

22nd March, 2004

Dear BBC,

I'm glad to have this opportunity to have my say because the BBC has been an important part of my life for as so long and I feel it has been allowed to drift recently. Everyone is allowed to do their own thing - there don't seem to be any editorial guidelines and presenters and producers can do or say what they like and resent any criticism. Radio and television are powerful media - they can influence and persuade, especially the young, and this is a grave responsibility which should be taken seriously.

However, I cherish the BBC on the whole and it is doing a good job. The following criticisms are made in a constructive spirit.

TELEVISION: I'd like some real entertainment. There seems to be a lack of creativity, with the same topics being done to death, eg. gardening, makeovers. There are occasional excellent programmes but these are rare.

Music: The only music on TV is pop. There should be more light, tuneful music such as the incomparable Welsh male voice choirs, popular arias from opera, Gilbert & Sullivan, etc. This sort of music introduced generations of radio listeners to classical music. The occasional full length ballet or opera just goes to extremes. I'd like all different kinds of dancing - let's have more of those Asian dancers linking the programmes.

Current Affairs I used to watch Question Time and similar programmes until these were moved to a late slot. Why do I have to stay up late to see anything worth watching? The BBC should not have to be concerned with ratings - this has led to a lowering of standards. There is now very little difference between BBC and ITV. Have you thought out your aims - are they still information, entertainment and education? If not, you should define new ones.

RADIO: I listen mainly to Radio 4 which has maintained its usual high standard, although rather more turgid these days. My only complaint is the News. I am interested in current affairs and used to enjoy politics, but not any more. Now I rarely listen to the entire news because it's either boring or horrific, and deeply depressing - quite different from years ago.

1. Apart from sudden, terrible tragedies, there is too much concentration on bad news which apparently means anything involving death. It is not true that people don't enjoy good news - that's only journalists! It seems that we must have one or two sensationally horrific accident/crime stories every day in addition to new events. Why? The hospitals, courts, police etc. are, sadly, always busy & I don't see the need for us to hear a daily selection. I might add that this habit has only arisen since TV and radio combined resources a few years ago.

2. Why must this bad news be repeated every hour, sometimes every half hour. Most of the programmes I like tend to start on the hour so I'm compelled to listen to the same items being repeated over and over. What was shocking in the early morning becomes boring after the nth repeat and I can hear them without a flicker. You should realise that journalists and reporters are desensitised by the very nature of their job. But I resent it happening to me and I hate to think of the effect it has on children. If you must have hourly news, it should ~~be~~ contain something entirely different, with varied and interesting items from Britain and Europe.

3.

3. Recently, the news has started to include details of accidents, atrocities, etc. in graphic detail. This is a comparatively recent development and just isn't necessary; it's depressing (especially when constantly repeated) & desensitising.
4. Your selection of items is very limited and not as good as the quality papers and more like a tabloid. Many interesting items are never reported, or are mentioned only in the early bulletins, never to be heard again, only the "death news". There is no EU news (apart from accidents, etc.) You wouldn't know we're in the EU.
5. There is far too much politics on radio, but concentrating not on policies or politics but on personalities, confrontations, speculations and gossip. I have almost completely lost interest in politics and blame it on your overkill. No wonder people don't vote.
6. Occasionally you go over the top and spend too much time on one subject. It was quite unnecessary to give a daily, blow by blow account of the Ian Hunter trial. You treated it like a soap and there was too much detail. At other times you spend almost the entire programme on one subject and it's typical of the general unbalance in the BBC.
7. What is radio 5 for? At first it was supposed to give us rolling news, especially during important events and I used to listen a lot. Now you should rename it the sports programme. Typically, it interrupts a serious programme to bring the latest scores! During important events, Radio 5 carries on with sport while Radio 4 drops its usual programmes in order to cover the news. Or they both carry the same items in tandem.

What do I value about the BBC?

Radio 4, Radio Merseyside, and the occasional high quality, interesting and informative programme done with expertise and flair. Now very rare.

What does it do less well? Humorous programmes: programmes for older viewers (who don't all go to bed at 8 o'clock - some of us are busy professionals).

Technology: Websites are brilliant.

Commercial: If it makes a profit, it's OK. The television World News is a waste of our licence fee - why should I pay for the world to listen to and watch? We do need a full and adequate programme listing just for radio.

Licence Fee: should be retained as it does permit a certain independence. The BBC should not have to be concerned with ratings and the licence should give the BBC the freedom to be different.

Governors: should not have a dual role and they should, all of them be regular listeners/viewers. Should be more representative of the general public and not only the "great and the good". There needs to be a separate body to oversee standards, quality and deal with complaints - with teeth.

Political balance: is fine during the news but nowhere else. The "comedy" programmes and presenters chatting are invariably left wing. I object to the royal family being continually sneered at. More than half of us are royalists.

Watershed: There should be a watershed on radio. If we want children to become listeners, certain language should be avoided. Most people object to foul language anyway. Playwrights and philosophers through the ages have managed to convey their messages without giving offence.

The new director should apply himself to what people want, rather than following the inclinations and agenda of his staff. I get the feeling that researchers are desperately seeking out subjects to fill the huge void and end up with results that are either weird and wacky, nightmareish or boringly stuffy. They should seek out what the general public actually enjoy in real world. They could start with the amazing variety of clubs and courses that exist and investigate the sort of entertainment that people like, and not just young people. The BBC's youth culture is out of sync with the actual proportions of older people.

Finally, two examples of ~~were~~ editorial guidelines should have been stronger. i, A programme about paedophilia on 23rd March contains the warning, in the Radio Times, "contains disturbing images". There is no need to show, or advertise, such scenes. It just corrupts those teetering on the borderline and feeds the already existing obsessions. This is utterly irresponsible.

Also, there should be some way of preventing a good, well loved programme from being ruined. The Archers has been taken over by the P.C. thought police. What with a do-gooding vicar, grafted-on ethnic appearances, city drug addicts, teaching the "rich spoilt brat" about the real world, gays, (I've nothing at all against gays but don't want the minutiae of their relationship), a man-chasing decadent old haridan and now a crime/police story, I've finally stopped listening after many years. It's completely lost sight of the everyday story of country folk which was the main attraction. The Archers should not be competing with TV soaps. The radio audience is a different audience, with different tastes. Radio is a different medium and should be treated differently from TV.

Pet hates:

drums with everything  
 repeated trailers  
 trailers which sound like programmes and are switched off by mistake.  
 TV photographic gimmicky, eg. series of quick stills accompanied by drums.  
 intrusive background music/noises.

PS I only picked up one of your leaflets by accident - why wasn't this enquiry publicised more?

yours sincerely,

R. Jacobs