

28th. March 2004

re : "Your BBC, Your Say"

**What do I value most about the BBC ?**

- a) The unashamed intellectualism of Radio 3. The championing of new music, the nurturing of programmes like "Mixing It" and "Choirworks" the sheer quality of programmes like CD Review and Andy Kershaw, the depth of thought and thinking around output such as "Night Waves". Of course, the Proms too!
- b) The quality of Hugh-Cudlipp-style-Daily-Mirror-tabloid –journalism of Radio 5 at its best. Peter Allen and Jane Garvey. John Inverdale. Simon Mayo. The authority and depth of experience in its sports coverage.
- c) Radio 4 when it talks to its literate audience. Not just the obvious stuff like "Today" "Woman's Hour" and "The World Tonight", but Parliamentary coverage, Melvyn Bragg on ideas in our time, the deep mysteries of "Something Understood", the simple but high quality reportage of "Farming Today", the quintessential Englishness of Church Bells on Sunday. Too many more to list !
- d) Radios 1 and 2 I listen to less, but there is still quality here. Johnnie Walker is a nonpareil in mainstream DJing, "The Organist Entertains" and the various RandB shows are guaranteed to bring entertainment and information.
- e) Local Radio. Great for local info and sport with no double glazing ads ! Radio Leeds for its breakfast show and Rugby League coverage, and John Boyd. Radio York for the quality of its work on the rebirth of York City, the 2000 floods and its local sport, with great local voices like Ivan Ash and Andy Hutchings.
- f) The World Service. The best from all the above.
- g) The new digital services. I only have time for a little of , but again , high quality everywhere from bangra beat to breaking news, from Parliament in Committee to Pink Floyd on radio 6.
- h) Feedback. What other broadcast organization allows its public a slot like this ?
- i) Educational – style input. Not only documentaries, but Bitesize, Open University stuff etc.
- j) Quintessential English people. Only the BBC could – and should - have the likes of Patrick Moore, John Peel, Jeremy Clarkson and Sid Waddell.

You may think from the above that I see the Beeb through rose-tinted specs.

Far from it. I find much of the mainstream TV output trivial, mundane and verging on the insulting. The unrelenting misery of "EastEnders"(sic). The pointlessly gory cheap horror chic of "Casualty" and the like. The seemingly endless auction/property development stuff encouraging us all to make a cheap buck. The irritatingly chirpy "chefs".

Small amounts of such would be fine – but the airwaves are awash with these effluvia. The dumbing-down of the main news bulletins. Why have something simple like a person in a studio reading the story to us, when a hapless reporter can be sent to the back of beyond to read the same story in front of suitably gory/pathetic images. ? Oh, and if we can have some groovy computer graphics, that'll do nicely too.

~~Pizazz does not improve the delivery of information. Clarity of purpose is what you should be aiming at.~~

**Changes in technology**

Whilst not perfect, the BBC's response in this area is pretty good. As I've already said, I'm pleased with the digital services, and BBCi is a good internet starting point.

## **Commercial Services**

Are about OK as they are at the moment, as described in the "Your BBC Your Say" leaflet. However, one big complaint is the increasing number of ads on the BBC for its own programmes. I know you call these trailers, and that you claim they are only there to inform the listener/viewer, but the repetition of mentions for things like the Alan Clark diaries, the Mozart stuff and the asinine FA Cup/Don King material, and the need on Radio 5 to keep telling me how much sport they are covering ( I know, otherwise I wouldn't be listening !!!) annoy me more than your commercial rivals' dependence on car ads and ambulance – chasing legal eagles.

These ads cut in to valuable programme time – on several occasions I have heard good discussions on such as "Today" truncated because we "had to go to the news" – only to find that there was just time to slip in a trail. Aaaaarrghhhh!!!. Can't the BBC follow Iceland's example, when they used to have Thursday (I think) as a day without TV, and declare one day of the week an ad-free day ?

---

## **Paying for the BBC**

The licence fee is not perfect. It is more perfect than any other system. Simple and direct, and good value too. If there were a better way, it would have been in place already. Keep those media shysters like Murdoch, and meddling politicians like that dozy Tory who had a good old rant the other week, well away from deciding the BBC's income stream.

## **Efficiency**

No, the BBC is not totally efficient. No organization is. However, it is certainly efficient enough not to have to bother with worthless, Birtist committees to try to get the mythical 100% efficiency.

## **Running, regulation and accountability**

Again, not perfect, but as close as one can get. Any organization that can report as the BBC did on the Falklands, Iraq, the Miner's Strike et al, and suffer opprobrium from both sides must be getting it about right. Heaven help us if the BBC became "AngloCNN". Train people to do the job right, trust them to do the job properly, and back them as much as you can. I heard the original Gilligan/WMD report, and whilst he may have been lax in his "accounting procedures" the reporter and his report, and the trust of the BBC in their staff, has been proved just about right in the light of the facts (We'll let history bury Hutton).

---

## **How should the BBC adapt to change ?**

By sticking to its core principles of quality, clarity and "speaking unto nations".

Don't just chase ratings. In an increasingly fractured media environment, blockbusters watched by half of the population are a thing of the past.

Don't be taken over by the cheap gimmickry of commercial and mainly American input.

Cut the trails !

Appoint people with quality and trust their judgement. Aim to annoy both Norman Tebbit and Tony Benn simultaneously.

Don't follow fads.

Don't go down-market with "reality" shows, tacky celeb excess and lowest-common-denominator stuff.

Realise that people with more money than sense will outbid you for certain things, and don't fret about it.

---

Don't be bullied by this government. Or any other government. Or the rabid tabloids. Stick to your guns !!

David Lewis