

From: Craig Whyel
Sent: 16 December 2003 03:45
To: BBC Charter Review
Subject: Deeply saddened by BBC in America because of lack of diversity and credibility issues

I am, with great regret, no longer watching BBC America or the BBC-based programming on my local Public Broadcasting Station (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania).

The lack of diversity in programming available to me has become extremely narrow in scope and content. BBC America, available to me in Digital Cable format since 1998, has degenerated from a wonderful cacophony of comedy, drama, music, news, documentary and talk shows into a second-rate, myopic home and garden network with close to one hundred fifty (half-hour) installments of remodeling and lawn care shows per week. Granted, some other programming exists, but it is dramatically less varied than it was just a few years ago. In short, I, along with my family and friends, do not find it worthwhile to wade through the do-it-yourself shows just to find some crumb of a program that could change at a whim. BBC America, despite what it purports, is not the "best of British Television," and it saddens me to say so.

Meanwhile, the PBS affiliate, WQED, has determined that British programming is far too expensive and runs roughly about a fifth of its former level of programming from the BBC.

Further saddening me is BBC America's assertion that ratings (which according to the Nielsen Research Website are not available for Digital Cable Television) justify the current spate of shows and warrant the unceremonious removal of so many all-time BBC greats like EastEnders and others with claims of poor ratings (of which there has been no public documentation made available). Such maneuvering is both difficult to take as well as believe.

I would make a list of many other shows that have arbitrarily disappeared but I would further digress, and to get to the point, I do not like what is available and as a result

As a Scottish national living in the states, I terribly miss an actual varied slate of shows from Britain.

Please, as you consider the future of the BBC and its charter, you consider that it really is an international television network with many millions connected to United Kingdom lives and culture and that to be the best it must actually show the best.

Further consider that it should work with PBS affiliates and other networks to make its syndicated programming more affordable. It should also work to make its vast library of wonderful programming available to as many outlets as possible whether it be BBCi broadband; Video On Demand; VHS/DVD sales and other networks whose schedule lends itself to diversity of lifestyles and cultures.

Also, if it survives, the BBC has to consider the state of BBC America. As it is, it is not watchable because it really is a thinly-veiled home improvement network under the guise of an all-around television network-which it is not. If such shows are going to be run at its current pace of near one hundred fifty installments per week then please change the name of the network to BBC America Home, Garden and Fashion, which would be a more accurate reflection of its content and context.

Last and by no means least, with the growing number of international packages available to numerous cable and satellite entities (that offer Asian, Russian, Japanese and Italian networks by subscription), the BBC should aggressively consider making strides to get into this market so that the parent company can have a more hands on approach to how the BBC is being showcased in larger populated countries.

Thank you for this venue to express our views on the BBC and consideration of its future charter. Clearly there are many challenges ahead that need to be met. I wish you the very best of luck but want to make it clear that here in the United States I am one of a massively growing throng of people who know there is better programming available than what is being offered to us and I will not, under any circumstances, watch the current offering until appropriate changes are made. One hundred forty plus installments per week of second-rate remodeling and gardening and fashion shows do not reflect diverse programming nor does a solid five years of nearly the exact same programming block on a local PBS affiliate.

There is better out there and many deserve to see it and will be waiting. From 1998 through 2001, BBC America was one of the great wonders of not just digital cable television but television itself and I want to thank the BBC for those great years of viewing. From 2001 on, it has been another matter altogether.

Craig Whyel