



Save Our Music

Fact Sheet

February, 2017

In January, 2017, without public consultation, ABC Radio cut all but one of its much-loved music programs from Radio National, and made redundant three of its expert presenters. Two of these programs had been broadcast for decades, and all were vital to the Australian music ecosystem. They attracted a wide range of listeners, young and old, metro and rural, and focused on music rarely heard on other mainstream channels: folk, blues, jazz, world, indigenous, islander, devotional and music from Australia's multicultural communities. Their loss diminishes cultural richness and diversity, especially for rural and regional audiences.

When the cuts were first announced, we started a petition that quickly garnered close to 23,000 signatures and the support of celebrated Australian artists, philanthropists and peak music industry organisations. Our campaign (www.savernmusic.com) focussed on saving the programs and presenters. But ABC Radio Management proved deaf to the pleas of listeners and the music community, instead promoting a premature digital-centric strategy that served to distract from their primary aims: cost-cutting and ratings. The result has been a loss of curated music and a loss of access, particularly for rural and regional listeners. While the programs have gone for now, we remain resolute in achieving our goals:

The Save RN Music (#saveRNmusic) Campaign remains committed to reinstating the music lost from ABC Radio in January 2017, with this guiding principle: No Net Loss.

In an ideal world, 'no net loss' would mean the reinstatement of the programs and presenters. *This is still our highest aspiration.* However, ABC Management has decommissioned the shows, implemented redundancies (that preclude reinstatement for at least a year), and reassigned savings to support their digital strategy. Given that, we are aiming for the next best thing. In this context, **no net loss means:**

- There will be no reduction in Australian free to air music content or promotion (as measured by the number of hours prior to the January 2017 cuts that were devoted to broadcasting folk, blues, jazz and world, and content not represented on other ABC formats).
- Regional access to Australian music will not be reduced (as measured by the number of regional listeners able to access RN music programs prior to the January 2017 cuts in comparison to current figures).
- Australian music and the public will not be worse off. This is difficult to measure without industry reports, though benchmarks include listener engagement with industry and financial and cultural impacts on artists, festivals, promoters, educators and culturally diverse communities.
- Programs will continue to be presented by expert curators providing context to broadcast music.
- The changes won't reduce the diversity of music styles played.
- The financial resources devoted to music on ABC radio will not be reduced.

The Charter

According to its charter¹, the ABC has a responsibility to broadcast programs promoting national identity, that are informing and entertaining and reflect cultural diversity². It also has a responsibility to encourage and promote musical, dramatic and performing arts³. The loss of these programs has resulted in the ABC reducing outputs in support of its charter obligations.

Prior to the cuts, the ABC featured music from folk, blues, jazz, world, indigenous, islander, devotional and Australian multicultural genres. It provided informative context through expert curation, featured new or upcoming local artists

¹ <http://about.abc.net.au/how-the-abc-is-run/what-guides-us/legislative-framework>

² 6(1)(a)(i) broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community.

³ 6(1)(c) to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia.

and promoted gigs, concerts and festivals. It also targeted a demographic not catered for by other channels and, through its AM transmitters, achieved broad reach into rural and regional areas. While it may not be the ABC's role to prop up industry, how can it expect to encourage and promote the arts (as per its charter) when it broadcasts and supports less Australian content? Supporting local performance and product is a pivotal part of the Australian live music, touring and festival circuit ecosystem, and has extensive cultural and economic impacts.

ABC Management justified the programs cuts, in part, by citing poor ratings. We challenge this approach, and point out that the charter clearly states ABC programming should *not* be dominated by number of listeners per se, but should be balanced with informative, specialist programs that, by their nature, have a smaller audience⁴. Comparing the numbers of passionate, engaged and informed listeners of RN with those in the commercial paradigm of identity presenters makes no sense. Again, the ABC has behaved contrary to the spirit of its charter.

Listener demographics

To quantify the effects of the changes, at least three factors should be considered: content, reach and demographics. While content and reach have been discussed at length, demographics has received less attention. Programs on RN target a different demographic to Triple J and Double J. No matter how good the program, it is unrealistic to expect RN listeners to appreciate those programs in the same way if content and presenter style are aimed at different audiences (e.g. younger). A listen to any of the related programs on Triple J and Double J quickly confirms this. Overlaps in content between RN and Triple J and Double J do not mean duplication. The ABC is in danger of losing listeners with its Double J strategy, rather than benefitting from the cross-promotion that happens through program adjacency.

What we've lost

The following table shows the decommissioned programs, and their approximate genre equivalents on Triple J and Double J:

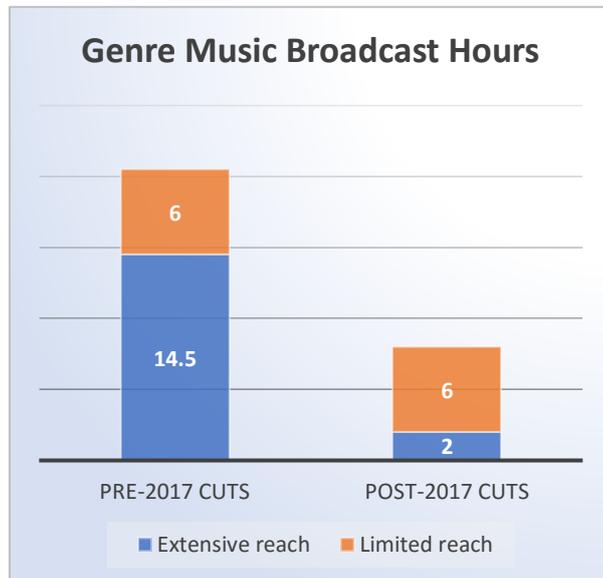
Program	Presenter	Channel	Broadcast time	Weekly original hours ¹	Content
Decommissioned programs					
The Planet	Lucky Oceans	RN	Mon–Fri 11pm–12am	5	17 genres (e.g. Jazz, World, Folk, Singer-Songwriter, Blues, Country, Indigenous) from 40 countries, around half Australian ² , gig alerts
The Inside Sleeve	Paul Gough	RN	Mon–Fri 3–4pm	5	12 genres, around half Australian ³ , gig alerts
The Live Set	Alice Keath	RN	Fri 8–9pm	1	Live performances from seven genres and six continents ⁴
The Rhythm Divine	Geoff Wood	RN	Sun 5:30–6am	0.5	Various
Soundproof	Miyuki Jokiranta	RN	Fri 9–10pm	1	Sound spaces
Remaining programs					
Roots N All	Nkechi Anele	JJ	Mon 10pm–1am	3	Blues, reggae, soul, funk, country, folk and world music
Tower of Song	Henry Wagons	JJ	Mon 8–10pm	2	Folk and roots, Americana, alt-country, bluesy rock
The Music Show	Andrew Ford	RN	Sat, Sun 11am–12pm	2	Jazz, classical, folk, interviews
Jazztrack	Mal Stanley	Digital radio	Sat 5–6pm	1	Jazz

Notes: ¹i.e. excluding repeats; ²Compiled 1 Nov 2016 – 16 Dec 2017; ³Compiled 1 Nov 2016 – 20 Dec 2017; ⁴Compiled Jun – Dec 2016.

⁴ 6(2)(a)(iii) the responsibility of the Corporation as the provider of an independent national broadcasting service to provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialized broadcasting programs;

The gaps

There are two main gaps. The first relates to reach and demographic. While programs similar to *The Planet* and *The Inside Sleeve* exist on Double JJ, access is largely restricted to metropolitan areas. Rural and regional listeners cannot access digital radio transmitters, Internet is inconsistent and over 50% of listening is not done in the home. Further, the demographic each channel targets is radically different. The other main gap is no replacement for *The Live Set* or, at this stage, *The Rhythm Divine*.



In summary, genre music broadcast hours (excluding repeats) have dropped from 20.5 hours with mostly extensive reach via AM transmitters, to just eight hours with mostly limited reach (only *The Music Show* maintains extensive reach via AM). On any reading, ABC Radio now performs substantially worse in supporting charter principles.

Some other notes:

- Along the lines of *The Planet*, Henry Wagon's program, *Tower of Song*, comes with an excellent playlist, but is presented within the younger Double J style and context, and reach is restricted.
- *The Inside Sleeve* overlaps to some extent with Myf Warhurst's *Lunch With Myf*. Again, the demographic is different, and reach is restricted.
- *The Live Set* – there are no new or existing programs that feature live performances of the genres previously covered.
- *Rhythm Divine* host Geoff Wood is now working on a new program, *God Forbid*. As of the first two episodes, no music had been featured.
- Nkechi Aniele's *Roots N All* is an excellent show clearly targeted at younger listeners. While not a replacement for the decommissioned shows, it is an excellent complement, providing a crossover for listeners coming from a younger rock/pop environment.
- *Fat Planet* is touted as a world music program. However, this is not world music, as 'planetees' would recognise it, which consists of traditional or indigenous music, with or without a modern facelift. In contrast, *Fat Planet* heavily features international hip hop and electronica.
- There is no continuation of any program similar to *Soundproof*.
- *Jazztrack* is no longer broadcast via transmitter; it is only available online.