated effect of this exposure for the record

company is an increase in sales of a record, but a less quantifiable consequence is a

reinforcement of notions of the authenticity of live performance as a representation of an

artist's true talent, or ability to 'cut it live' [42].

For most commercial FM radio stations, live performances are unusual events used as part

of a promotional campaign for the network, the record company or both. The use of live

performance as promotion is also part of BBC network music radio, but live-ness represents

a more explicitly ideological strategy in public service broadcasting:

> Live music is such a big part of what we do. Whether it's Lamaq live every week, or when we webcast The Strokes [live event] before we broadcast it. As much as we can [we] go around the country. It comes down to money - it costs a lot to put on the events we do, like the Big Weekend - huge artists free. It's only because we're the Beeb that we can do that. It's really exciting - I think it's like clubbing was 5 years ago. The kids see all these new bands and go out and buy the records. It's part of our public service that we play live music, like Jo Whiley's 'Live Lounge' always goes down really well. And we have artists [playing live from BBC studios] Maida Vale. Live music is even more important now at Radio 1, it's something about hearing the cheering, it gives you a little tingle and [you know] it is live. And our specialist DJ's are off around the country every week playing live. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Jagpal positions live music at Radio 1 as central to the BBC's role as national cultural

institution. Live music, like the seeking out and showcasing of new artists, is aligned with

the BBC's public service remit. The same ambiguity is present though - listeners are

served by hearing broadcast live performances that are otherwise only available to the

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[42] Natalie Imbruglia's third album *Counting Down The Days*, became her first number one album in the UK, and the single *Shiver* became one of the most played songs of 2005 (Sullivan, 2005).

audience co-present with the artist. Yet that live performance is also a promotional event for the record company, so the BBC is again operating at the commercial-cultural interface where the difference in explanation of a particular strategy or event depends on one's ideological (or political) priorities.

Jagpal represents the public service-ness of the BBC as the organisation's capability to support expensive live performance from a licence fee in a way that most commercial radio stations either could not or would not. The BBC's distinctiveness is then in offering a service not available from the commercial sector. While this may not be absolutely true in all circumstances (UK commercial radio does feature live performances), Radio 1's economic strength allows the station to broadcast more live music than its commercial competitors, much of which has been created specifically for the BBC. More importantly Radio 1 features live music every day in a mainstream mid-morning show (Jo Whiley), which despite some recent moves by commercial radio to increase its coverage of live music (Robinson, 2007), is still unique in British radio. Radio 1's stress on the importance of live music in part reflects a more general growth of interest in live performance across Europe (Smith, 2007), but for Jagpal there is a correlation between live music and sales ("The kids see all these new bands and go out and buy the records"). Regardless of the statistical basis for the statement, it is an acknowledgement of Radio 1's dual status as public service cultural organisation and as a major (if autonomous) component of record industry promotional strategy.

RECORD FORMATS

Much of this chapter has made the assumption that most of the music playlisted on UK music radio is, or has been available as a single (as opposed to being a track chosen from an album by a music programmer or DJ), either as a physical vinyl or CD release, or as a legal digital download. Album tracks are played from time to time on UK music radio, but it is unusual to see a track playlisted unless it is, or was a single. Historically plugging has been about getting a newly released single on to playlists of music radio stations, and it is

worth noting that there are few signs of that changing, despite the sharp growth of digital

sales (and the reported decrease in physical CD sales) (Allen, 2007b). As the music

market shifts to digital downloading, in principle any track from any album can be

purchased at any time but in practice there has been no shift away from the

single/album/tour model used by the record industry for decades. Part of the explanation

might be social inertia - music fans are familiar with the model and resistant to change.

More likely are the economic issues raised by most of the pluggers and programmers in this

research. It matters here because without that established framework of promotion of

single tracks the relationship between pluggers and programmers would have to change in

unpredictable ways.

The single will survive in various formats, according to Mark Findlay of Capital Radio

Group:

> [The single] gives us the track that the record companies are wanting to push from that new album and it gives us something to hang the playlist around. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Andrew Thomson of EMI:

> There's always going have to be a single for promotion of an artist and album to radio and TV. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

Sarita Jagpal at Radio 1 agrees:

> The whole idea of the single release [as a CD] is definitely on it's last legs, it's just not economical. The idea of having a promotional track from an album, with a video, will continue. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Roger Jacobs from BMG Records agrees that the single is central to the promotional

campaign for an album:

> [A single is] the forefront of the advertising for the album. If [we] fail to get it heard on the radio or seen on television, then [we're] quite handicapped in promoting and selling the album. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

The single will continue to be an economic necessity for a record industry that needs to

focus promotional effort on one song to promote a whole album, but it also matters for the

structure of music radio playlists. Adam Uytman from Kerrang Radio extends the argument

that, from the perspective of a music radio programmer, singles make radio playlists work:

> A physical single is only important because for us, as an industry as a whole it gives us a record to play from an album. [We] could go and play random album tracks that you like best, but if [different radio stations are] playing different tracks … we kind of rely on a certain element of support from other radio stations, so [the audience] get to know and like [a record] better. By the time I'm getting sick of a record, as a Head of Music, that's the point at which the listeners will have kicked in and started liking the record. So it's all about familiarity. The single is quite important then, [so that] everyone plays the same record, we're seeing the same performances on TV, and they become anthems, if you get the right records. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

The single therefore acts as focal point for the music radio industry as whole - competing

radio stations depend on each other (and other media) to be playing the same records at

more-or-less the same time.

This mechanism helps to explain the inertia of playlists and the conservative programming

policy of most mainstream commercial hits radio. Long established industry structures and

practices develop and maintain a feedback loop that privileges the notion that familiar

sounds as are favoured by music radio audiences. As discussed earlier in this chapter,

radio stations will tend to want to playlist music which tests well in audience research.

Records that are known to audiences, or records with a particular set of aural and musical

qualities that are known and favoured by audiences (that is, records that sound like records

they already know) will tend to test better. Audiences become familiar with records and

sounds if they are widely playlisted, and exposed in other media - radio stations will

therefore play more of the same records (and sounds) with which audiences will

consequently become more familiar, so squeezing out space that new records and sounds

might otherwise occupy.

This is of course the central dilemma of the record industry - innovation is a high risk

strategy, but one with potentially large rewards. For the commercial radio industry

innovation in mainstream music programming would be a very high risk strategy with little in

the way of similar reward - Radio 1 and Radio 2 already fill the role of risk-takers in radio

programming. The BBC may not like the ratings damage resulting from potential

misjudgement in music policy at its flagship music radio stations, but those stations are in a

sufficiently strong economic and cultural position to be able to weather temporary audience loss in a way that most of its commercial rivals would envy.

Singles have historically been used by major labels to sell albums rather than being profit generating products in and of themselves. Since the successful introduction of the iTunes Music Store in 2003 there has been much media speculation about the 'death of the album' (Browne, 2007), but despite modestly falling CD album revenue in the UK, the end of the artist album as a music format is not yet a foregone conclusion. In 2005, Alan Smith describes a record company model that continued to focus on albums:

> I think people now will go out and buy and album, or wait for the album. I think downloading has made the CD single irrelevant … also there are so many other things kids can spend money on.   Also, we're back to a world of album acts right now, like Scissor Sisters, Snow Patrol, even Busted were an album act as well as a singles act. (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions Manager, Warners Music UK).

Why does any of this matter to the relationship between the record industry and music radio? The record industry needs to sell records either physically or digitally, and while this economic model prevails singles will remain at the centre of promotional campaigns. Mainstream music radio, commercial or BBC, needs the single as the key structural element of playlists. The emphasis on the single promoted track for radio and for the record industry means the relationship between those two industries will continue to focus on pluggers and music programmers.

BRANDS

Excavating a useful definition of branding from the mountain of largely vocational literature that characterises the field of marketing is far from easy. Nevertheless, Ind (2005) offers this:

> The argument is this: just as capital is a concept, so is a brand. Although a brand is related to a physical product or service it is itself immaterial. It is a transforming idea that converts the tangible into something of value. (Ind, 2005:3).

'Brand' as a concept collapses many, often complex, social constructions (authenticity,

trust, status) into a single value set such that, if the brand construction has been successful,

a company name or logo triggers a series of brand connotations in the consumer of a

product or service. Companies need positive values to be associated with a brand, but

equally there can be unanticipated and unwelcome negative associations. Until relatively

recently the brand connotations of Skoda cars were negative (poorly built, spartan,

unreliable), whether or not the cars themselves exhibited these qualities. Toyota on the

other hand has brand values that may be interpreted positive or negatively depending on

context: reliability, retained used-value, safe but unexciting driving experience. Similar

processes are at work in branding of radio stations, and my informants clearly understand

the value of getting radio branding right. It is the sounds of the music and the choice of

records that are the core branding tool for radio stations, according to Mark Findlay of

Capital FM:

> The whole brand thing has been really important for us in the commercial sector. Because it's very important that our [advertising] clients understand what [each station] is about. I think it's also very important from the record companies' point of view. That they actually understand where they are liable to make things work and where things are gonna get away. You can spot the really good record pluggers, because they won't come to us with lots of stuff that isn't appropriate for our radio stations. Quite often what will happen is that I'll get two piles of records from them. They'll go 'Right, here's all the stuff I want to talk to you about for the FM Network and here's all the stuff you're gonna love and you'll want to take and listen to at home and in the car. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

For Findlay, branding is a tool that makes his relationship with advertisers and pluggers

easier to manage - advertisers know what values the station prefers to represent and

pluggers have a more clear idea of what records will have the best chance of being

playlisted on different Capital FM network stations. Music programming is therefore not

simply about the sounds and the song on the record, it is about matching perceived brand

values of artists or individual songs to the brand of a station. The process of creating and

using branding, as Ind (2005) suggests, is associated in critiques of late capitalism with the

undesirable excesses of consumer society. The notion that branding is part of a morally

corrupt economic system is perhaps difficult to dismiss out of hand, but that is an argument

for another research project.

Branding's position as a cornerstone of modern business practice is captured in the

literature of the field - titles like Docters' (2003) *Winning the profit game : smarter pricing,*

smarter branding, and Parker's (1999) *Integrated branding: becoming brand-driven through*

companywide action are far from unusual. Ind's definition however is useful because it

captures branding's relationship to modern capitalism ("products and services") without

implying a particular moral or political position (other than perhaps that of accepting

capitalism as the dominant worldview in the early 21st century).

Organisations, at various levels of self-awareness, generate brand associations that are

normally designed to appeal to a particular demographic of consumer. In UK music radio

the notion of brands is increasingly part of the marketing and public representation of

stations and networks, publicly funded and commercial. Sarita Jagpal at BBC Radio 1, for

example, understands why the station brand matters:

> … It all comes back to our BBC public service values, educating the audience about new
> music or cultural or social values. We run a lot of drug awareness campaigns - we've just run
> a bullying campaign. For [our] young audience it's not just about the music, it's about
> enriching their lives. That's why live music is an important part of what we do - it's added value
> in every sense for a young audience. [The notion of added value] is why we run Newsbeat
> [Radio 1's news show] for 15 minutes, twice a day. Probably most [radio] people think it's mad
> that we do that [because audiences] switch off during Newsbeat.   It's not as bad as it used to
> be - [we] used to see a major drop off, but now we're a bit more tuned in [to our audience]. But
> those mad things that we do, it's all because of Radio 1's brand values, we're not there just for
> the RAJAR figures. It's always a fine balancing act between keeping an audience but at the
> same time making sure we do educate them and introduce them to new music and make them
> socially aware. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Jagpal understands core BBC notions of public service (education, enriching lives) as being

a set of brand values as much as those of a major capitalist corporation like Apple

Computer with its brand values of (amongst other things) innovative industrial design and

user-friendliness. She is aware that the "mad things" that the station does as part of its

public service remit potentially damage ratings, but that the station needs to keep doing

those things that distinguish it from its commercial rivals. It is partly because of that need to

be distinctive that the educational value of playing new and live music is positioned

alongside less ambiguously public service content, like campaigns to raise awareness of

bullying or drug abuse amongst Radio 1's young target demographic. This is a rather

sophisticated way of balancing the potential perceptions of the dull worthiness of social

campaigns against the notions of excitement and cutting edge popular music culture

associated with innovative music radio programming. While brand associations of Radio 1

continue to include the latter it means that for the majority of record pluggers that station will continue to be the place where new records will be played.

BBC Radio 2's transformation from solid and unexciting home for ex-Radio1 DJs into the most listened to and most musically influential UK radio station has involved a shift in brand associations:

> [Radio 2's Brand] is really tricky. Radio 2 suffers a lot from how people [perceive it as being] the *old* Radio 2. There were all those negative connotations [where people were embarrassed to admit they listened to the station]. Amongst non-listeners those beliefs are still quite strong and they don't believe Radio 2's changed. Radio 2 is so complex that it's hard to get a message over - Radio 1 know exactly who they're targeting, it's very specific. We aren't so much age targeted, it's more about attitude and where [listeners] are in their life [and a lot of our growth has been in [the] 35-54 [demographic]. (Kim MacNally, Research Manager, BBC Radio 2 and 6Music).

MacNally suggests that Radio 2 has grown *despite* the difficulties of moving brand associations away from older, increasingly unrepresentative values. Radio 2's diversity of content does make conventional branding difficult compared to the demographic focus of regional commercial stations - Radio 2's brand is "tricky" because it changes through the broadcast day, as audiences change. It would be naïve (though not of course, impossible) to imagine that the same audience which enjoys Terry Wogan's breakfast show will also assiduously tune in to Mark Lamarr's late Friday night specialist reggae programme. Radio 2's brand has to be therefore far more flexible that its commercial FM rivals, whose branding remains largely the same in any 24 hour period.

Mike Walsh of Century, like many in music radio, increasingly refers to brands rather than stations or networks:

> So we realised that within our Radio Authority / Ofcom format, there was nothing that said we had to be male or female ... So we looked at brands like Heart, who've become very successful both in London and the Midlands, giving Capital FM and BRMB a lot of trouble in terms of RAJAR, so ... we flipped it male to female [target demographic]. Overnight we went from playing The Coral, Travis and Nickelback to playing Gabrielle, M People and Natalie Imbruglia. And overnight, we started making money. The next quarter's RAJAR's were suddenly up. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

For Walsh, the Century brand is defined by its target demographic and the music the station plays to attract that demographic. His brand is fairly clearly defined, as captured in the

notion of "Debbie" the idealised listener, discussed earlier in this chapter. Adam Uytman at

Kerrang has a more complex problem in defining his stations' slightly different brands:

> The national [digital] station … [is] the parent service of a parent brand … [it's] competing against all the national digital radio stations, XFM, Virgin, Storm and some of the classic rock stations … we tend to keep the music a little bit harder, a little bit more what you'd expect with knowledge of the magazine … We don't take it as far as playing a band like Coldplay because that's too soft. On the digital platform we're competing against other proper, decent rock stations. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

There is for Uytman a progressive shift away from the rock/metal/punk brand values of

Kerrang magazine, through the national digital radio station to the West Midlands FM

station. The national digital station does not provide an equivalent aural experience to that

of reading the magazine, because it is competing against the "proper, decent rock stations"

on the national digital multiplexes.

Kerrang magazine's sales of around 66,000 per week on average by the end of 2006 mean

it is still a specialist magazine with a tighter focus on harder sounding music than Kerrang

digital with an average first quarter reach of 973,000 listeners per week across the UK.

Kerrang on FM in the same period was averaging 352,000 listeners in the West Midlands,

in a much smaller area and with much more mainstream competitors (RAJAR, 2007). The

problem then for Uytman is to exploit the Kerrang parent brand, but not to the extent that it

precludes attracting new, less specialist listeners:

> Yes [the Kerrang brand is both a strength and a problem], very much so. I've said that to a lot of people. The strength is that [we've] got an instantly recognisable brand, and that brings in listeners from Day 1 ... if they like it, they listen. At the same time it's negative as well because some people know what Kerrang [the magazine] is and they don't like it, so they don't listen. What we're trying to say [about Kerrang 105.2FM] is [that] we're not quite what you think we are - if you like general rock music, come and listen. It's the same with clients. It's very hard to tell a client who's sitting there with a potential check for £10,000 that they're wrong … these people have pre-conceived ideas of what Kerrang is, and if they're scared of that, they won't spend their money with us. And the same with the record companies that we don't just do this [rock music]. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio)

Uytman must reconfigure the brand associations of Kerrang magazine to fit different target

demographics in different media, and the upfront advantages of the well-known brand must

be offset against the need to attract larger numbers of consumers without losing the

positive values of the core brand. He must attract those new audiences in order to

convince advertisers that the radio stations are not what they expect and in order to

establish links with record companies whose artists are neither rock nor metal. Those

artists also have associated brands and brand values, and record companies promotions

departments want to match artist brands to station brands:

> You take your brand to the [radio station] it matches the best, first ... then you start spreading
> out from there. Radio is probably less diverse than people think it is in the UK ... you kind of
> have to please everybody really ... [That] is a disadvantage ... when you've got artists that are
> a bit niche ... But an advantage when you've got a ... Kylie Minogue or a Scissor Sisters,
> [artists who are mainstream and] popular. Brand is becoming more important ... in the last few
> years, in pop [we] could turn a brand on and off like a tap. But now [we] need to build and
> build before [an artist] can go anywhere ... now you need to prove it's working [artist is
> becoming a success]. And then [radio will] kind of trust you. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional
> Radio, Polydor Records).

Artist brand matters in the first instance because it determines radio promotional strategy -

according to Crain, music programmers are approached and plugged in the order of brand

fit. His argument that "you kind of have to please everybody really" points towards the

discussion of power and influence in the next section, but he does see the overall lack of

diversity in UK music radio as an advantage when he needs to plug more mainstream

artists. Crain's final point about brand building is also significant for the relationship

between music radio and the record industry. Record companies must build the artist

brand (across media) to the point that music programmers will buy into that brand, and be

confident of ongoing record company support. And that process is largely based on a

notion of trust, on which a little more in the final section on relationships.

POWER

Elsewhere in this research project I discuss the prevailing argument in academic and

industry literature that the relationship between music radio and the record industry is

symbiotic. This is true to a degree, but it fails to capture the dynamic nature of the

relationship - the position of the balance of power has important consequences for cultural

intermediaries at the point of contact of that relationship (pluggers and programmers) and

therefore for popular music culture. My argument throughout this work is first that the radio

industry holds the balance of power and that this has a series of consequences for the

sounds of popular music. My second point is that this imbalance in power is expressed in

the relationship between pluggers and programmers, and the strategies adopted by record

companies to increase the probability of radio airplay. This section addresses the balance

of power and the some of the consequences for commercial popular music sounds and

culture.

Balance of power

Alan Smith formerly of Warners sees music radio as being the dominant partner in its

relationship with the record industry:

> Radio … has become so powerful because there's so much competition for a limited amount
> of plays, playlists or support in ever tightening radio formats. [Record companies] can ask, not
> demand. If you have a run-of-the-mill band … with the top networks in commercial radio,
> those at the top hold the power. You have to do as much as you can to get what you want, but
> 9 times out of 10 you aren't going to get it all. (Alan Smith, former Regional Promotions
> Manager, Warners Music UK).

The competition for a limited number of playlist slots is such that any amount of persuasion

and inducement doesn't guarantee airplay for any record, let alone those by "run-of-the-

mill" bands.

The promotional effect of getting records on playlists is not the only potential revenue

stream for the record industry:

> It's a totally co-dependent relationship ... they are the providers of 80% of our content, but then
> again we pay [the record industry] ... through our PPL [Phonographic Performance Licence]
> payments. About 10% of our revenue, depending on size of audience, is paid back to the
> music industry ... the more money we make, the more money they make, so it's a very closely
> tied relationship. The radio industry is still the music industry's best access to market, in terms
> of getting records heard and getting people into action to go and buy them. And the radio
> industry relies so heavily on the music industry to give us content, to make our brands sound
> attractive.   (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

The co-dependency of the relationship between radio and the record industry is therefore

strengthened through PPL payments. In Walsh's model it is in the interests of the record

industry for the radio industry in general to be successful, whether it is the BBC or the

commercial sector - the income from PPL will remain high while radio continues to attract

listeners. If this is indeed the case then it becomes more likely that the record industry will

tend towards the production of music that will be good for radio, music that attracts and

holds listeners. Put another way, the record industry has more incentive to produce the

kind of records that music programmers want to play (which may not necessarily be the

same as records that sell as albums). So the balance of power in this relationship moves

away from the record industry and towards music, pushed in this case by additional

economic motivation. If, as the record industry continues to argue, the income from CD

sales continues to fall, then revenue streams, like PPL and other royalty payments become

more important and the cycle described here is reinforced.

Sarita Jagpal at Radio 1 suggests that the financial climate for record companies shifts the

balance of power towards radio:

> Generally it's been a tough time for the record industry in the last couple of years, with
> downloading and falling revenues. So there's a lot of pressure on the record companies to
> deliver. They've got to be making money. But at the same time Radio 1 is still one of the few
> places that they can bring new music and it gets played. Generally we're in a good place,
> Radio 1 and the record industry. They need us, and obviously there will be times when we
> don't playlist a band of theirs and it's hard for them to swallow, but at the end of the day, they'll
> have another band next week they need to be getting plays. It's still a time of change for the
> record industry - they still haven't quite got their heads around different revenue areas, or just
> fully embracing the digital era. They're getting there but they've been very slow to react. They
> were initially burying their heads in the sand a little bit, but realising now that they've got to get
> their act together. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy Executive, BBC Radio 1).

There has of course always been pressure (from share holders and from parent

companies) on record companies to deliver commercially successful albums, but Jagpal

suggests that an economic environment in which overall record sales are down gives radio

a stronger position from which to negotiate. This strength is amplified by the status of the

two national BBC networks as large, influential arenas which are open to new music in a

way that commercial radio is not.

On the other hand both Radio 1 and Radio 2 share an objective with the record industry,

albeit with very different motivation, and that objective is to break new records from new or

established artists. So both networks need new music to provide the content they need to

meet their notions of a public service remit. Jagpal knows however that the supply of new

music is much greater than Radio 1's capacity (or willingness) to play in mainstream playlist

slots, so the station is in a strong position to reject new records or artists because there will

always be more new artists from the record industry. Record companies, naturally enough,

seek to minimise rejection of records by Radio 1 and by Radio 2, and seem to be quite

willing to modify their business strategies in order to achieve that objective.

Andrew Thomson from EMI illustrates how quickly that a record company can move to meet

the needs of Radio 1:

> Radio 1 is powerful. A guy from Radio 1 heard a track in a bar when he was on holiday [in the summer of 2005], and brought it back. The artist was on BMG in the UK and Radio 1 said 'If you put this out, we'll play it'. Within two or three weeks there was a promotional copy on his desk, and Radio 1 added it [to their playlist]. Whether or not if [one of the regionals] did that it would have the same effect, I don't know. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI Records).

Colin Martin at Radio 2 indicates just how much the balance of power had shifted towards

radio:

> Once I stopped track testing, I went along to the record companies and I said, 'Look, can you … think about your A&R, can you … think about melody and good tunes?'. At the time I said 'Less boy, more band. We want artists, we want all that sort of thing.' The other thing that I noticed [in 2000] was that Radio 2 had existed for many years playing very strong historical music from the 50s, the 60s, the 70s. And then we didn't play a lot of the 80s, we gave up on that. At the end of the 90s there was so much dance music and rap and hip hop, that there was nothing in there for us to get our teeth into. So when we look back in 5 or 10 years time, I was not gonna dip into the core dance stuff, in which there were no artists. … So I wanted to persuade record companies to release tracks, music, artists and to try and develop them, because I knew instantly that would create for me what would be my gold music in 5 or 10 years time. And that is what has happened. Record companies have all got behind artists, and Radio 2 got so big that it was hard to ignore [the station]. Now a lot of record companies look to A&R product knowing that Radio 2 has a massive influence. Not in single sales, but in album sales and that's where all the money is made. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

The strategy of abandoning music testing and programming playlists based on instinct and

experience had a strong basis on developing a long term music strategy that would be good

for Radio 2 in the coming years. Martin is not alone in his judgement that the record

industry has tended collectively towards short-termism and that one of the consequences

has been a reduction in the number of long term career artists. His solution to the problem

he perceived as emerging for Radio 2 was to approach record companies directly and

describe the kind of new artists he would be prepared to play.

As promotions manager Roger Jacobs suggests:

> … the record companies, don't care whether it's a Las Ketchup album that sells 10 million, or a Dido album, or Coldplay, as long as it's something. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

Pragmatically then the record industry is likely to cooperate with any strategy which promotes sales, regardless of the genre or sound of an artist. Therefore the record industry had little reason (other than perhaps irritation at external interference in their core business) to reject Martin's approach.

Martin is a key figure in my overall argument about the strength of radio in influencing the sounds and culture of popular music. That strength is summed up in his point that, "record companies look to A&R product knowing that Radio 2 has a massive influence". There are serious and complex arguments to be addressed here. The most important of these is probably the question of whether a large and powerful, publicly funded broadcasting/cultural organisation should be able to interfere with the commercial activities of a private sector industry. In practice this is not a question likely to attract a great deal of attention as long as the outcome of that exchange of influence is beneficial to, (a) a record industry that sells more records and invests in future sales, (b) Radio 2, which gets the raw programming material it judges to be necessary, and (c) to the commercial radio industry which allows the BBC networks to take risks with new records before cherry picking the most popular of those records. Further, if one accepts that innovation and newness (rather than *novelty*) is essential to the ongoing development of popular music culture, then Martin's strategy and the powerful presence of the BBC in the music radio market is a good thing. In other words, BBC radio has increasingly become a significant A&R advisor to the record industry.

If Martin is clear that the interests of Radio 2 and the record industry can be aligned successfully, he also wishes to make the distinction between public service broadcaster and profit-driven record industry:

> Although we're not a commercial arm [of the record industry] and we don't do anything for commercial interests, we have a symbiotic relationship. I need record companies to produce good music, to produce what I want, and they need me to play them. As long as those two things come together, then it works really well. And it's worked brilliantly. And now of course the world is full of singer/songwriters. And now we're beginning to export music to America, where the single genre of [UK] dance [in the late 1990s] had … closed down that avenue because we had nothing to export. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

Whether or not a world full of singer-songwriters is a good thing may be a matter for debate, but Martin is correct in that the British record industry has started to produce artists that sell in the US. The influence then of the BBC as a cultural organisation translates not only into profit for the British arm of a record company, but also arguably contributes to export revenue for the UK as a whole. Martin expands on why his programming strategy is first about audience, secondly about culture and lastly (though indirectly) about selling records:

> The record industry had always thought of Radio 2 as … a sleeping giant. And if we ever got it together it could have a massive influence on the culture of music in this country. We didn't [set] out to do that, we went out to serve our listeners, to give our listeners what we thought they would want, to make Radio 2 unique as a network and [to] give it [an] identity [and] a station sound … To begin with they were slightly sceptical. We did have a large listenership at the time, but nothing like what we have at the moment, and [the record industry] felt that we had not ever proved ourselves as a network that could embrace new music. But we gradually proved that this is what we [were] going to do. And then we looked around for acts [like] Nora Jones, Eva Cassidy … these are classic examples of when, if you get embraced by a Radio 2 audience, then you can sell bucket loads of records. For us we were helping to create new music, helping to create artists for our audience. We want those artists to be with us for years, and decades to come. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2).

From a BBC perspective all the rating and commercial record sales consequences spring from the public service notion of audience. Martin's argument is that the BBC's need to service its audience-public led to the discovery and promotion of artists that would otherwise have had less (or no) commercial recognition, and that the long-term commercial success of those artists is good for Radio 2 and for the record industry.

Roger Jacobs formerly of BMG saw the record industry ceding power to the radio during his time in his industry:

> In my last year of doing radio plugging [2004] I felt that the record companies were giving more and more power to the radio stations. Y'see, if [I] walk in [to a radio station] with an important priority record and [I] try to talk it onto the airwaves or whatever, and it doesn't make it … [Then] 2 weeks later everyone in London panics and [I] have to go back [to the same radio stations] giving competitions to win tickets for gigs. That becomes an incentive [for radio stations] to wait [before playlisting a record]. They may think, 'the record would sound good on the station, but it's not out for another 4 weeks so we'll wait. And if we wait, the record company will panic and come and offer us a load of goodies. And it'll help our station - we can say 'We're the station that's running a competition to go to New Orleans or San Francisco.' And that's where the record companies gave in too quickly. I always say to London 'If we're going to throw a lot of money at something and run a lot of competitions … we should go in at the start and do it, so there's no doubt. If [we] try to save some money out of the marketing budget at the start and then 2-and-a-half weeks later change [our approach] we're just giving in [to radio]. I never, ever went into a radio station and said 'This is our number 1 priority'. Soon as [I] do that, they know they can just sit back for a couple of weeks, then [I'm] bound to come back and give them something that [they] need. (Roger Jacobs, former International

Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

This again reflects the short termist approach of the record industry, as identified earlier by Colin Martin. Jacobs' example explains how well informed radio stations can exploit the need of record company promotions departments to produce positive results. If experience shows that radio stations expect more promotional effort as a release date approaches, then they have little incentive to go with a record early, even if they believe the that record will work on the station. Jacobs' frustration with the tendency of record companies to "give in" to radio is evident, but his proposed solution is sensible - either go with a full promotional campaign early, or not at all. In Jacobs' view the short term promotional cost saving was not worth the concession of power to radio. The relatively subtle consequence of any movement of power towards music radio is an increase in programmers' ability to negotiate which records and which sounds they are prepared to accept from the record industry, and at which point in the promotional campaign they are prepared to do so. This therefore increases the pressure on record companies to produce artists and sounds that will be as attractive as possible to programmer notions of what will sound good on their station or network.

Plugger Jay Cox does not disagree with the general sense that radio is dominant in its relationship with the record industry, but suggests that this is not the case for the whole calendar year.

> For 10 months of the year it's radio [that holds the balance of power], and as soon as it gets to the summer and [radio] want acts for their Party In The Parks and roadshows, it's the other way around. [But] yeah, record labels are shit-scared of radio … and they'll do anything to have them on side. To break a record is what [record companies] want to do and [they'll] do anything the gatekeepers of media want, to make that happen. (Jay Cox, On A Plate Promotions).

Outside of the summer season of live events, Cox is unambiguous about the power of radio, and the lengths to which the record industry will go to get a new record on a playlist. How then is this power imbalance expressed, and what are the consequences for the sounds of popular music? In the next two sections I look how far the record industry is prepared to go to generate artists, songs and sounds that will meet the requirements of

music radio in the UK.

Signing artists / releasing records

Roger Jacobs, formerly of BMG remains uncomfortable with the influence that radio can

have on something as apparently straightforward as the order in which singles are released

from an album:

> There's always a couple of incidents every year where radio stations will give really strong feedback on a new album, and say 'actually, we really like track 4' and the record company will have had track 3 lined up to be the second single. If [we] get enough feedback like that from radio stations, [the record company] might change [the order of release]. But it's a dangerous game … because [we] end up letting a radio station A&R an album for [us]. And this is really stupid, because [we've] got an A&R man who's [been] paid a lot of money to sign the act, to develop the act, [we] can't then let the radio station start dictating to [us]. It makes a bit of mockery of the whole investment in the first place. I think, when you have an album, the record company should decide, 'right, that's the first single, the second, the third', and we should stick to the plan, and have total faith and confidence in the act. (Roger Jacobs, former International Marketing and Promotions Manager, BMG Records).

Jacobs believes that there has been a collective failure of record company nerve in over-

privileging feedback from radio stations, arguing that record companies should have the

vision to manage an artist's promotional campaign without recourse to radio's requirements.

At Capital Radio Group, Mark Findlay explains the process from the perspective of the radio

programmer:

> ... record companies ... quite often come in [before a new album is released] … they might come in with the new Avril Lavigne album and go 'Right, she's delivered this album. If you listen to it, it's a little bit harder than her first album'. ... They went 'Which tracks, as Capital and the Capital FM Network would you be willing to support?'. And we basically highlighted the ones we thought would work. And they have actually gone with the records in that order. And I know they do that with people like ... Radio 2 ... and Radio 1. So if they've gone around a few Heads of Music, with them saying 'We'd support these singles', then it makes it much easier for them to come to us and say 'Hang on, you said you were gonna support this record …' and we go 'Well, actually we don't have space on it [the playlist] this week'. That's the way the relationship works. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

In this example, Sony-BMG have made a decision on the order in which to release singles

from an Avril Lavigne album based on feedback from music radio. While this dependence

on radio programmers' needs supports the argument that the balance of power lies with

radio, what is more interesting is Findlay's lack of a sense of obligation to support tracks

when they are released. Ultimately his responsibility is to produce a playlist that will

maximise listening figures and his approach to achieving that can change on a week-to-week basis. As Jacobs suggests, the concession of power to radio by record companies doesn't guarantee anything, and that concession works to undermine the ability of record companies to negotiate future deals.

Findlay offers a second example of the power of radio feedback to record companies, an example in which the dynamic of the relationship is made explicit:

> … they came in and played us what was going to be the first single off that George Michael album [*Patience,* 2004]. And we all said 'That's shit. That's absolutely shit.' They said, 'Well it's not changing now - George has decided and the management have decided'. And I said 'Well, we can't guarantee you any support.' Cut to two weeks later and they delivered *Amazing*, which wasn't even on the album. They literally went back and said 'Have you got any more songs?'. They came back and played us *Amazing* and we went 'That's exactly what a George Michael fan would expect to hear, whether he likes the song or not.' It was exactly right for that audience, it worked for us and that became the first single. So I think it's very much a relationship like that. The whole point is that if you can do that with someone of the calibre of George, then presumably you can be doing that with new acts. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

In this case Capital's lack of commitment to support the album without a suitable lead single forced the record company (Sony) to reconsider not only order of single releases, but which songs would be included on the album. Radio's feedback overrode the decision of the artist, his management and (by implication) the record company, but probably contributed to the massive success of the album (around three million copies sold worldwide).   Findlay is correct in reading this example as an illustration of the power of radio to affect what music is released - that power will be proportionately more evident if the artist in question is new or breaking act.

The power of radio to affect record company processes extends to A&R signing policy, and to very early sound production decisions:

> They do ask [what kind of things are we interested in]. Often they'll come early, occasionally even before [artists] have been signed. We might get asked 'what do you think of [whoever]'. There have been a few bands recently, Orson, The Feeling, that there's been big money dished out for. And before all that you do get [record companies] coming in to ask [what we think]. We'll often get albums quite early and [record companies] want feedback on what we think should be the next single or what we think the strongest tracks are on an album. Often with dance records we'll get asked whether or not the radio edit's right, or what they should do to change it. We often get told that we are A&R for the record industry. Again that's partly what we're here for [laughs]. [Steve Lamaq] used to use the strap line 'A&R for the Nation'. With the record industry it isn't just them coming in to plug a record for the playlist, it's a much bigger relationship than that. They do ask for our input. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy

Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Radio 1's influence on the sound of commercially release popular music extends far beyond accepting or rejecting final versions of singles at playlist meetings. Jagpal suggests that the record industry actively sounds out Radio 1 for the kind of sounds, styles or artists that would be likely to be supported. A major record label may be interested in signing an artist, but will check in with Radio 1 for feedback on whether that artist is likely to have their support. Jagpal's point about the upfront cost of signing bands (particularly as the result of a 'bidding war') helps to explain record company determination to exploit every possible strategy to ensure a return on that investment. Jagpal, like Findlay, is approached early in an album release cycle to comment on which songs in which order should be singles, and gives similar feedback on mixes of dance tracks. Her understanding of Radio 1 as performing an A&R function, at least in part, is in line with Jacobs' perception of music radio in general. For Radio 1 Jagpal sees the BBC as making, through the record industry, a positive contribution to popular music culture.

Colin Martin at Radio 2 has a similar perspective:

> A lot of record companies send me early stuff [and ask me] 'What d'you think?' . I always try to be honest with record companies and say 'Yes it will or it won't [work]' and that's the only way we can deal with each other. With Nora Jones, someone came in to see me and had a chat. I said 'That's fantastic, I love it, and we want to support it'. With Eva Cassidy, it was an presenter-endorsed record that came through Terry Wogan. He loved her voice, he played it. And music has to have presenter endorsement, it's so important. (Colin Martin, Head of Music, BBC Radio 2.).

Martin describes a relationship with the record industry similar to that discussed by Jagpal, but introduces the new element of "presenter endorsement". The flexibility of Radio 2 is such that star presenters like Terry Wogan have the freedom to champion individual artists, though it is unlikely that it would have been be possible without final approval from Martin. Endorsement matters because it allows presenters to display open appreciation for individual artists and that demonstration of knowledge and enthusiasm about music is aligned with the values Radio 2 prefers to represent. Successful endorsement of artists also situates mainstream presenters as potentially powerful players in the record industry, as much as in radio. Outwith Radio 2 and BBC Radio specialist music shows this is

unlikely to work in the same way, but it is a reflection of the strength of Radio 2's influence on the production of popular music.

Changing sounds

In the previous section I addressed the consequences of a shift in the balance of power away from record companies and towards radio in terms of the A&R function of the record industry: signing artists and releasing recordings. In this section I investigate the changes to the *sounds* on those recordings, and how radio is instrumental in the process of developing and changing those sounds.

Typically record companies will approach senior music programmers at major stations and networks with different versions of an upcoming release and request feedback on which is most likely to make the playlist. Mark Findlay of capital Radio Group explains:

> It happens a lot. I've never asked specifically for a different mix of a track. Quite often the record companies will come in with two or three versions of [a song] - there might be a track with no rap, or track with rap, or one with the guitars turned down slightly. At the end of the day, if it's a great song, it's a great song. There was a Nickelback example … they came in with one where they'd pulled the guitars back in the mix and we actually went with the original. It was just a better song, it had much better energy in it. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay doesn't see the record company strategy of offering alternate mixes as one that will ultimately affect his decision to playlist a song. Yet the presence of alternative versions of the same song, each subtly different, increases the chances of the *sound* of a record matching a music programmer's notion of what will fit the station's brand. There is something of the authenticist in Findlay's point about going with the original version of the Nickelback song, reflecting an indie/rock ideology which privileges particular recordings and mixes of songs as 'definitive' versions [43]. The point is underlined by the reference to the

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[43] Alternate mixes and versions of the same song by the same artist have been around since the late 1960s, originating in Jamaica's 'version' culture in which many mixes or versions of the same song were released to maximise return on the investment in the original recording (Best, 2004). 12" mixes and remixes have been part of dance music culture since the early 1970s development of hip hop, and continue to be so (Ogg, 1999). Rock however has never really abandoned the notion of the definitive recording, despite the late 1980s / early 1990s indie-dance crossover (largely wiped out by

notion of the "great song", which is a return to the argument earlier in this chapter about good radio records and good music. Findlay, states that he hasn't "asked specifically" for a different mix of a track. This is not to say that he doesn't *want* a different mix of a song from time to time:

> We've done our own edits of songs. Band Aid 20 - it's not great … it's for a great cause, but it was 5:26 long, so I just went in to the production guys and said 'can you shorten this?' and they did a fantastic 3:26 edit and it's got the whole song in it. It doesn't have any of the warbly nonsense in the middle, or the warbly nonsense at the end. And actually when you hear it on our stations, no-one's any the wiser that nearly two minutes has disappeared from the song. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

The only surprising aspect about this example is that there was no official 3:30 mix of Band Aid 20 made available to radio, although this may have had something to do with the number of artists making contributions to the record and the difficulty of making a decision on which of those would not appear in a record company edit.

Mike Walsh of the Century FM network has a slightly different perspective on the question of the Nickelback single:

> [In the US] record labels, A&R departments and even artists are very radio savvy. And because they have so many different formats ... they actually do different mixes for different formats, y'know, with the guitars down, or the drums up, or whatever. Quite often, what we find is that if it's an American act [we] ask for a 'Gold Mix' in America … Nickelback's *How You Remind Me* as a good example of that. Roadrunner were punting the 'rock' mix in the UK and somebody said to them 'Is there an A/C [Adult Contemporary] mix?'. And there was, in America. And it was just that it was a very simple switching of one of the heavier guitars in the mix to an acoustic guitar. And it became a massive radio hit, because it just opened up the scope of that song to softer, older radio stations. The texture changes - it's in the mix, in the production. And yes, that often happens. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Walsh's target demographic is one that prefers "softer, older radio stations" and the A/C (adult contemporary) version of the Nickelback single was, in his judgement, more suited to the sound of his network. It is more significant that Walsh sees the US record industry as particularly sensitive to the requirements of radio, and is prepared to make various different versions of songs available to appeal to different formats. The implication is that this process is not (yet) so developed in the UK, and that there may still be here more of a sense of the definitive version. Nevertheless the impact that radio can have on the sound

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grunge, then Brit-pop).

of records (the "texture" to which Walsh refers) is clear if Walsh is correct and the

willingness to adjust sounds on a recording can go as far back as the artists themselves.

This raises questions for music fans who may assume that the record they hear on the

radio, a version of which they may buy at some point, is the result of an uncorrupted artistic

vision. I am less interested though in this challenge to rock ideologies of authenticity and

more in the overall effect on the sounds of commercially released popular music. Walsh's

example demonstrates the ability of mainstream music radio, with the cooperation of the

record industry, to make decisions not only on the sounds of individual records but on the

texture of popular music as it is consumed on radio.

Outside of more rock-authenticist perspectives, dance music culture adds another level to

radio responses to new records, according to Andrew Thomson of EMI:

> I make a note of radio station reactions to a record and I send a report down to London. I talk
> to [a lot of] specialist DJs [and they] they tell me [if] a mix isn't working for them. More and
> more those DJs send remixes they've done of a track [that we are about to release] from
> Positiva in the hope that we might pick up on that.   Some of these releases have about 10
> different mixes covering different styles of dance music, just so all the different DJs are
> covered ... hip hop, house, chill-out. (Andrew Thomson, Regional Promotions Manager, EMI
> Records).

Not only has the practice of multiple mixes or versions of a release become part of dance

music culture, the numbers of versions is large - the 10 mixes that Thomson refers to would

not have been unusual during my own time as a dance/electronic music presenter in the

late-1990s. The availability of relatively cheap digital studio technology has allowed

specialist dance DJs to go further than commenting on existing mixes or requesting edits -

they can create their own mixes and send those back to the record company. Whilst this is

moving away from the mainstream music radio I address for the most part in this research

project, the notion of the unofficial remix is no longer confined to dance music. In early

2007, Nine Inch Nails released online tracks from their official album in an accessible

multitrack format (Apple's GarageBand), to encourage fans to remix the tracks themselves.

Mike Walsh implies that in the US there are artists who are happy to have multiple versions

of their music made available for different promotional purposes. This practice though is far

from universal:

> It all depends on the genre the act is in. Y'know, no-one's gonna tell Thom Yorke [of Radiohead] that he's gonna [have to] do an edit. I have examples of artists that don't know the record company has edited the tracks, and of course radio stations do their own edits constantly. Kiss 100 and the Galaxy Network are great examples of really butchering songs to make them fit a 2 minute hook-filled version of the song, using Pro-Tools. Even we do that - probably our biggest edit would be raps ... we'll take the rap out, just because we know that our target audience doesn't have an ounce of 'bling' in them. For them it can be a bit of a turn off. So, admittedly we try and smooth the aesthetic of the song. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

Radiohead are a good example of a band whose commercial success gives them the power to maintain levels of artistic integrity (or at least to *appear* to maintain artistic integrity) to point where it would be unlikely that they would be asked to provide a radio edit. According to Walsh, less successful artists will have had edited versions made of their songs without their knowledge by radio stations and by the record company. Walsh's stations use edits made internally, but he makes the distinction between "smoothing the aesthetic" of a record and "butchering songs" to strip them of non-hook content.

Adam Uytman of Kerrang Radio understands the role of the plugger as one in which they have to anticipate radio station reactions to new releases:

> It's their job to know in advance what radio stations are going to say, and what they'll be scared off by. Mainstream radio is very, very safe, so anything they can do to make people less scared of a rock record is going to help … I've sat and watched other Heads of Music say 'It would be a great record if you just take that middle bit out'. I think that's quite a hard thing to bring back to a band. They've spent all this time and effort and money in production, and they think it's perfect. Then someone else comes along and says 'It's alright but it needs sped up by plus-5%', which is what a lot of radio stations do and it bugs me. (Adam Uytman, Head of Music, Kerrang Radio).

Uytman's role as Head of Music for a rock station brand may mean that he has a more 'rock' or authenticist ideological position on the integrity of records - elsewhere he refers to himself as a music fan who like going to see live shows. He certainly has an understanding not only of the music production processes but also of the mindset of musicians passing through those processes. Mark Findlay agrees that the practice of speeding up records though is commonplace though he, like Uytman, is unconvinced about its merits:

> The whole speeding records up nonsense … I understand why stations do it, and on some of our stations we do … it just brightens the sound a little bit. I'm a little bit sceptical about that … (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Popular music on daytime radio then is pre-formed to meet the anticipated demands of music programmers and it may be modified by record companies and radio stations, with or without the knowledge of the artist. Grant Crain of Polydor explains how the record industry responds to the demands of music radio:

> … in terms of the sound of a record, radio pick and choose. We are constantly doing edits of records, with the cooperation of the artists - they understand there's a game to be played there as well. [The edits] take out swear words, take out dull middle-8's … whatever. Bands like to make 6 minute records, but radio likes to play 3 minute records. We've actually had a couple of projects where we've gone [to radio] and said 'We're very excited about this - are you?'. And they've said 'No, not now'. And we've maybe delayed it for 6 months, or not released it at all. National radio again has a big influence on that, whether it's Radio 1 or Radio 2. They say, can we get an edit of that, or a popular one at the moment is 'It's a bit slow, can you speed it up?'. The make up [the unique characteristics] of the record's in there too, so it's a fine line between messing with a record and making it something totally different … [and] adapting it to fit. Some [artists] will make the effort and some [artists] say 'We won't', and we'll move on then. Sometimes we have 5 singles planned from an artist from an album and after single 2, [a radio station will] say 'Well, single 3's not good enough, but we like single 4'.   And that kind of helps, because you save wasting time then. But sometimes you think 'Who's really in charge here?'".   (Grant Crain, Head of Regional Radio, Polydor Records).

The first question that arises from these accounts of the power of radio to change the sound and availability of popular music is whether or not this matters. The corollary question is *why* it matters (if it does).   One argument is that it really doesn't matter at all. The existing system appears to allow new sounds and styles to emerge and move into the mainstream through exposure on the public service BBC networks, Radio 1 and Radio 2. Some of those sounds achieve wider exposure and longevity through commercial radio. A few of these records become long lasting components of popular culture through their life as recurrents and oldies. Radio stations continue to attract listeners, to make money as commercial stations or to demonstrate commitment to 'public service'.   Imagined audiences are being catered for through the 'instinctive' programming of the BBC networks and the mix of research and gut feeling that informs most commercial radio music programming. In the UK, the model of public service BBC radio discovering new sounds and styles through its specialist programming, balances the inherent conservatism of mainstream commercial radio, leaving daytime Radio 1 and Radio 2 to bridge the gap between the two.

A second argument is that it *does* matter that radio has significant power to influence the sound and availability of commercial popular music. It matters because the radio industry is interested primarily in reaching audiences and winning ratings, and popular music is simply

a means of achieving that objective. If we are to delegate the responsibility of finding,

developing and recording new artists to a corporate, capitalist industry, should it not be one

for whom music itself is the core business? That is to say, should it not be the record

industry that does this cultural work? The record industry (and the music industry in

general) should, in principle, be far better equipped in terms of skills, knowledge and

understanding of the cultural-economic production of popular music. Whether of course it is

possible to imagine a commercial popular music universe in which the record industry does

not need radio (in whatever form) to mediate and promote its product, is another issue

altogether.

RELATIONSHIPS

One of the key arguments that runs through this thesis has been that the relationship

between pluggers and programmers is the focal point for many of the issues raised earlier

in this chapter. The ways in which both sides perceive that relationship are crucial to any

useful interpretation of radio's influence on the sounds of popular music.

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM describes sometimes peculiar social dynamics of that

relationship:

> We both want things off each other. Radio needs artists and songs, prizes, meet-and-greets,
> and the record industry needs exposure [for new releases]. As groups get bigger, like GCap,
> they'll have more sway to negotiate deals to do bigger things, like Radio 1 has always
> managed to do. There're always deals going on - it's a very strange relationship. There's
> falling out as well. Obviously commercial radio is often too slow [on playing new records] and
> [that doesn't] fit into record company plans. Sometimes it works, but there's no guarantee.
> There's no money changing hands, and there's no contract. It really is about persuasion, so
> obviously good relationships are hugely important. But [record companies] have also got to
> have a product there as well. And there might be a lot of other record companies with product
> that might be equally as good. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power FM).

Smith captures the unique quality of the business relationship between the record industry

and the radio industry: there is no written contract; no money changes hands in exchange

for products or services. Yet both industries need each other. For me the paradox is that

radio would struggle to find new music programming material without the patronage of the

record industry, but the record industry has at its disposal many other potential promotional channels for new records, from MySpace to MTV. Yet the record industry continues to depend on radio as not only a key promotional tool, but also as a source of professional advice on their core activity of finding artists and selling records. Smith's account of the relationship between the record industry and radio touches on three central characteristics all of which derive their relevance from the absence of the formal business constraints of contract and payment.   Much of this chapter has focused on aspects of the first characteristic, *negotiation* (or persuasion), but it is worth spending some time considering the less well explored characteristics of *trust* and *sociability*.

Trust and sociality

Mike Walsh describes what he sees as the dominant characteristics of the relationship between pluggers and programmers:

> It's incredibly friendly. In my background I've done both [worked in both the music industry and the radio industry]. I was a plugger for many years for Parlophone and now I'm on the other side of the fence. It's like in lots different kinds of businesses … it's about relationships. And it's about understanding each other's business needs ... brands ... or priorities. I think there's a lot of heat higher up the chain at various levels - I think you will often feel the pressure of somebody else's boss, who's screaming down the phone at them, wanting to know why so-and-so is not playing such-and-such record. At the same time, I've got people that that I have to answer to [and] because I want us to be a focused brand, I can't do favours for people. (Mike Walsh, Head of Music, Century FM Network).

For Walsh the relationship is largely about understanding the motivation and priorities of pluggers but remaining focused on the business requirements of his radio stations.

Mark Findlay of Capital Radio Group goes further in his assessment of that relationship:

> It's great, really good. When I was up in Scotland I could genuinely say that the pluggers that I dealt with all became really good friends. And they were people you could go to gigs with, but not necessarily their gigs. They just were music fans and they wanted to go and do stuff. When I came to London, it was a very different thing initially. A very different style of plugging - it's really quite full on. They expect you to have a whole day, or a half day set aside for pluggers appointments. And I was absolutely adamant, from Day 1, that I wasn't gonna do it like that. I wanted to work exactly the way I'd worked in Scotland. It took a good six months to get to that stage, but now I think I've got it … in that I think I've got a pretty good relationship with them. (Mark Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Findlay's contrasts his experience of working in Scotland (for Forth FM in Edinburgh, then

Beat 106 in Glasgow) with that of music programming for the Capital FM Network in

London. My own anecdotal observations of some of the social activities of pluggers and

programmers in Glasgow supports Findlay's assertion that these are largely informal

occasions characterised by a shared interest in music. There has been a sense that in

Scotland not only do most of the pluggers and programmers know each other, but they also

actually enjoyed socialising together. Whether Findlay has succeeded in bringing that level

of informality to London is not clear, but he believes he has made some progress in

changing the way the plugging process works at Capital. For Findlay, trust is a key element

in developing a good working relationship with pluggers:

> I trust them, they trust me - we're very honest and we're very open with each other. (Mark
> Findlay, Head of Music, Capital FM Network).

Grant Crain of Polydor Records has a different response to the question of whether there is

trust between pluggers and programmers:

> As long as it's in writing! [Laughs]. Hmmm. Not really, no. I don't think there's ever trust
> because there's always someone else trying to influence their world. The key record
> companies … we all knock on the same doors and go for the same playlists. GWR is a good
> example of that. They have a playlist that from a music point of view runs over 33 stations.
> But they have 1 or 2 slots a week for records. If you know how many records are released
> each week, you just know the difference in that. You're looking at this very small window - you
> know you can't rest on your laurels, because other record companies are after those one or
> two slots too. Things like competitions, which cost the record company money, used to be a
> bit more 'Yeah, you can have it, it's fine'. But now it's in writing what you get in return for it. Or
> at least a pretty good definition of what was likely to happen. (Grant Crain, Head of Regional
> Radio, Polydor Records).

Crain's perception of levels of trust reflects the culture that Findlay first encountered having

moved to the London headquarters of Capital/GCap. Findlay's response was to attempt to

import the approach he had successfully employed in Scotland which was to be as open

and direct with pluggers as possible. In doing so he hoped to develop a sense of trust

between plugger and programmer, which Crain saw as missing from most of his day-to-day

interaction with music radio. There is humour behind his "as long as it's in writing" but I

have little doubt that a pluggers job would be significantly more easy if there was a more

traditional business practice of written contracts which guaranteed the terms of an

exchange. It is the level of competition for playlist places that underpins Crain's notion of

lack of trust. What I think he really means is that there are no guarantees of quantifiable

airplay for a record from a Polydor artist if other pluggers from other companies

subsequently offer more attractive inducements (or more appropriate records). Trust then

is associated with power in this relationship - here the more powerful partner in the

relationship (music radio) is able to trust the less powerful partner (the record industry), but

that relationship doesn't work in the same way, in the opposite direction.

Sarita Jagpal from Radio 1 describes the plugger appointment system that Mark Findlay

met when he relocated to London:

> The music team and producers at Radio 1 do appointments every week. [We] have 10 minute
> slots with pluggers. Every week I'll do 5 or 6 hours of appointments, where I'll have pluggers
> back to back. I get small labels wanting to come in to talk to [me] - literally a one-man show.
> We get managers coming in, or the artist themselves just wanting a bit of feedback.
> Sometimes we get record company A&R's who want to sound [us] out a bit. It is mainly
> pluggers, but there are others looking for honest feedback too. (Sarita Jagpal, Music Policy
> Executive, BBC Radio 1).

Meeting pluggers in this format, although efficient, means it is difficult to build up personal

relationships of the kind Findlay believes are essential to his mode of working. Jagpal's

final point though is that her feedback to pluggers (or managers or label bosses) must be

honest. Radio 1 (like Radio 2) is however in a strong position, as Jagpal noted earlier, to

say no to records and be confident that the same plugger will return with new records at the

next meeting regardless of whether a priority record is rejected at a first meeting.

Jay Smith of Ocean FM / Power FM uses an analogy which in my view astutely captures

the complexity of the plugger-programmer relationship:

> Yeah, there's someone I don't get on with. But generally relationships are very good because
> the plugger needs to have a good relationship with the radio station.   And record companies
> keep Heads of Music sweet by taking them on trips and wining and dining them. It's like any
> relationship, isn't it? There might be someone in the family you don't get on with, but you smile
> and grit your teeth, do what you have to do. (Jay Smith, Music Scheduler, Ocean FM / Power
> FM).

My observations of pluggers and programmers together in social situations supports

Smith's notion of relations as "generally … very good". When those personal relations are

not good though, Smith's simile of the family is apt: there are times when the need to

achieve an outcome that is mutually beneficial (like, say, a Christmas Day without arguments), outweighs personal antipathy. The use of 'family' reflects the unique character of the relationship between plugger and programmer - it's a relationship that must work, based on negotiation, trust and sociality … but not on written contracts or formal exchanges of currency, goods or services. This is where the notion of 'professionalism' is necessary to make the relationship work - pluggers and programmers need to believe that the other party is 'professional' in the conduct of their business relationship. Without that belief, that level of mutual understanding (but not, as I've shown, necessarily trust) the relationship fails, and both parties lose.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Implicit in my discussion of the interview data in this research are some potentially problematic assumptions about meaning and intentionality in terms such as 'public service broadcasting', 'quality' (or 'good-ness') and notions of what might characterise recordings, artists or radio stations associated with terms like 'cutting edge' and 'innovation'. Of these terms, I have spent most time attempting to deconstruct perceptions of 'quality' or 'good-ness' in relation to the *sound* of music radio and the characteristics of a 'good radio record'. Yet despite those extended discussions, I would not wish to suggest I had succeeded nailing down these complex and slippery concepts. At best I have sought to reduce, if only in part, the ambiguity embodied in those terms as they have been represented to me by agents working in music radio programming and record plugging.

Even more problematic is the tangled set of arguments contained within the term 'public service broadcasting'. The BBC, its commercial competitors and various government-appointed regulators have spent a great deal of time and energy in the last decades wrestling over the meaning of 'public service' in broadcasting. For this research project though, the important distinctions in understanding of the meaning of 'public service broadcasting' are those between BBC personnel, their commercial radio colleagues and record company pluggers. For the BBC employees to whom I spoke, the notion of 'public

service' is often deployed as the BBC's reason for existence, and the justification for policy decisions. This is a perfectly reasonable position to take - my informants from Radio 1 and Radio 2 were doing more than attempting to answer my questions, they were representing the BBC as an *organisation* to the outside world (the academy in this case). The role of organisational representative was also assumed by many of the commercial radio music programmers and record industry pluggers, and as far as possible I have considered their responses to my questions in that context. The BBC understanding of 'public service' has historically embraced two strands of argument: the first of these is that, due to the nature of its funding model, the Corporation is ideologically committed to providing programming for audiences that would otherwise be ignored by commercial broadcasters. The second of these is that, due to the nature of its funding model, the Corporation is ideologically committed to providing programming for large mainstream audiences which have collectively paid for the majority of its programming. The BBC's continuing ability sustain this apparent contradiction has been the key to its longevity. For commercial radio broadcasters, the BBC's funding model seems to permit it a degree of freedom from economic constraints and overtly commercial considerations. To the record industry, for example, this appears to offer opportunities to break new artists and records on BBC networks first. Thus the term 'public service' is deployed according to the requirements of the discourse being pursued in a given context, or argument.

Similarly problematic are the terms 'cutting edge' and 'innovation' - terms used by both pluggers and programmers. Here there are connotations of novelty as being an intrinsically good thing. In general I would argue that innovation and novelty in popular music (and in popular culture generally) is indeed a good thing. It is also true that popular music culture has embedded ideological positions which value novelty-as-good and valorise artists-as-innovators. These characteristics are not universally perceived to be positive. The notion of cutting edge music to the listeners of many mainstream FM music stations would have negative connotations - those listeners seem to desire familiarity and reassurance from music radio, rather than challenge and innovation. At Radio 1, my informant suggested that previous music programming policy had drifted too close to being, as she put it, "too cool

for school". In other words, self-consciously cool, cutting edge and *new*, against the grain of mainstream popular music taste.

There may also be, as I discussed in Chapter IV *Methodology*, issues around the reliability of the information provided by my interviewees, and the thus the extent to which the conclusions I draw from their statements may be considered reasonable. In general I have made the assumption that my interviewees have not attempted to mislead me or to knowingly provide untrue information, by error or omission. This may not be the case, but the only way of dealing with this potential problem is to make a considered judgement as to whether this has taken place in any of the interviews I conducted - it is of course impossible to be absolutely sure. If my informants have no well-hidden agendas (which, by their nature, I would be unlikely to notice), and I am aware of the constraints under which they are answering my questions, then my conclusions must be reasonable. It is not possible to be absolutely confident about conclusions drawn from any empirical data, but that fortunately does not invalidate attempts to interpret that data to the best of any researcher's ability.

The emphasis of this research has been on the *music* programming strategies of music radio stations, with little time devoted to the significant issue of *presenter/DJ* policy. This is not to say that presenters of mainstream FM music radio are not important - they are in fact an essential tool in any station's on-going struggle for listeners. Radio 2 in particular has used very high profile presenters as part of its successful campaign to build and maintain the network's position as the most listened to station in the UK. Jonathan Ross, Michael Parkinson, Chris Evans and others are deployed to exploit not only their on-air talents, but also their national profile and cross-media fame. My Radio 2 informants touched on issues of matching music to presenters, but presenters (or their producers) do not challenge overall music policy. It is has been those music policies, and the processes that shape them, that are central to my arguments about the on-going ability of radio to mediate the cultural production of popular music. Nevertheless, individual presenters can have a disproportionate influence on the ways in which new music and new artists are heard and

understood - Radio 2 presenters are often as much their own brand as a part of the station

brand. A live session on Jonathan Ross's show, for example, connotes not only Radio 2

approval but also Ross's personal approval of an artist, an association which may be very

useful for a band or solo artist in longer term career building. Even if a listener tunes in

because it's Jonathan Ross, rather than because of the records played, the music is still

there as part of the radio text and can therefore work in much the same way as I argue in

Chapter V *Production Relationships*.

There is a hierarchy of influence in UK music radio programming, with Radio 1 and Radio 2

at the top, followed by the major station groups, like GCap, then the smaller groups and

independently owned stations. The BBC stations see their public service role as expressed

in their pursuit of new music and new styles, tempered by (in the case of Radio 1 at least)

an awareness of competitive activity in the radio and other media sectors. Radio 2 seems

unconcerned about competition, but one could speculate that their attitude might change if

ratings were to slide.

In general, music radio stations tend to avoid risk. The BBC stations reduce risk by using

their specialist evening and weekend shows as expert filters for new records before they

can be added to a daytime playlist. There are potential ratings rewards for getting

programming strategy right, and there are rewards in terms of cultural capital for

programmers and stations that take risks and succeed. Taking risks and failing therefore

has penalties in terms of ratings and cultural capital. Radio 1 and Radio 2 are more likely to

take risks for ideological reasons (their 'public service' remit) and because of the lack of

structural constraints (they are not likely to go out of business or be taken over if they have

a bad ratings year). Commercial radio stations are therefore less likely to take risks. Risk

aversion is amplified by the inertia generated by the competitive radio environment, where

few programmers are likely to go with a new record unless they know other programmers

are already going with it, or are about to.

For pluggers, the competitive radio environment is both a threat and an opportunity. It is a

threat because if one major radio station or group does not take the lead in playlisting a new record, it very difficult to persuade any of them to playlist that record, and the promotional campaign will stall. It is an opportunity because if a major station or group *does* take the lead in playlisting a record, that becomes a tool with which to persuade other programmers to do the same thing.

The 2005 launch of Kerrang 105.2 illustrates the perceived difference in competitive environment between national UK digital radio and regional FM radio. National digital radio stations tend to have relatively small audiences and consequently focus on much more tightly constrained formats. Regional FM radio stations are seen by the radio industry as competing with each other across formats for, in essence the same audience. Kerrang 105.2's launch response was to attempt to manage its playlists in a way that would capture listeners from existing radio stations, whilst building a new audience of rock radio fans.

The national youth pop station Radio 1 frames its notion of value in terms of its public service commitment to both audience and culture. Playing new music, breaking new records, and finding new sounds are all represented here as intrinsically good cultural activities, because an *audience* good is defined as not only being able to hear what they want to hear, but also what they *should* hear. Furthermore, they see the same activities as being good for the *culture* of popular music, a culture which has valued novelty and innovation since the beginning of recorded music, and more so since the emergence of rock in the mid-1960s (Peterson, 1997). The cultural value of commercial music radio is, perhaps unsurprisingly not explicitly addressed by music programmers or record company pluggers. Yet there is evidence here that commercial stations influence popular music culture through the very conservatism of their programming strategies. By selecting which records to continue playing, long after their release date and life-span in the singles chart, they contribute to the longevity of artists, sounds and genres. The innovation of public service radio is thus balanced by the conservatism of most commercial music radio. This balance contributes to a national popular music culture which is relatively stable, but capable of developing and incorporating new sounds and styles.

Commercial regional music radio programmers and record company pluggers are explicit in their approach to the economic value of radio. For these cultural intermediaries the equation is straightforward - more airplay of a record or artist normally means more sales and/or greater awareness of that artist. They understand the economic value of music radio in the UK in terms of a hierarchy of power and influence, partly defined by audience, partly by attitudes to innovation and new music. The national BBC stations are normally the most valued, followed by the larger regional commercial networks and groups, with smaller groups and independent stations the least valued. Radio 1 and Radio 2, despite their public emphasis on cultural value, understand their economic role for the record industry. There are conceptual similarities in the apparent conflict in the cultural-economic role of BBC music radio, and that of the creative-commercial tension in the production of popular music - they are both ideological and contradictory unities which must be accepted if their industries are to continue to function.

UK commercial music radio programmers' use of market research shapes their notion of who the audience is and what they want to hear. This tends to result in Berland's (1990) rational, non-innovative programming strategies. The record industry, on the other hand, want radio stations to embrace novelty (or at least new records). This is the underlying tension in the relationship between pluggers and programmers.

BBC music programmers also use audience research but value direct audience feedback through email, SMS and letters. They emphasise 'knowing' their audience (gut feeling or instinct), and use this knowledge to shape programming decisions. In particular, BBC programmers and producers feel that their charter and public service remit means that it is their *responsibility* to be taste makers and anticipate what their audience will like tomorrow, even if it does not like it today. To that end, Radio 1, once notoriously dismissive of competition (Frith, 1981; Hendy, 2000b), now pro-actively monitors other radio stations, and indeed media, as new cross-media competitors emerge.

Music policy is informed for all my informants by the dynamic balance between research, direct audience feedback, instinct and ratings.   How that balance moves is dependent on whether a station or show is regional or national; BBC or commercial; generalist or specialist.

BBC programmer notions of instinct may run into trouble if gut feeling is significantly out of step with research data, or direct audience feedback. In practice, the gut feeling approach to programming is dominant only when ratings are high, or when high ratings are not the core objective of music programming. For the BBC, it is not enough for the Corporation to consider itself to be 'public service', it must be *seen* to be public service. Similarly, in some ways it simply doesn't matter much if BBC radio music programmers do not *know* their audience. If programmers are going to do a good job, they only need to *feel* like they know their audience.

For programmers in both commercial radio and the BBC, face-to-face meetings with groups of selected or self-selecting audience members can be a powerful influence on how they imagine the audience as a whole. Since they can never really *know* that 'real' audience, the most regular indicative feedback they have on their imagined audience comes from RAJAR, which despite methodological criticism from the academy and some parts of the radio industry, remain the only credible ratings system in the UK.

DJs can play a crucial role in the success of a music policy - if DJs are positive and "passionate" about the records they play, market research suggests that audience approval of those records increases. The role of the DJ shifts from that of being a music-neutral enabler to that of an actor playing the part of a "passionate" specialist DJ. This may not be a problem for many mainstream music DJs, nor may it matter much to a mainstream pop radio audience. This argument also pre-supposes that DJs themselves have sufficient credibility or approval for their "passion" to be taken seriously by listeners.

The fault lines dividing BBC national music radio stations and their commercial rivals are

most obvious in the process of choosing records for playlisting. The BBC's notions of the audience-public and its commitment to 'serving' that public have some interesting repercussions on music radio and on the production of popular music.   The public service-ness of Radio 1 and Radio 2 is manifested in mainstream playlist innovation, and the self-conscious involvement of breaking new records and participation in the star making process. Commercial radio stations tend to look to Radio 1 or to Radio 2 to see what new records are being playlisted and to make decisions on when to cherry pick the most appropriate of those new records (if any) to add to their own playlists (provided of course that they music test well). The ability of the BBC national networks to take risks on new records means that commercial radio stations (a) can rely on the BBC to do preliminary market testing for them, and (b) are provided with a broader palette of sounds and styles from which to choose their own playlists. In other words, the BBC stations make the commercial music radio stations a little more innovative than they would be without the presence of the BBC in the market.

The roles of the BBC national networks and the big commercial radio stations are then quite different. Radio 1 and Radio 2 emphasise the new, which means that (certainly in the case of Radio 1) there is less space for recurrent records in the mainstream daytime playlists. Conversely, the research-led programming of the mainstream CHR radio stations (and '80s, 90s and Now' formats) is intrinsically more conservative, which means that there is *more* space for recurrent records and oldies. Thus Radio 1, and yes, Radio 2 become associated with the new and the cool, with breaking new sounds and styles, with creating new careers. Commercial music radio, is associated then with *sustaining* careers over long periods of time, by keeping recent hits on air for much longer periods of time. In these terms (and despite superficial similarities) Franz Ferdinand are very much a BBC band (quirky, a bit arty, a bit cool), and Snow Patrol are the perfect commercial music radio artist (less musically challenging, anthemic choruses, down-to-earth). Franz Ferdinand could only have been broken by the BBC, but Snow Patrol achieved massive success in large part because of sustained support from commercial music radio. It seems strange therefore that the Commercial Radio Companies Association continues to publicly attack the BBC

national networks, when not only are Radio 1 and Radio 2 taking the risks with new records that commercial radio would normally not take, but that very risk taking approach clarifies the BBC's role in relation to its commercial rivals. As one of my informants put it, Radio 1's 'coolness' is perceived as an unattractive characteristic by some commercial radio audiences.

The connection between commercial music radio programming strategies and the advertising industry is manifested not only in commercial radios formal objective of delivering audiences to advertisers, but also in the increasing use of market research demographics to segment audiences. The focusing of brands through the lens of an idealised personification of an audience (for example, 'Debbie' at Century FM) is an approach developed and tested by the advertising and marketing industries. It is not however unique to commercial radio, and internal Radio 1 branding strategy has in the recent past used similar strategies based on the model of a female student [44]. What is interesting about this is not so much that it is a strategy based on advertising industry origins - it is the contrast between mainstream hits radio notion of audience as *female*, and the older record industry model of the typical mainstream record buyer as male (a model which can be seen reflected in music television programming on both terrestrial and cable/satellite stations). The 'mainstream' then, for most UK music radio stations, is female.

The balance of power between radio and the record industry lies with the radio industry for most of the calendar year, which increases the pressure on pluggers to build good personal relationships with music radio programmers and to use a variety of techniques designed to persuade programmers to support records and artists. The relationship between pluggers and programmers continues to be the crucial focal point in the relationship between the record industry and music radio, and remains as the most effective locus at which to study that relationship, particularly from the production of culture perspective.

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[44] From an internal BBC Radio 1 presentation by then Controller, Andy Parfitt in Glasgow in the run up to the launch of the national-regional opt-outs for the Evening Session in 1999.

VI CONSUMPTION RELATIONSHIPS

The previous chapter addressed the production context of music radio, and how the plugger-programmer relationship works to influence not only the sound of music radio, but also the sound of commercial popular music. In contrast, this chapter addresses a focused case of music radio consumption and how it relates to local popular music production. It is an investigation into one specialist weekly music programme, *Beat Patrol*, presented in several formats by Peter Easton at BBC Radio Scotland from 1984 to 2000, and how a readily identifiable section of that show's audience (indie musicians) make sense of that show. In terms of the model of music radio presented earlier in this research project, the processes I address in this chapter take place in the upper right quadrant, in that they are concerned with consumption. They are also, however, concerned with a specialised feedback loop between production and consumption of music radio and the production and consumption of music. In this case, indie musicians in Glasgow listen to indie music on a specialist show, and transition from being listener-consumers to being active producers of content for that indie music show, while continuing to consume it as listeners.

BBC RADIO SCOTLAND'S *BEAT PATROL* AND LOCAL POPULAR MUSIC PRODUCTION

The principal objective of this chapter is to examine the role that specialist music radio programming has played in local production of popular music in and around Glasgow, Scotland between 1995 and 2000. During this time, a number of artists moved from being local, unsigned bands to making a series of high profile and critically successful independent albums. The bands interviewed here are Mogwai, The Delgados and Bis, of which only Mogwai continues to be active as a working unit in 2007. The Delgados split in 2005 and although Bis in 2003, they reformed briefly in 2007 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of their debut album release by playing several UK live dates, and releasing a new Greatest Hits compilation. Inevitably there are other components that develop and

sustain local music production, primarily live venues and local indie record labels. The

most significant live performance venue for this scene and these bands was The Thirteenth

Note, originally on the city's Glassford Street, later on King Street. The Thirteenth Note

continues to host regular local live shows and clubs, but the original management team is

now based at another local venue, Mono. The most important local label in that 5 year

period, 1995-2000 was Chemikal Underground, which was set up by The Delgados, and

continues to be run by the original four members of the band.

My own involvement in this scene was two-fold. Firstly, I was an indie club DJ and

occasional promoter, which allowed me to act as participant observer of the key players.

Secondly, I was a freelance employee of the BBC, presenting an electronic music show for

Radio Scotland. During this period, as an academic I became increasingly aware of the

role being played in local music production by specialist radio programming in general and

BBC Radio Scotland's *Beat Patrol* in particular.

Beat Patrol and BBC Radio Scotland

Much of the history in this section is assembled from interviews with the key participants

(*Beat Patrol* producers Stewart Cruickshank and Sandy Semeonoff, and presenter Peter

Easton), from primary sources in the form of personal archives of BBC documentation (from

Easton) and office archives kept by Cruickshank and Semeonoff.

This section presents a slice through the history of BBC Radio Scotland's popular music

output from station launch in 1978 until 2007. In focusing on the history of key individual

programming strands I present a selective genealogy of popular music programming on the

station. That programming, in a Reithian mixed output tradition has included jazz, Scottish

country dance, folk and Celtic music, "world" music, country and western, easy-listening,

light classical and serious orchestral music.

The BBC faced its first legal radio competition in Scotland in the mid-1970s, with the launch

of two commercial Independent Local Radio stations (ILRs): Radio Clyde, serving the

Glasgow area, went on air on 31 December 1973, and Radio Forth, serving the Edinburgh

area, first aired just over a year later on 22 January 1975. Both stations mixed music and

speech, and although the BBC did not consider itself to be in direct competition with the

ILRs, it responded to the large listening figures achieved by both Forth and Clyde by

launching a nominally autonomous Scottish radio service, BBC Radio Scotland in late 1978.

The name of the station was not however completely new - from late-1965 to mid-1967 an

offshore pirate station had been on air under the name Radio Scotland with a blend of

Scottish news, weather sport and music [45].

Whether or not the brief success of the first Radio Scotland had any influence on its BBC

namesake a decade later is a matter for speculation. It is, though, perhaps unsurprising

that the new BBC Radio Scotland had a similar programming policy with a mix of original

Scottish material, and selected additional output from Radios 2 and 4. Music programming

included folk, Scottish country dance, an early evening chart oriented show, and a late

evening Middle-of-the-road (MOR) show, all reflecting a closer affinity to the easy-listening

music of BBC Radio 2.

Chapter V addresses the structures and discourses of power and culture within radio

stations - the ways in which individuals (Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries) within media

organisations can exert influence, within set constraints, regardless of their hierarchical

position. The way that influence can be expressed is central to an understanding of how

BBC Radio Scotland, as an organisation, made sense of popular music and youth

programming.

I had three primary informants in my reconstruction of the history of alternative music on

Radio Scotland. They were Peter Easton, continuity announcer turned presenter-DJ, and

since 2000 once again in continuity; Sandy Semeonoff, gramophone librarian, producer and

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[45] The first Radio Scotland is documented in various accounts of the 1960s offshore pirate stations, including the thorough and balanced work of Chapman (1992) and the more populist approach of Hind and Mosco (1985).

occasional presenter; Stewart Cruickshank, former gramophone librarian, eventually senior

producer of music before becoming an independent music producer. For more breadth of

information on the period after 1988, other BBC personnel supplied information, including

Amanda Freeman, former production assistant, now producer of music; Donald McInnes,

former researcher, now producer of music; Nick Low, former researcher and producer, now

of independent production company, Demus.

In the Summer of 1978 Peter Easton joined BBC Scotland as part of the presentation and

continuity team in the run up to the launch of Radio Scotland. In the first two years of

broadcasting, Radio Scotland's adult rock show was *Nightbeat*, airing on the weekday

evenings, 10pm-midnight [46]. It was made by the Presentation Department (rather than the

Music Department) and had a rotating roster of presenters, including Easton, Ian Aldredge,

and Sheena MacDonald (later to move into a successful career in television). *Nightbeat*

was replaced in 1980 by a contemporary hits show, presented by Tom Ferrie.

Easton was frustrated at the lack of recognition afforded the rapidly growing post-punk

music scene in Scotland, as typified by the new Scottish independent labels such as

Postcard Records (whose artists included Orange Juice and Josef K). In the period 1978-

1980 a number of Scottish bands, including The Skids from Dunfermline, and The Rezillos

from Edinburgh, had become successful at UK national level. Easton noted that there was

nowhere in the Radio Scotland schedule to accommodate these bands, particularly in terms

of providing exposure at an early stage in their careers. Easton suggests that excluding

new pop and rock bands from Radio Scotland meant that the BBC was failing in its public

service commitment to deliver a radio station that would serve significant minority tastes

that might otherwise have had no regional exposure at all. This seems to me to represent

more than a commitment to the notion of BBC public service - it is the logical extension of

Radio Scotland's Reithian legacy. A radio programme which played new artists, even at

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[46] This was at the time the same time slot as John Peel at BBC Radio 1.

the demo [47] stage, would appear to educate, inform and entertain, and indeed John Peel's

Radio 1 programme was in many ways the archetypical example. See Garner (1993) for

more on the significance of the late John Peel for popular music culture.

During early 1979, presentation team member Sheena MacDonald moved into a production

role, and instigated a documentary on the rapid developments in post-punk Scottish music.

The programme featured interviews with amongst others, Simple Minds (who had just

released their first album) and Mike Scott (then of Another Pretty Face, latterly of The

Waterboys). The documentary suggested to Easton the notion that the time was right for

Radio Scotland to produce a regular popular music programme that would showcase rock

and pop, much as Peel was doing nationally, but with an emphasis on music in Scotland.

In a BBC internal memo, dated 26 November 1979 to the head of presentation Easton

strongly argues the case for a new programme:

> A glaring and highly regrettable omission from Radio Scotland schedules is a serious and
> authoritative reflection of the thriving yet vulnerable popular music scene in Scotland. To
> argue that Radio 1 is the proper outlet for 'that sort of thing' is only valid if one writes off the
> rest of Radio Scotland's output as being covered by Radios 4 and 2. Our coverage of the
> performing arts encompasses folk music, jazz and the more esoteric end of modern serious
> music - all minority interests. Rock music is also made in Scotland, but apparently does not
> qualify as a significant contribution to our cultural life. How can we justify this omission?
> (Peter Easton, BBC Radio Scotland, 26 November 1979).

A formal reply has not survived, so official reaction to Easton's memo is unclear.

Nevertheless, several months later, in July 1980, when a six week gap opened in the

schedules, due to the temporary absence of the country music programme presenter,

Easton was to be given an opportunity to present a short run of modern rock radio shows,

Rock On Scotland. The duration of the show was 40 minutes, once weekly, and the initial

series of six was sufficiently well received by management that the run was eventually

extended to 39 weeks. Stewart Cruickshank became involved at an early stage because at

that time, all new record releases came first to the gramophone library. The library was

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[47] Demo is a contraction of "demonstration recording", an early, often live or cheaply produced
recording. Until the late 1990s the carrier of choice for demos was the cassette tape. High quality
recordable CDs dominated until the mid-2000s, when the ease of distribution of compressed digital
file formats like MP3 allowed downloadable or streaming versions of demos to supplant the CD.

also an important resource when archive classics were required. Cruickshank notes that the initial brief from management was to play Adult Oriented Rock (AOR) and classic album tracks from major (mainly progressive) rock artists like Yes and Genesis. *Rock on Scotland*'s first producer was Chris Worall, previously employed at Edinburgh-based ILR, Radio Forth. Worall's intention had been to make a programme that would play progressive and art rock. However, within a few weeks, the programme had become a showcase for alternative and new Scottish music. Archived running orders of the era show that featured music included records by Scottish artists Orange Juice and Joseph K, and non-Scots The Stranglers, Martha and the Muffins, and the Dead Kennedys. The explanation for the change in music policy has its roots in the division of labour in BBC Radio, in the notion of a BBC 'sound' and in the then-significance of the gramophone library.

Producer Worall was determined, despite his previous experience at Radio Forth, that *Rock on Scotland* should not have an ILR 'sound', and would be distinctively 'BBC'. The distinctiveness of the BBC sound was part production practice, and part ideology: the records and tapes for *Rock on Scotland* were played in by an engineer in the control cubicle, following a hand signal from Easton. In contrast, ILR stations followed the offshore pirate and Radio 1 practice of a DJ playing in all music and mixing sound him or herself. The significance of these differences is discussed, amongst others, by Garner (1993) and Crisell (2002).

Production practices for *Rock on Scotland* did not however rigidly adhere to BBC organisational norms. BBC standard practice assumes that a producer is editorially responsible for determining programme content and presentation style. The producer also oversees the live broadcast of programme ('studio production'), in a role analogous to that of a hybrid of television's floor manager and director. The presenter is then responsible for fronting the programme and largely follows the direction (and often scripts) of the producer. In contrast, *Rock on Scotland* allowed Easton direct involvement in selection of music, a practice that led to the forming of co-operative alliances with Sandy Semeonoff, the gramophone librarian, and Stewart Cruickshank (on short term contract in the library). The

library was particularly significant because this was where new records arrived, and this was where station playlist meetings would take place. Thus the involvement of Cruickshank and Semeonoff at some stage of the programme's production process was inevitable. The consequences of this organisational structure was that Easton, Cruickshank and Semeonoff increasingly assumed responsibility for programme content and music policy, whilst Worrell concentrated on studio production and, crucially, helping the other three to develop their broadcasting skills and judgement.

Rock on Scotland's format as originally proposed was largely feature led, with music playing a supporting role. Within a few weeks the format of the programme settled down, and content across the 40 minutes of air time typically consisted of:

- reviews of live gigs, local, national and international;

- a gig guide for Scotland;

- interviews with local and national touring bands;

- music related features (e.g., Scottish recording studios);

- new and classic alternative music on record.

Rock on Scotland's music policy also allowed for "the better end of hard rock and metal", according to Stewart Cruickshank. This may have reflected the then-revitalisation of the heavier end of rock in what one of the UK music weekly press (Sounds) described at the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM). Thus Rock on Scotland featured rock from artists such as Ted Nugent (programme 3), Blizzard of Oz, Budgie (programme 9), Tygers of Pan Tang (programme 12) and AC/DC (programme 15).

Scottish content increased as the run progressed. This coincided with the increasing influence of Easton, Cruickshank and Semeonoff, the latter two of whom frequently appeared on air as reviewers or feature presenters. Cruickshank notes the editorial latitude offered to all three "novice broadcasters" by Worall, and therefore implicitly by the BBC. This latitude allowed the team to review and interview successful Scottish artists like The

Associates (Dundee), Midge Ure (Glaswegian vocalist with Ultravox), Orange Juice (Glasgow), and Skids (Dunfermline). Less well-known bands were also covered: the Squibs (Aberdeen), Those French Girls (Stirling), The One Takes (Ayr), The Hollow Men and FK9 (both from Stirling).

Rock on Scotland ended in April 1981, and Easton and Cruickshank recall an informal management assurance that the programme would be re-commissioned for the summer of 1981. The programme did not in fact return to Radio Scotland until the Autumn of 1984, as *Beat Patrol*.

Rock on Scotland was characterised by production practices that were unusual for Radio Scotland. Yet there was a clear emphasis on the BBC ideologies of public service broadcasting and technical professionalism. Production practices which I would characterise as non-standard are:

i) the influence on programme content and structure of the gramophone library staff, and an implicit acknowledgement of their knowledge and expertise in new popular music;
ii) the division of labour between content production, studio production and presentation favoured input from presenters and novice production personnel;
iii) the relative lack of entry barriers to BBC personnel (Cruickshank and Semeonoff) not formally trained in broadcasting skills.

BBC production practices that were widespread in Radio Scotland are also evident in Rock on Scotland:

i) the collaborative nature of the production;
ii) the emphasis on technical quality of the sound of the programme;
iii) the adherence to a notion of public service broadcasting, and responsibility to a perceived audience need.

That the co-existence of these standard and non-standard production practices may be understood, perhaps even expected, in a BBC regional radio station at a very stage in its historical development. By the middle of 1980, the station had been on air for less than two years, and was seeking to establish itself as an authentically Scottish voice. The BBC in Scotland had two related problems: first to understand its potential audience and how that audience related to notions of Scottish-ness; secondly it had to develop a distinctive station identity for Radio Scotland. This mission manifested itself in several ways:

- reductions in the amount of programming the station used directly from other BBC networks, like Radio 2 and Radio 4;
- increased coverage of Scottish news and current affairs;
- increased representation of "Scottish" music.

Easton's demand for equitable treatment for new rock may have had a positive result because it explicitly refers to a notion of Scottish popular music culture, and therefore that there was an audience in Scotland that would have been disenfranchised if new rock had not been not represented. This appeals directly to the Reithian ideology that permeated the organisation, and is evident in the programme schedules of Radio Scotland since its launch, whether that adherence was a reflection of formal institutional policy, or (as with *Rock on Scotland*) the result of the activities of individuals at an operational level. This argument accounts in part for the existence of *Rock on Scotland*, and subsequent youth and popular music programming on Radio Scotland. It does not however directly address the development of the production practices I have described - there are a number of internal and external conditions that permitted this development.

Radio Scotland was (and is) a large organisation, within a very large and bureaucratic public service broadcasting corporation. Within the hierarchical structure of Radio Scotland there is delegation of production duties, and many key production decisions, to operational production staff. Those production staff may be allowed the latitude to make programmes using procedures they judge to be most appropriate. This latitude may increase where the

programming is not highly prioritised by management. Radio Scotland typically prioritises its speech output, including news and current affairs, and sport coverage. The relatively low profile of *Rock on Scotland* probably worked to its advantage, allowing the production team to develop broadcasting practices and skills appropriate to the content and the perceived audience for the programme. Additionally, despite the extended run of *Rock on Scotland*, there is a lack of evidence, either anecdotal or documentary, of coherent long-term Radio Scotland strategy for the representation and broadcast of popular music. A positive consequence of this may have been the freedom experienced by the Rock on Scotland team to develop new production practices . A negative consequence has been the inconsistent nature of popular music programming strands and scheduling throughout Radio Scotland's history.

Beat Patrol ran from 1984 to 2000 through several different management regimes and continued to showcase Scottish music alongside a diverse selection of international alternative and independent artists. At times during that 16-year run it was the only national Scottish outlet for new Scottish music, and at other times it had company in the schedule in the form of my own shows, *Bite the Wax* (1988-1993) and *Electronica* (1997-2000). BBC Radio Scotland's coverage of new Scottish independent and alternative music continues in 2007 in Vic Galloway's weekly show, discussed in a little more detail earlier in this research project (see Appendix 2 for a mid-2007 Galloway playlist).

Radio and local music production

My informants in this section were, from The Delgados and Chemikal Underground, Emma Pollock (vocals and guitar); from Mogwai, guitarist Stuart Braithwaite. All members of Bis participated in their interview: Amanda MacKinnon (vocals and keyboards), John Clark (vocals, guitar and keyboards) and Steven Clark (vocals, guitar and keyboards). The interviews took place either in the band's recording studios or in The Thirteen Note café-bar, and were recorded in 1999. All three bands were central to the growth and success of the Glasgow alternative music scene at that time. Mogwai became part of a growing post-

rock movement and The Delgados set up the influential independent label, Chemikal Underground. Bis, although signed to UK independent label Wiija, also had a North American deal with The Beastie Boys' label Grand Royal and in Japan with Sony.

All three bands emerged at around the same time, 1995/96 in Glasgow, as did a number of other new alternative bands. The Delgados were a four-piece (three men, one woman) guitar-driven alternative pop group, influenced by US underground artists like Mercury Rev. In their 10-year recording career, they released five albums and numerous single, mostly on their own Chemikal Underground label. Bis were a three-piece (two men, one woman), 1980s-influenced electronic/guitar/drum machine alternative pop. Their first single release was in 1995, and they released four albums before they broke-up in 2003. Mogwai are a five-piece primarily instrumental post-rock band, sharing avant-gardist influences with bands like Montreal's Godspeed You Black Emperor! Their first single release was in 1996 and their catalogue includes five studio albums, a number of compilations and various singles and EPs. In 2006 they released two full-length albums: *Mr Beast* (in March) and the original soundtrack to the film *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait* (in October).

For the bands, the role that radio played changed over time, as they became more successful. Those changes break down to four phases of listening.

(i) Listening as fans

All informants were regular listeners to music radio before becoming active musicians, though their first experiences of indie music were not necessarily from listening to *Beat Patrol*. Before to moving to Glasgow to go to University, Emma from The Delgados' taste in music was mainstream rock and chart pop. She recalls starting to become aware of alternative music through John Peel's Radio 1 show for the first time after arriving in Glasgow. She suggests this was a consequence of meeting and becoming friendly with fellow students who would become founding members of The Delgados. Amanda from Bis makes a more explicit connection between joining the band and becoming a *Beat Patrol*

listener:

> It wasn't until I met Steven and John [from Bis] that I got into ... *Beat Patrol*. I really wanted to get into new bands but I just didn't know how to. (Amanda MacKinnon, Bis).

John from Bis describes how he discovered *Beat Patrol* for the first time:

> It was around about the time of our first gigs ... we were aware that *Beat Patrol* did sessions, and that it was a down-to-earth, cool programme to listen to. [I heard about it from] bands and people who go to see bands. (John Clark, Bis).

Steven from Bis:

> It wasn't until I was in a band and I started talking to other bands who would say 'send a demo in to *Beat Patrol*, that's the only one that it'll get played on. (Steven Clark, Bis).

It seems clear that there is a close relationship between the process of becoming an active musician and starting to listen to *Beat Patrol*, for these bands at least. As a showcase for new Scottish bands, and alternative music in general, the show was being used by musicians at an early stage in their careers to develop taste and knowledge, and so to develop subcultural capital. This subcultural capital could then be deployed later in the bands' careers, consciously or subconsciously, as a contribution to self-representation as authentic.

Both Steven and John describe the role of social networks in circulating useful information that will assist in career development. Social networks of musicians tend to form at live venues, rehearsal rooms, musical instrument shops and other focal points, like The Thirteenth Note. These networks of musicians and bands seem to demonstrate co-operation and support, rather than competition. There is no sense, in these interviews at least, that air time on *Beat Patrol* (some 60-90 minutes long, as various points in its history) might be a limited resource, with finite time allocated for unsigned bands. While this might have been naïvety on the part of young bands, it is more likely that information is shared for the common good of a collective scene of music production.

There are two further points here. First, the bands heard about *Beat Patrol* by word of

mouth within a local music scene. Why were local social networks necessary to raise awareness of *Beat Patrol*, when it was being broadcast on the BBC's Scottish national service? One answer may be that historically Radio Scotland has been ineffective in promoting its alternative music provision. A consequence of this is that the station has been perceived by younger listeners as a speech-dominated news and culture channel, with an emphasis on music for an established and mainstream audience in Scotland (typically folk music or country and western). Secondly, John includes "people who go to see bands" in these social networks. In common with other local music scenes, groups of fans are included as scene participants (Straw, 1991). Bands at the very early stages of their careers are not only physically close to fans in small venues, but they are also close socially. This reflects the transitional status of young bands, as they move from being fans themselves to being musicians and performers.

*(ii) Listening as a b*and*: hearing your first demo*

The role of radio becomes more significant for unsigned bands once they have made demo recordings. Not withstanding the rapid growth of websites like MySpace as tools for musicians to showcase their music, first plays on radio remain important. Radio play on a respected show is a validation of a band's music - it situates that recording in a sequence of other music, mostly commercially recorded, some perhaps with high subcultural credibility. *Beat Patrol* was playing the role of *authenticator*, to borrow and slightly repurpose a term from Peterson (1997). Where the authenticator is perceived as having high cultural or subcultural capital, then the judgement it makes is therefore highly valued by specific subcultural groups, like aspiring musicians.

Members of all three bands emphasise the emotional impact of hearing their music on *Beat Patrol* for the first time. The *Beat Patrol* production team were certainly aware of the high value that bands associated with the first play of a demo recording. It was normal production practice to telephone bands a few hours before the demo was aired, so that they would be able to circulate that information to band members and friends.

Amanda from Bis:

> Once I started getting into *Beat Patrol*, I listened to it quite a lot, and I'll never forget that they were the first to play one of our demos ... I heard the intro to [early Bis song] 'Kill Yr Boyfriend' and I absolutely flipped! (Amanda MacKinnon, Bis).

Stuart from Mogwai:

> The first time we ever got played on the radio it was on *Beat Patrol*, and they played the demo of 'Summer' - that was quite special for us, hearing ourselves on the radio. I remember thinking 'this is amazing, I could get used to this'. (Stuart Braithwaite, Mogwai).

Emma from The Delgados:

> It was a fucking big night ... everybody was totally silent when the demo was getting played ... it was a fucking huge rush. Everybody suddenly realised what was happening, it was like we were a real band. (Emma Pollock, The Delgados).

The response in all cases to first plays of demos is characterised by a euphoric disbelief and excitement. The radio play of a demo recording seems to be a validation of musical relevance that is more significant than either live performance or the recording process. Being represented in a mass broadcast medium makes bands feel more 'real' because the music they make is at once being both mediated (they are not playing it, someone else is) and contextualised (their music is being treated in the same way as, say, a new release by Sonic Youth).

The role that radio plays here for music is twofold. First it adds value to the music itself. The demo recording is represented as being the same as any other record on the programme. The values the show represents and the credibility associated with the show, are implicitly passed on to the music in the demo. Secondly the first radio play of a demo recording has enormous significance for the bands themselves. It represents a watershed in their career, and a moment where there has been unambiguous and irrefutable validation of their creative work - it is the point at which they re-define themselves as 'musicians'.

*(iii) Listening as a b*and*: hearing your record*

When a band has been established enough to release commercial recordings, there is a

subtle change in the role that radio plays for both the sound of the music and notions of

band identity. Hearing a commercial release on *Beat Patrol*, or another radio show does

not provoke the same response as the first demo. Here, the bands talk about hearing their

records on *Beat Patrol*, though the substance of their comments would be similar if the

records had been heard on another high status radio programme.

Emma from The Delgados:

> One of the things I still haven't got out of the habit of is that you cannae wait to hear what the
> presenter says when the song finishes. (Emma Pollock, The Delgados).

Stuart from Mogwai:

> It can change the way I think of a tune ... I wanted to see how it [the record] sounded in context
> with other records ... how the filters and compressors affected the music. They [*Beat Patrol*]
> don't play any old shite, they don't play every single thing that comes out of Glasgow, they play
> some of the better bands. The fact that you're getting to hear something that you've done
> definitely contributes to the feeling that you're doing something worthwhile. (Stuart
> Braithwaite, Mogwai).

John from Bis:

> You start listening out for yourself. We always had this thing about our singles sounding dead
> quiet on the radio. Sometimes our records sounded flat compared to other records. (John
> Clark, Bis).

The emphasis is again on contextualisation, but at this stage the bands have moved on

from a euphoric reaction to something much more analytic. They are asking themselves

"Okay, so how does our record *sound* on the radio?". In asking this question, the bands are

showing an awareness of technical issues in radio production, presumably as a result of

increased experience of the recording process. Not only do they know that music sounds

different on the radio (from the sound in the studio, or on CD), but they have a reasonably

clear notion of *why* it sounds different. Stuart knows that the record is passed through

various "filters and compressors" in a radio studio, and that these change the sound of the

music in subtle ways. John knew that Bis records sounded different from other records

played either side of them. These comments imply that the musicians want their records to

not only sound good on a domestic sound system, but to sound good *on the radio*. This

suggests that more experienced bands not only understand the peculiarities of broadcast sound, but they also have the knowledge and motivation to consider those effects when making final mixes of future recordings.

The bands are still using radio to contextualise their music, but that contextualisation has become more broad. It is no longer simply about being a 'real' band - it is about knowing that they are already a 'real' band, and that their records are in competition for sales and airtime with other records, by other artists. So the validation conferred by an appearance on *Beat Patrol* is still important. Stuart again shows an awareness of how radio works, and how *Beat Patrol* maintains its reputation for quality - "They don't play any old shite". This is an important point - bands know that simply being a band from Glasgow is not good enough in itself to justify being played on *Beat Patrol*. The show is perceived to have quality control, and for those bands that reach that level of quality, the programme continues to reassure them that, as Stuart puts it, "you're doing something worthwhile".

The high status of *Beat Patrol* is further illustrated by Emma's curiosity about what presenter Peter Easton would say about her band's record. It is of course likely that a comment about the record will be positive because all the music on the show tends to be material that the production team like or feel that should be played for other reasons. Nevertheless, Emma's comment reflects the uncertainty many musicians privately exhibit about their work, and the important of external validation from a respected source.

Radio thus has two evaluative roles for these musicians: firstly, it allows self-evaluation in terms of technical achievement and production value; secondly, it validates the music, both in *Beat Patrol*'s implicit approval of the band (through association with other records in the segment) and in the show's explicit evaluation of the band (the presenter's comments).

(iv) The first interview

The role that *Beat Patrol* plays here for these, and other bands, is moving them up a

hierarchy of media exposure, from simply having their records played, to being part of a broadcast interview.   Learning how to react in interview situations is an important part of a band's development, although many musicians never become truly comfortable with it. Radio interviews give bands an opportunity to represent themselves in a very direct way. Print media interviews have a level of mediation by the journalist that makes it difficult for bands to be sure that what they say is what will be published. The majority of television interviews are short and designed to be entertaining rather than informative. Radio interviews tend to be informal, and *Beat Patrol*'s interviews often sounded to listeners like a conversation overheard in a pub.

Even so, the comments below reflect the bands' nervous reaction to their first broadcast radio interview - the interviews to which they refer were either live or recorded in real time to be broadcast 'as live'.

Emma from The Delgados (on the band's first *Beat Patrol* interview):

> I completely shat myself ... I was sitting in the BBC canteen ... I wanted to do the interview ... but there was this huge fear [while I was waiting] to be called. (Emma Pollock, The Delgados).

Stuart from Mogwai (on the band's first *Beat Patrol* interview):

> We were absolutely shittin' ourselves ... it was such an early stage of the band that we didn't have anything to talk about really ... it was a day before our first single came out ... it was quite frightening. (Stuart Braithwaite, Mogwai).

The *Beat Patrol* interview is again a significant form of validation: the show is not only interested in the music, it is interested in the musicians themselves and what they have to say about their music. An interview by a highly respected show confirms that a band's music is valuable and important. This matters in several ways: as validation to the band of their creative work. It matters to the scene because exposure on *Beat Patrol* for the band reflects recognition from a respected authenticator of the scene itself. It matters to friends and family for whom appearance in any medium represents a form of validation - the process of mediation, perhaps ironically, makes the band more 'real'. It matters to the highly motivated music fans that were regular listeners to *Beat Patrol* - music fans who are

able to hear a new band being treated in exactly the same way as an established band, and this case making the band more real in a different way - it makes them more human and less abstract.

Summary

I have identified four phases in the role that a specialist alternative music programme (Radio Scotland's *Beat Patrol*) played in local music production in Glasgow, Scotland.

(i) The bands discussed here became *Beat Patrol* listeners as they became active musicians - local music production and *Beat Patrol* become closely associated at an early stage.

(ii) The bands value highly the first-time plays of demos - there is a strengthening of the bond between bands and the radio show.

(iii) The bands value highly the opportunity to evaluate their records in relation to other bands records, technically and aesthetically.

(iv) Ultimately the bands re-evaluate themselves as being of interest to *Beat Patrol* as individuals that make music, rather than only collectively as bands.

Beat Patrol therefore played two key roles overall:

(i) The show provided a measurement of the bands' relative success and status in relation to local, regional and national music scenes;

(ii) The show provided a tool for bands the evaluate the technical aesthetic validity of their recordings in relation to their influences and contemporaries.

VII CONCLUSION

This research project has investigated the relationship between the record industry and the radio industry, how that relationship works to produce music radio and to shape the production of popular music. I approached the issues in three ways:

(i) the construction of a model of music radio production and consumption, illustrating lines of power, influence and ideology;

(ii) an ethnographic investigation of the primary point of contact and negotiation between a record company and a music radio station - the plugger/programmer relationship;

(iii) an ethnographic investigation into the use of specialist music radio by independent musicians.

This research was necessary because there is a lack of literature that tackles both structure and agency in music radio and its relationship with the record industry. In particular there have been few ethnographic studies that have involved in-depth empirical analysis of how pluggers and programmers conceptualise their cultural work, and no serious work in the UK at all on how those conceptualisations work in the production of music radio and popular music.

The model represents the most significant (but not all) of the processes around music radio production and consumption, provides a framework for the ethnographic work that followed, and for potential future work in this field.

The key arguments that emerged from a critical analysis of the literature and the discussion of the results of my ethnographic work are grouped into 4 strands: the continuing significance of music radio as a central part of record industry promotional strategy; the movement of the balance of power further away from the record industry and towards music

radio; the expression of that power through the social relationships between record company pluggers and music radio programmers; the development and mediation of cultural production practices by local musicians through the consumption of specialist music programming.

1. Music radio continues to be central to the record industry's promotional strategy for new commercial recordings.

There is no serious evidence in this research to suggest that music radio will become less important as a mediator and promotional channel for new commercial recordings from the record industry. The radio industry is embroiled in a debate, focused through the regulator, Ofcom, and a number of industry fora, including The Radio Academy, about the future of radio and the potential (detrimental) effects of digital technology. However, overall figures for radio listening remain high and far from threatening the future of radio, new ways of consuming radio (digital radio, streaming, podcasts) are strengthening the position of radio, despite the possibility of fragmentation as predicted by Peterson and Anand's (2004) model of cultural production. Record industry claims of falling revenue from physical sales of records have been disputed, but while that industry is under real or imagined economic pressure as (they argue) a consequence of new channels of popular music distribution and consumption, music radio must continue to be central to record industry promotional strategy.

2. The record industry's on-going need for the promotional power of radio has augmented the capacity of UK music radio to mediate the cultural production practices of the record industry, with important consequences for the sounds of commercially recorded popular music.

This is a development of the first strand of argument, above. The increasing importance of music radio as a promotional tool for the record industry means that the position of music radio is strengthened in any negotiation with the record industry. I have shown that the

power of music radio is manifested in sometimes subtle, sometime not-so-subtle modification in the cultural production practices of the record industry. In other words, the sound of popular music changes in response to the mediation of music radio, and it changes in two keys ways: radio can feed directly into the A&R function of the record industry by suggesting (directly and indirectly) which records and artists most likely to be playlisted; the requirements of a radio station for a particular *sound* tends to focus record industry attention on artists and production practices that are likely to meet that requirement.

The increased power of music radio to influence the cultural production practices of the record industry has happened alongside a re-emphasis at the BBC's national music radio networks (Radio 1 and Radio 2) on the values of public service, expressed through commitment to new records (and sometimes new sounds). These two processes have helped to redefine the distinction between the BBC's national FM stations and their more conservatively programmed commercial competitors. Both radio sectors remain important to the radio industry, but for slightly different reasons. The BBC networks are, despite their positions as the two most listened to radio stations in the UK, far more about innovation and the slippery notion of 'cool' than commercial music radio. Radio 1 and Radio 2 are about *new* music and sounds, about creating hits and stars. Commercial music radio is about *sustaining* careers and building familiarity over long periods of time. The Commercial Radio Companies Association (CRCA) seems not to see this distinction as clearly as does the BBC and thus tends to focus its displeasure at the BBC national networks' slowly increasing ratings into attacks on the BBC's *lack* of distinctiveness. In my view, based on evidence from my research and my experience in the radio industry, the BBC's national networks and commercial music radio *sound* different, perform clearly distinct roles, and have listeners with clearly differentiated priorities.

Those listeners form 'audiences' constructed by music radio from audience research based on techniques developed from advertising industry notions of demographics and audience-as-consumer. For the BBC national music networks, the audience-as-consumer is

complimented by the notion of audience-as-public, and music strategy at Radio 1 and Radio 2 is often represented, in this research project at least, as a function of the BBC's public-serviceness. Mainstream hits radio audiences can be personified as a single idealised listener, most commonly a woman, and sometimes with a generic name (the Century FM network's 'Debbie').

3. The mediation of the cultural production practices of the record industry, and so the sound of commercially recorded popular music are focused through the social relationship between music radio programmers and record pluggers.

Record company pluggers and music radio programmers are the key cultural intermediaries (in the sense used by Negus, 2002) through whom popular music is mediated and is affected by the processes described in the second strand of argument, above. In the absence of mainstream business transactional tools like written contracts and legal obligation, the relationships between pluggers and programmers are characterised by a mutual need for 'professionalism'. Pluggers deploy an array of persuasive strategies intended to convince programmers that a record a 'good' (that is, appropriate) for a station or network. The effectiveness of those techniques is constrained by the perception of mutual benefit, and the potential consequences (for programmers) of having been *seen* to be persuaded.

4. Cultural practices of musicians are developed and mediated by consumption of specialist music radio, as they become *part of* specialist music radio.

Specialist music radio is consumed in a very specific way by independent musicians. The mode of consumption changes from listening as a band to listening as a band-producer, and there is a correlation between listening as a fan and becoming an active musician. Bands value the validation of hearing their music as part of a radio text which does not

differentiate between the relative fame or success of artists. As bands produce commercial recording they continue to listen to specialist music programming as producers of example of the cultural products that together make those specialist music shows, closing a loop of production, mediation and consumption.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has suggested to me some potentially valuable future research directions:

1. The model of music radio presented here focuses on music radio and the record industry to the exclusion of other entities and processes in the complex of music industry production, mediation and consumption. While this has enabled me to keep the model graphically clear and semantically direct, I would like to extend the model's coverage to properly account for gold format stations, other radio distribution technologies and other social, economic and cultural imperatives in the production of popular music and of music radio.

2. The notion of 'professionalism' has been important to elements of my arguments here. Those arguments would be considerably enriched by a systematic investigation into how notions of 'professionalism' are constructed in music radio and the record industry.

3. The arguments I present here are based around what might be loosely described as Contemporary Hits Radio (CHR). It would be most illuminating to develop future research into UK music radio formats dominated by old hits, and in particular into non-pop formats. The only serious and successful example of the latter in the UK is Classic FM, and a thorough ethnographic research project designed to investigate the station's similarities and contrasts with pop music stations (and Classic FM's relationship with the classical music industry) is long overdue.

4. This research has been based on traditional analogue FM broadcasting in the UK, with some passing reference to digital radio (DAB - Digital Audio Broadcasting). Analogue FM still dominates listening figures at the time of thesis submission, but digital radio is growing in significance (RAJAR, 2007). The Government's nominal deadline for analogue radio switch-off is 2020, so in the mid-term there is little to suggest, even with the growth of DAB, that traditional FM models of broadcasting are seriously threatened. Nevertheless there are two trends developing in the use of DAB. The first of these is that national digital multiplexes are being used by regional analogue stations (and networks) to develop new audiences outside of their FM areas and some, like XFM (alternative), Kerrang (rock) and Kiss (dance) are becoming national UK brands. These three brands (and others) represent a different approach to programming which is, historically at least, rooted in genre/taste demographics rather than the socio-economic and age demographics that inform traditional FM music radio programming in the UK. As such, an extended investigation into programming strategies of those DAB stations (and the record industry promotional strategies that interact with that programming) would be a very useful extension of the work presented in this thesis. The second trend is the increased number of stand-alone national, digital-only genre based stations. The BBC has 6Music (alternative) and 1Xtra (contemporary black music genres); elsewhere Planet Rock (classic rock) and Chill (chillout/ambient/electronica) are attracting interesting minority audiences (RAJAR, 2007). It is unclear how much growth potential the more specialist genre based stations have, but another very useful development of the research in this thesis would be an analysis of the programming strategies of these stations and their role in building audiences for genres considered to be outside the remit of mainstream FM radio stations.

Internet streamed music radio in the UK has some interesting possibilities. Large, well-resourced organisations like the BBC use streaming extensively (up to seven days after first real-time broadcast), to extend the listening life of their existing analogue and digital radio programming. If traditional real-time broadcasting continues to dominate music radio listening, the effects of streamed radio in this format are likely to be minimal, at least in terms of deciding when to play particular records over the course of the 24-hour broadcast

day. Even if the BBC's streamed music radio programming starts to show large increases in listening figures, it seems unlikely that it would mean the demise of, say, the traditional breakfast show. Hypothetically, it may even strengthen formats like breakfast as, for example, shift workers can choose to listen to a morning show despite getting up at lunchtime. In the mid-term, despite the flexibility of listening it brings to radio consumers, I don't foresee streaming in this format as having a serious effect on record company promotional strategy. There is, however, another possibility generated by smaller, specialist internet-only radio stations - despite the small numbers of listeners (sometimes numbering in hundreds, rather than thousands [48]), those listeners are likely to be highly motivated fans of specific genres. They are therefore more likely to be opinion-formers, and potentially useful in breaking new genre records (and indeed, new genres). I would not expect this to attract the attention of the mainstream record industry, but it may be a useful way into promoting new artists for small, independent labels and the artists themselves. In the short term however, it seems likely that social networking sites like MySpace and tailored streamed music stations like LastFM, both with a very large user base, may be more influential in shaping record industry promotional strategy. Research addressing these areas would be both interesting and useful.

Overall though, while the sales curve for recorded music shows a large number of sales for a relatively small number of recordings, and much smaller number of sales for a much larger number of recordings, record company radio promotional strategy will probably remain relatively stable. If that curve shifts substantial away from that form, the record industry reconsider its approach to the promotion of recorded music. In the music industry as a whole there are strong indications that maximising the booming revenue streams from live music in particular (Gibson, 2007d) is increasingly part of the objectives of the record industry, and as such, music radio (FM and DAB) will continue to be central to the promotion of musicians as brands, recording artists and live performers.

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[48] See, for example, streams available at http://somafm.com, based in San Francisco, USA.

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APPENDIX 1

JIM GELLATLY'S (XFM SCOTLAND) MYSPACE SITE, 11 JULY 2007

The four bands in the Player area are all unsigned bands. The bands are also played on the show, and listeners vote for the best every week.

APPENDIX 2

VIC GALLOWAY SHOW (BBC RADIO SCOTLAND) PLAYLIST, 2 JULY 2007

Friday Night - Lily Allen

Creeping Up The Backstairs - The Fratellis

Saturday Superhouse - Biffy Clyro

Good Vibrations - The Beach Boys

Broken Records - The Russian Song (Session Track)

Listen up! - The Gossip

Keep Forgetting - The Cinematics

No One Left To Follow - Slam

The Waltzers - Bricolage

Slow Parade - Broken Records (Session Track)

Let's Make Love And Listen To Death From Above - CSS

Make It Wit Chu - Queens Of The Stone Age

Fluorescent Adolescent - Arctic Monkeys

Over And Over - Hot Chip

I Created Disco - Calvin Harris

How Was It For You - James

Layers - The Dykeenies (Session Track)

No Cars Go - Arcade Fire

The LSB - Make Model

No Broadcast Messages - Theatrefall

Once Upon A Time - Air

New Ideas - The Dykeenies (Session Track)

Spitting Games - Snow Patrol

APPENDIX 3

JOHN KENNEDY'S *X-POSURE* SHOW (XFM LONDON) - PLAYLIST, 4 JULY 2007.

Wednesday 4th July 2007 10pm-1am

Artist in Residence: Elvis Perkins

Live Studio Guest: Simon Raymonde, Bella Union Records

X-posure Hot One: Dirty Hands 'Get On Yer Bike (Charlie)' (Happy Release)

X-posure Big One: *X-posure* Big One: Dan Le Sac vs Scroobius Pip 'The Beat That My Heart Skipped' (Lex)

10–11pm

The Polyphonic Spree 'Running Away' (Gut/TVT) single out 6th August

Yourcodenameis:Milo 'I'm Impressed' (V2) 9th July

The Rakes 'The World Was A Mess But His Hair Was Perfect' (V2) 16th July

The Bishops 'The Only Place I Can Look Is Down' (1234)

The White Stripes 'You Don't Know What Love Is (You Just Do As You're Told)' (XL) from 'Icky Thump' album

X-posure Hot One: Dirty Hands 'Get On Yer Bike (Charlie)' (Happy Release) 7" single out 3rd Sept www.myspace.com/dirtyhandsmusic

Malcolm Middleton 'Fight Like The Night' (Full Time Hobby) single out July 9th

The Pistolas 'Take It With A Kiss' (Best Before) single out now

Artist In Residence: Live Phone Interview w/Elvis Perkins

Artist In Residence, Session Track: Elvis Perkins 'Emile's Vietnam In The Sky'

Make Model 'The L.S.B' (The Biz) single out July 9th

Dead Disco 'You're Out' (679) single out now on download, in shops 9th July

The Heavy 'That Kind Of Man' (Counter Records/Ninja Tune) single out 23rd July

Lethal Bizzle 'Bizzle Bizzle' (V2) single out 16th July

Kid Acne 'Worse Luck' (EMI) single out now

11pm-Midnight

Middle Man 'Blah Blah Blah' (Bad Sneakers) single out now

Lift To Experience 'These Are The Days' (Bella Union) from 'The Texas Jerusalem Experience' album

Live Studio Guest: Interview w/ Simon Raymonde of Bella Union

Midlake 'Roscoe' (Bella Union) from album 'The Trials Of Van Occupanther' out now

The Kissaway Trail 'La La Song' (Bella Union) single out 13th August

Beach House 'Master Of None' (Bella Union) from album 'Beach House' out 11th August

Cocteau Twins 'Heaven Or Las Vegas' (4AD) from 'Stars and Topsoil: A Collection (1982-1990)' album

Midnight-1am

Dirty Three 'Some Things I Just Don't Want To Know' (Bella Union) from 'Whatever You Love, You Are' album

Stephanie Dosen 'Way Out' (Bella Union) from 'A Lily For The Spectre' album out now

X-posure Big One: Dan Le Sac vs Scroobius Pip 'The Beat That My Heart Skipped' (Lex) out Aug 7th (dig)/Sept 3rd (7" and CD)

The Victorian English Gentlemens Club 'La Mer' (Fantastic Plastic) single out 16th July

Tits Of Death 'Iron Nipples' (Seriously Stacked) red vinyl 7" out now

The Go! Team 'Bull In The Heather' (Memphis Industries) b-side from 'Grip Like A Vice' 7" out now

Sonic Youth 'Within You Without You' (Geffen) from 'Daydream Nation - Deluxe Edition' album out now

To My Boy 'Eureka' (ABeano) from 'Messages' album out now

Franz Ferdinand 'Hallam Foe Dandelion Blow' (Domino) from 'Hallam Foe' soundtrack album out 13th August

Nancy Elizabeth 'Hey Son' (Leaf) out 30th Aug

Jesus Licks 'Marry Me' (Stolen Records) from 'Stolen Recordings: A Compilation of 23 Bands'

Kate Nash 'Old Dances' (Fiction) b-side of 'Foundations' 7" out now

APPENDIX 4

BBC Radio Scotland DJ Vic Galloway's biography page

From http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/vicgalloway/biography.shtml (Accessed 20 July 2007).

BIOGRAPHY

Vic's Biography

Vic was baptised into punk and new wave after witnessing his first live concert by The Damned, and as the obsession grew so did the record collection.

On leaving school, Vic chose to live his ambitions and immerse himself in rock'n'roll and its lifestyle. He set out to form a band, get into recording and performing music and also managed to busk his way around Europe for 6 months! He's currently writing, performing and producing music with prog-pop pioneers Deaf Mutes (debut LP out now - www.deafmutes.com) and punk band Family Man.

Vic also worked in the other side of the music industry - writing for fanzines, working as a venue lighting director in Edinburgh , helping to set up and develop independent labels, and working as press and radio promoter. His journey into Radio was unforeseen, so when prompted to make a tape for this new regional Radio 1 show he obliged and to his surprise, got the job!

Free from showbiz ego and pretentiousness, he also finds himself in the position of doing another new-music show - 'Air' on Radio Scotland . Air happens every Monday and has set out to inspire all those who switch their dial to the show at 8pm every week.

If that wasn't enough, Vic has been co-running a club-night at the Glasgow Barfly each Friday called The Funhouse pulling in weekly crowds of over 400 for more than 3 years. He also likes to get out and DJ in other clubs and student unions across the UK . As a freelance journalist, he does a column for The List magazine as well as occasional work for broadsheet papers.

Vic lives in Edinburgh , likes getting tattooed, eats spicy food and wants World peace...

APPENDIX 5

RADIO 2 PROGRAMME SCHEDULE, 11 JUNE 2007

What's on BBC Radio 2 This Week
www.bbc.co.uk/radio2

BBC RADIO 2

Monday 11 June   close window

Today	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning			**Morning**			**Morning**
06:00 Sarah Kennedy	06:00 Sarah Kennedy	06:00 Sarah Kennedy	06:00 Sarah Kennedy	06:00 Sarah Kennedy	06:00 Mo Dutta	07:00 Aled Jones
07:30 Wake Up to Wogan	07:30 Wake Up to Wogan	07:30 Wake Up to Wogan	07:30 Wake Up to Wogan	07:30 Wake Up to Wogan	08:05 Brian Matthew	09:05 Steve Wright's Sunday Love Songs
09:30 Ken Bruce	09:30 Ken Bruce	09:30 Ken Bruce	09:30 Ken Bruce	09:30 Ken Bruce	10:00 Jonathan Ross	11:00 Parkinson's Sunday Supplement
Afternoon			**Afternoon**			**Afternoon**
12:00 Jeremy Vine	12:00 Jeremy Vine	12:00 Jeremy Vine	12:00 Jeremy Vine	12:00 Jeremy Vine	13:00 Out to Lunch	13:00 Elaine Paige on Sunday
14:00 Steve Wright in the Afternoon	14:00 Steve Wright in the Afternoon	14:00 Steve Wright in the Afternoon	14:00 Steve Wright in the Afternoon	14:00 Steve Wright in the Afternoon	14:00 Stuart Maconie	14:30 Pick of the Pops
17:05 Stuart Maconie	17:05 Stuart Maconie	17:05 Stuart Maconie	17:05 Stuart Maconie	17:05 Stuart Maconie	16:30 Dermot O'Leary	16:30 Johnnie Walker
Evening			**Evening**			**Evening**
19:00 Paul Jones	19:00 Desmond Carrington	19:00 Mike Harding	19:00 Bob Harris Country	19:00 Leonard Cohen... On Songwriting	18:30 Paul Gambaccini	18:30 Alan Titchmarsh
20:00 Mark Radcliffe	20:00 Mark	20:00 Mark	20:00 Mark	19:30	20:00 Sgt Peppers	20:30 Sunday

APPENDIX 6

KERRANG 105.2, PLAYLIST, 11 JUNE 2007

1 Ash - Polaris

2 Biffy Clyro - Living Is A Problem

3 Editors - Smokers Outside The Hospital …

4 Fall Out Boy - Thanks For The Memories

5 The Fratellis - Ole Black n Blue Eyes

6 Funeral For A Friend - Into Oblivion

7 Good Charlotte - The River

8 Green Day - Working Class Hero

9 Linkin Park - What I've Done

10 Maximo Park - Books From Boxes

11 Reverend and The Makers - Heavyweight Champions Of...

12 Stereophonics - Bank Holiday Monday

13 The Twang - Either Way

14 The Enemy - Had Enough

15 Hinder - Lips Of An Angel

16 The Killers   The Killers - For Reasons Unknown

17 My Chemical Romance - Teenagers

18 Air Traffic - Shooting Star

19 The Answer - Keep Believin

20 Billy Talent - Surrender

21 The Bravery - Time Won't Let Me Go

22 Enter Shikari - Jonny Sniper

23 Evanescence - Sweet Sacrifice

24 Fountains Of Wayne - Someone To Love

25 Gallows - Abandon Ship

26 Interpol - The Heinrich Maneuver

27 Klaxons - It's Not Over Yet

28 Marilyn Manson - Heart Shaped Glasses

29 Modest Mouse - Dashboard

30 NIN - Capital G

31 Paramore - Misery Business

32 Scouting For Girls - It's Not About You

33 The Smashing Pumpkins - Tarantula

34 Stone Sour - Made Of Scars

35 Tonight Is Goodbye - Criminal

36 Velvet Revolver - She Builds Quick Machines

37 White Stripes - Icky Thump

38 Within Temptation - The Howling

39 The View - Face For The Radio

APPENDIX 7

KERRANG - ABC (AUDIT BUREAU OF CIRCULATION) FIGURES FOR UK MUSIC MAGAZINES, JULY-

DECEMBER 2006

(http://www.mediatel.co.uk, July 2007).

Music Magazine Circulations

Music Magazines: Jul-Dec 2006 Year On Year Comparisons					
Title	Publisher	Jul-Dec 05	Jul-Dec 06	Actual Change	% Ch
Classic Rock	Future Publishing	50,027	62,699	12,672	25.3
The Fly	Channelfly Enterprises Ltd	108,097	108,683	586	0.5
Kerrang!	Emap Performance	76,165	85,377	9,212	12.1
Metal Hammer	Future Publishing	44,047	48,977	4,930	11.2
Mixmag	Development Hell Ltd	42,234	39,017	-3,217	-7.6
Mojo	Emap Performance	120,530	114,183	-6,347	-5.3
NME	IPC Ignite	76,792	73,008	-3,784	-4.9
Q	Emap Performance	168,547	140,282	-28,265	-16.8
Rock Sound	IXO Publishing	23,027	23,031	4	0.0
Uncut	IPC Ignite	110,052	93,678	-16,374	-14.9