

60 years old- BBC Radio 3



The History (from Wikipedia)

Sixty years ago, it was launched as **The BBC Third Programme** in September 1946. Its name was changed to Radio 3 on 30 September 1967 when, with the launch of BBC Radio 1, the three other national radio channels were also given numbers. At this time it incorporated a service on the Third Programme's wavelength which had previously been known successively as Network Three, the Third Network and the Music Programme, which tended to play less challenging music than the Third Programme and did not include the Third Programme's speech output. Radio 3 also absorbed the adult education material previously carried on the frequency under the name "Study Session", and the Saturday afternoon sports coverage which was known as "Sports Service", although this was moved to Radio 2 in April 1970.

The Third Programme, however, retained its separate identity until April 1970, when it was absorbed into Radio 3. Following the shake up of AM radio frequencies in 1978 it moved to an inferior medium wave frequency, and left MW altogether in 1992, but retained its FM frequency. Ball-by-ball cricket commentaries, which were formerly on Radio 3 medium wave, are now broadcast on Radio 4 long wave and digital radio station BBC Five Live Sports Extra.

What the BBC says about Radio 3

BBC Radio 3 makes available a broad spectrum of classical music, jazz, world music, drama and arts discussions. The network focuses on presenting live and specially recorded music of the highest quality from the UK and beyond, including a variety of contributions from the BBC's own performing groups. Radio 3 plays a role in shaping the national cultural agenda through its promotion of musical performance; its commissioning of music, and through its drama and ideas programmes.

BBC Radio 3 Partners

BBC Radio 3 offers considerably more than traditional western classical music. Partnership with the London Jazz Festival, the Awards for World Music and broadcasts from UK festivals from Brighton to Orkney, contributed to a rich schedule of diverse musical styles. However, classical music remains at the heart of the schedule, and new partnerships with UK orchestras in Birmingham, Bournemouth and Manchester have ensured a greater range of classical music on the network.

The opinions

There is no doubt in my mind that BBC Radio 3 has become the most important cultural organisation in our country and beyond. Having access to this network is like being able to attend a rich and diverse International Arts Festival, every day and for 24 hours a day. And, even more amazing, you can listen in your sitting room, your kitchen, your garden, your shed or your bathroom! It is, quite simply, superb, wonderful, and spectacular!

It is at its best in commissioning new works, broadcasting little-known works and composers, sponsoring young musicians, maintaining the broadest possible range of music and especially since it went over to broadcasting for 24 hours a day which is a godsend for so many people.

That does not mean it is without its faults. The diversification of output to include jazz, experimental and World Music is not to everyone's liking. And the practise of mixing musical styles in programmes like Late Junction and Mixing It can sometimes offend the ear.

To me, it feels as though someone at the top has ordered a quota of time to be devoted to this sort of music but as a result, the BBC's own high standards are continually breached in order to meet the targets, making it inevitable that some music is played where the quality is not really acceptable.



I can give you an example. It is 11.15pm on Sunday 28th August, this year and I am lying in bed wanting to hear some good music after a long day, and so I turn on Radio 3. The programme is Late Junction which presents a wide mixture of musical styles. The presenter, Verity Sharp (pictured) is introducing the next item, and I quote her verbatim: "Here's an album from Ethiopia. Its not the best by any means but it has some good moments."

The performance in question was billed as Tèfèri/Gèbrè-Heywèt: Antchim endèléla Gèbrèab Tèfèri/Bahta Gèbrè-Heywèt, voice, Taken from the album Éthiopiennes Vol 20 Buda Music 860121. (Just in case you wanted to hear it.)

The cacophony which spilled into the peaceful night air was instantly turned off and we put a c.d. on instead. That is an increasing trend for us at this time of day.

But let me give you another example, this time of good practice. It is Sunday 20th August and we are in the interval of a performance from the Proms of Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk by Dmitri Shostakovitch. The interval talk is really good and informative giving details about how the composer used the original literary source, a horror novel by Nikolai Leskov. The intimate knowledge of both works on display was truly remarkable and enhanced my appreciation of the opera considerably.

The Schedule

The daily schedule of programmes is excellent, with Morning on Three, followed by c.d. Masters and then the normally fascinating Composer of the Week. Some presenters read the information as though it was just reading out from a book, rather than properly presented with a vivid voice, but not all of them are quite that bad. Then follows the Lunch Time Concert and after that a concert of classical music, sometimes a replay of a concert from a festival, or the Proms. Then there is a range of music to follow. On Monday, Stage and Screen is often really interesting as the presenter searches from songs and music from shows or films, often with vintage performances and interviews with stars from the past. On Tuesdays, we have Voices which presents great vocal and choral singing from a wide range of styles from around the world. On Wednesdays, it is Choral Evensong, live from one of the major cathedrals or churches, sometimes even from other countries. What a unique pleasure to hear the psalms sung to Anglican chant really well! Thursday is Brian Kay's Light Programme which I sometimes enjoy, but it doesn't always grip my attention for one hour! Friday and Saturdays are devoted to Jazz at this point, and a definite turn off moment for me. Then from 5pm until the evening concert or play, there is In Tune. Here I am very unhappy. The presenters are Sean Rafferty and Petroc Trelawney. They gabble, show off, name drop, pose, now in awe of a great guest, now patronising and supercilious. Switch it off, please.

In the evening there is a concert with a wide selection of styles over the week and then we hit the barren area of Night Waves and Late Junction. Pass the c.d. box, darling! The evening ends with another Composer of the Week until 1pm and then it is the pure bliss of Through The Night until 7am when you get to hear the best music. I have no idea how to counteract the dead period from 9.30pm to 1am which is when I want to listen. I rarely have time or inclination to listen in the early evening. Too many meetings, too many distractions.

The talks



I am not really interested in listening to talk programmes on Radio 3. They don't hold my interest and sometimes, I feel positively anti. Ian MacMillan (left) presenter of The Verb really gets me down! He talks in a rough "eeh, by gum" voice, like a Yorkshire oaf of the stage variety, really exaggerated. I often wonder if at home he talks proper posh, as they say Cilla Black does when she is not on t.v. trying to talk Scouse!

The Competitors

Whatever my own personal opinions, I have say that I am very happy with Radio 3 as a whole. There is nothing like it anywhere, and certainly not in Britain. The only contender is Classic FM which used to advertise itself as the only station broadcasting just classical music, to distinguish itself from the broad range of Radio 3 output. But in fact, that claim was never true. Classic FM broadcasts a lot of advertising which really irritates and is an instant turn off for me. I can't abide their advertisement-music-advertisement sandwich and would prefer to sit in silence rather than listen to Classic FM any day!

In conclusion

For me there are two types of work undertaken at home, whether at my desk, in the kitchen, cleaning the bathroom or just doing nothing except really listening. There is work that I can undertake whilst listening to music and work which requires silence before I can do it.

I am really grateful that I can switch on or off as necessary and knowing that when the time comes to really listen, I have a very good chance of hearing something brilliant.

Radio 3, I love you.

Neil Richardson