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# Needle Time:

## the BBC, the Musicians' Union, popular music, and the reform of radio in the 1960s

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### Abstract

The BBC is currently the world's largest media employer of musicians. Influenced by Michel Crozier's theory on bureaucracies, and using primary source material from the BBC's written archives, this essay examines, through the prism of Crozier's strategic analysis, the attempts of the centralized policy makers of BBC radio to comprehend their external environment—pirate radio stations, craft unions, ministries. These bureaucrats strove to retain a working relationship with the Musicians' Union while, at the same time, attempting to meet the aesthetic demand of their licence-payers to hear popular music presented 'authentically' on disc rather than by BBC contract bands playing arrangements. In particular, the pro-music policies of senior bureaucrat Richard Marriott are considered. While the article explores the layers through which policy is pummelled into practice, or by-passed, it concludes that the changes that make the greatest impact are those spurred by the external force of government.

**Keywords:** BBC; bureaucracy; interclusion; light music; music policy; popular music; radio studies

### Introduction

This essay is indebted to the work of the late Michel Crozier (1922–2013), the French sociologist who examined public bureaucracies. In so doing he refined the theory of Max Weber (1864–1920). Crozier paid attention to critiques and subversions of policy made by groups of specialist circles within the bureaucratic system. He analysed how resistance and sclerosis came about and how subordinates acquired autonomy. Crozier noted, for example, that cadres of technicians

held exceptional power to defy change thanks to their practical function. This essay considers one aspect of organizational and aesthetic change in a public body, that of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Since its foundation in 1922 it has operated through policies written by desk-bound officials that are put into effect by three or four levels of operatives, depending on the period: controllers, editors, producers and performers. In the case of music policy it is argued here that the BBC's salaried musicians have held the status of technicians. Their external craft representative, the Musicians' Union (MU), has been robust in confronting broadcasting policy to a degree that has seemed more potent than its size might allow. This authority was eventually challenged at the BBC by postwar changes of practice that were brought about by shifts in the production and consumption of popular music, especially so through technical and aesthetic transformations in the recording industry. This is examined here in the light of cultural ruptures at the BBC in the postwar period. BBC radio policy had to respond to two seismic events—the launch of commercial television (1955–62) and the intervention of commercial pop music pirate stations (1964–67). These episodes, and the BBC's reactions to them, were themselves manifestations of a broader cultural change associated with neoliberalism. No longer could the BBC define popular music as late as it did in its annual report and accounts of 1963, as follows:

all jazz, all Top Twenty material, dance music, popular folk music, old-time dance music, *Music While You Work*, morning music, and some concert music (Cmnd. 2503, 1964: 32).

## Background

'The British Broadcasting Corporation is the greatest employer of musicians that this country has ever known'. This is how, in 1936, the BBC's Director of Music, Dr Adrian Boult, introduced to the Ullswater Committee his case for the renewal of the BBC's national monopoly in broadcasting (BBCWAC R27/219; Kenyon 1981: 110; Ehrlich 1985: 222). The word 'greatest' was carefully chosen to cover both quantity and quality. In terms of volume Boult's claim was correct nationally but not globally so. In 1935 the BBC employed 428 salaried musicians. In addition there were music specialists on full-time contracts such as the popular theatre organist Sandy MacPherson (1897–1974). Nazi Germany—through its programme of nationalization—and the Soviet Union separately ran broadcasting institutions that employed orchestras, ensembles and choirs in excess of the volume of the BBC. With the termination of these two powers (1945, 1991 respectively), the BBC currently remains the largest global media employer of musicians. Its salaried and contracted ensembles have been, or are, as follows.

Table 1: BBC salaried ensembles (with former names)

No.	Ensemble	Existence
01	BBC Wireless Orchestra*	1924–1929
	BBC Symphony Orchestra (114 players)	1930–
02	2ZY Orchestra*	1922–1926
	Northern Wireless Orchestra*	1926–1930
	Northern Studio Orchestra	1930–1934
	BBC Northern Orchestra	1934–1982
	BBC Philharmonic Orchestra	1982–
03	Cardiff Station Orchestra	1929–1931
	BBC Welsh Orchestra	1935–1939
	BBC Welsh Orchestra	1947–1987
	BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra	1987–1993
	BBC National Orchestra of Wales	1993–
04	BBC Dance Orchestra (Jack Payne)	1928–1932
	New BBC Dance Orchestra (Henry Hall)	1932–1937
05	BBC Theatre Orchestra	1931–1949
	BBC Opera Orchestra	1949–1952
	BBC Concert Orchestra	1952–
06	BBC Revue Orchestra	1931–1965
	BBC Variety/Theatre Orchestra	1931–1965
	BBC Radio Orchestra (later*)	1965–1991
	BBC Big Band*	1965–1994
07	BBC Salon Orchestra	1939–1945
	BBC Casino Orchestra	1941–1945
08	London Studio Players*	1941–1981
09	Wireless Military Band	1927–1934
	BBC Military Band	1934–1943
10	BBC Empire Orchestra (22 players)	1932–1940
11	BBC Midland Orchestra	1934–1939
	BBC Midland Light Orchestra	1941–1973
	Midland Radio Orchestra*	1973–1980
12	BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra	1935–1939
	BBC Northern Ireland Light Orchestra	1949–1983
13	Glasgow Station Orchestra*	1922–1931
	Scottish Studio Orchestra*	1931–1935
	Scottish Philharmonic Orchestra*	1934–1935
	BBC Scottish Orchestra	1935–1963
	BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra	1963–
14	BBC Scottish Variety Orchestra	1940–1967
	BBC Scottish Radio Orchestra*	1967–1972
	New Scottish Radio Orchestra*	1972–1981
15	BBC West of England Light Orchestra	1950–1960
	West of England Players*	1960–1965

16	BBC Northern Variety Orchestra	1951–1956
	BBC Northern Dance Orchestra	1956–1975
	BBC Northern Radio Orchestra*	1975–1985
17	New BBC Orchestra	1966
	BBC Training Orchestra	1967–1972
	The Academy of the BBC	1972–1977

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Sources: [www.northerndanceorchestra.org.uk/page2.html](http://www.northerndanceorchestra.org.uk/page2.html)

Briggs 1970: 577

[www.turnipnet.com/mom/](http://www.turnipnet.com/mom/)

[www.bbc.co.uk/orchestras/concertorchestra/about/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/orchestras/concertorchestra/about/)

[http://www.musicweb-international.com/Tschaikov/Chapter21\\_page1.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/Tschaikov/Chapter21_page1.htm)

\* = freelance/part-time contracts

It is due to the employment of musicians that, throughout its existence, the BBC has enjoyed and endured an intricate relationship with the senior representatives of the craft body for music that represents its members in terms of conditions, remuneration and welfare: that of the Musicians' Union. The 22,000-member MU was formed in 1921 from an alliance of the Amalgamated Musicians' Union (founded 1893) and the National Orchestral Association. Thus the MU (1921–) and the BBC (1922–) evolved contemporaneously. During the economic depression of the 1930s union membership fell sharply to 8,000 (1934). Ehrlich reports that subscription records ceased for some years. It was only in 1950 that membership rose back to 27,000 (Ehrlich 1985: 217). There is some irony, then, that it was at the union's lowest point in the mid 1930s that the BBC gave way to its demands to limit the amount of gramophone recordings the corporation played, in favour of 'live' music and studio ensembles. This was known as the 'needletime' agreement, a term that will be examined below. The settlement curbed the BBC's ability to play records of popular and novel music from 1935 up to 1988, when finally the Monopolies and Mergers Commission judged the Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL)'s terms to constitute a restrictive practice.<sup>1</sup> The 1990 Broadcasting Act liberated the BBC from half a century of intractable constraint.

It seems astonishing that the Musicians' Union should have maintained such an unyielding grip on the corporation, especially one that was first applied when the union was at its weakest. Yet, among the performers' representative bodies (Equity, the Variety Artistes' Federation, the Incorporated Society of Musicians)

1. Cm.530: *Collective Licensing: A Report on Certain Practices in the Collective License of Public Performances and Broadcasting Rights in Sound Recordings* (Monopoly and Mergers Commission, 1988).

the MU was the only interwar craft union that the corporation engaged with (Burns 1977: 61). It was one that was, by its very existence, alien to the BBC's Reithian ethos of institutional loyalty (Burns 1977: 60). But 1935 was a year of expansion in the employment of salaried music ensembles by way of the development of the regional orchestras identified in Table 1. In Scotland, Wales, Manchester and Birmingham, opposition from existing ensembles such as the Scottish Orchestra in Glasgow and the Hallé in Manchester provoked a series of local conflicts. BBC management sought support from the MU to negotiate détente. As these clashes continued, especially after various pay settlements, the MU's moderating status privileged the union for decades.

Committed to the defence of live work for its members, the MU consistently opposed mechanization—amplification, the gramophone record, pianolas, the sound cinema in the late 1920s, pre-recorded singing on the television of the 1960s, the synthesizer in the early 1980s, and so forth. It remained wary of radio in spite of the medium's positive employment record. After the BBC created a department for popular music in 1963, strengthening its links with the gramophone department while demoting its light music section, the MU adopted for its slogan 'Keep Music Live'. From its earliest days this small craft union initiated campaigns and 'actions' to press its case. In order to strengthen the hand of collective bargaining, the AMU's founder Joseph Williams (1871–1929) formed shrewd issue-based campaign alliances with larger Trades Councils (Ehrlich 1985: 151). Together with the threat of summarily withdrawing labour when a performance was about to take place, its tactics were the main means of asserting union power. Both courses of action were threatened or applied against the BBC at various times in the postwar era; in its realization, needletime restriction was a persistent and astute example of the former.

## Needletime

'Needle' in this context was a colloquial reference to the metal (later, mineral) stylus which rode the spiral groove of a shellac (later, vinyl) gramophone disc. 'Needletime' meant the total amount of licensed time that gramophone recordings could be relayed by a broadcaster across the period of a week. Agreements on total allowances were settled in phases of three, later five, years. This restricting license was purchased by the broadcaster from an agency representing record companies, who were the owners of the public reproduction rights to discs (Barnard 1989: 104). The Decca and EMI record companies founded the agency in question, Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL), in 1934.

A very clear explanation of the needletime issue was provided in an internal BBC report submitted in 1971 by R. G. Walford, the corporation's Head of Copy-

right (BBCWAC R78/7/1). He began with the Imperial Copyright Act of 1911.<sup>2</sup> According to Walford, at that time record companies discovered that under the law as it then stood they had no means of preventing a rival record company from making straight copies of a record and then selling these copies as its own. Therefore they induced Parliament to include in the 1911 Copyright Act a provision that what were called 'sound recordings' should have protection 'as if they were musical works' (see 1911 Copyright Act, Part One 19 (8)(i), and 35(1)(c)). A record company had the right to negotiate terms over which length of dissemination would be allowed. Further, it could extract payment for the licence it gave to someone to play a record in public. In 1933 a test case was won by the Gramophone Company (EMI) against a café in Bristol. At this point the PPL was set up to negotiate terms and collect fees from venues (Sexton 2004: 7; Barnard 1989: 26–27). As a national broadcaster of records, the BBC had no option but to pay for an annual license. But there were two points to bear in mind. First, as Walford emphasized:

Record companies have in general no direct interest in limiting the amount of needletime granted under the PPL agreement, apart from controlling what they call the 'over-exposure' of a record on first issue. On the contrary, the more needletime they can allow, the more money they get (BBCWAC R78/7/1, section 5:3).

Secondly, the BBC in 1935 was not especially bothered about gramophone recordings. It was running, or otherwise in the process of establishing, eleven orchestras and other ensembles (see Table 1) including its dance and variety bands. Together with freelance ensembles of light music they provided most of the music that the BBC planned to broadcast. At the time this was 'balanced' annually to comprise 14% classical, 16% light and 13% dance music, while, according to a sample, the National Programme played gramophone records of all kinds for just 8% of its output (Briggs 1965: 51). BBC executives, such as its stern Director-General John Reith, considered that music on radio was chiefly a means by which 'the plain man' could be elevated to appreciate classical masterpieces alongside 'fine works of the second rank' (Lambert 1940: 57). It was seen as a duty at the BBC to call attention to classical music, while light, and light classical, music were pathways to it.

It is in the interstices of these positions that the Musicians' Union found a way to protect its members against what it supposed was the destructive force of electrical reproduction. In Walford's report the MU was labelled 'the *eminence grise*'. He described how it stated

2. See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/1-2/46/enacted>.

quite openly to the PPL that if, when it negotiates needletime agreements with the BBC, it permits what the MU regards as an excessive amount of needletime, then the MU will if necessary take industrial action against the gramophone companies in the form of a refusal to permit any more commercial recording until the needletime position is put right (section 5:3).

Thus the union asserted its authority on an organization that was not even an employer of musicians but instead an agency. In negotiating terms with the PPL, the BBC had two elements to settle: the annual fee and the time-length. From the figures made available in various internal and secondary sources, it appears that the system for determining needletime was changed in 1945, from percentages to weekly sums, as follows:

Table 2: PPL-BBC 'needletime' licences 1935–1972

Years	Airtime	Fee
1935–38	4.22%	£20,000 pa
1940–45	18.34% Forces Programme 05.08% Home Service	£20,000 pa
1945–48	21 hpw between Home & Light (each 1.5 hpd); 3 hpw for Third	
1949–52	23 hpw Home & Light; 3 hpw for Third	
1952–57	(3.3 hpd = 1.6 hpd Home/Light)	
1958–63	22 hpw for three stations (3.1 hpd), + 6 hpw regions + 3 hpw TV	£100,000 pa
	1959 = plus 6 hrs for the domestic stations	1959 + £130,000 pa
1963–7	28 hours domestic stations (increase in External)	£300,000 pa
1967–71	32.5 hpw R1 (4.6 hpd) 18.0 hpw R2 (2.6 hpd) 25.0 hpw R3 (3.6 hpd) 06.5 hpw R4 (0.09 hpd) 07.0 hpw local stations (1.0 hpd)	£400,000 pa    local radio £50,000 pa

Sources: various inc. R78/7/1; Carpenter 1996: 18, 92, 225; Barnard 1989: 27; Briggs 1995: 510; National Music Network (BBCWAC R78/623/1)

Home = Home Service; Light = Light Programme; Third = Third Programme  
hpw = hours per week  
hpd = hours per day (average allowance)  
pa = per annum

These allowances were far less than liberal. Take the mid 1950s, when the corporation ran three domestic stations. The Light Programme was open for 14 hours daily while the Home Service broadcast for 16 hours a day. Permitted airtime amounted to an average of little more than one hour and a half per day

per station. Gramophone recordings were saved chiefly for the record-request programmes such as *Housewives' Choice* (1946–67), *Family Favourites* (1945–80) and *Children's Favourites* (1954–1967; *Junior Choice* 1967–84) on the Light Programme, and *These You Have Loved* on the Home Service. It will be noted in Table 2 that a reduction in the hourly allowance took place in the 1958 agreement, from 23 hours per week for Home and Light to 22 hours per week for Home, Light and Third Programmes together. Its cause was the introduction of the 1956 Copyright Act, which replaced that of 1911. It set up a new formula in favour of live music (Barnard 1989: 104). But not only did the BBC salaried ensembles represent through time an increasingly outmoded soundworld, their cost to radio increased in relation to the available licence income. Their outlay rose from 4.27% of total BBC expenditure in 1956–57, to 6.72% by 1966–67, an increase of 57%.

### The Marriott Report of 1957

It was statistics like this that led a far-sighted but subordinate BBC executive to reform BBC radio. In 1956 Richard Marriott (1911–85) took on the post of Chief Assistant to the Director of Sound Broadcasting. At the time BBC radio faced an acute crisis. Up to 1955 the BBC had enjoyed a legal monopoly in the national provision of radio; it would do so until 1973. The corporation held a similar monopoly in television, from 1936–39 and 1946–55. Following the adoption of the 1954 Television Act, commercial television (ITV) started to broadcast from London in September 1955. Over the next seven years it spread across the country in regional blocks, gaining millions of new viewers. To study its impact on radio and secure that medium's survival, the Marriott Working Party was set up. The Marriott Report was submitted and approved by Directorate in March 1957 and by the Governors the following month. Marriott formulated an entirely new method of enquiry by commissioning internal costings and introducing a sociological approach. In doing so he discovered that a loss of audience could not be blamed entirely on television; BBC radio audiences had fallen by a half since the postwar height of 1948 (see Table 3).

Table 3: BBC Audience Research Dept.: The trend of listening since the war

	1948			1956		
BBC Station	No. of adults	% of adult pop.	Listening ratio	No. of adults	% of adult pop.	BBC listening ratio
Home	3.6 m	10.2	38	1.6 m	4.2	35
Light	6.0 m	16.5	61	2.85 m	7.6	64
Third	0.1 m	0.3	01	0.05 m	0.1	01
<i>Total</i>	<i>9.7 m</i>	<i>27.0</i>		<i>4.5 m</i>	<i>11.9</i>	

Source: BBC WAC R34/1022

Furthermore, Marriott made a horizontal comparison of the corporation's radio schedules. He showed for example that Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* on the Home Service played against an Edinburgh Festival recital on the Third Programme, leaving the Light Programme 'to satisfy the rest of the audience'. He asked, 'Can it be right that we devote twice as much attention to the educated audience as we do to the great majority of our audience?' (BBCWAC R34/1022/2). The Marriott Report concluded that radio's salvation would be found through music. Television could not cover music as well as radio could. Music was a clear means of distinguishing the stations from each other. New developments in wireless technology—frequency modulation, stereophony, the portable radio—benefited the reception and circulation of music. The BBC's foreign competitor, Radio Luxemburg, was dedicated to popular music. So, in consequence, the Light Programme should be devoted to 'the whole range of "pop" music from dance band combinations to the lighter part of light music' (para. 21). This, incidentally, may well be the earliest recorded use of the word 'pop' in BBC policy papers. Meanwhile the music content of the Home Service should be increased, falling between 'high-brow and low-brow', extending from 'Grand Hotel' to 'prom-type symphonic music' or 'serious music of the less difficult kind' (BBCWAC R34/1020).

Marriott also looked at the list of house orchestras together with their costs and wondered what was really required to run an increased schedule predicated more on pop than classical. He was told that the corporation needed only two orchestras. Rationally, he proposed the chopping of the BBC Scottish Orchestra and other outworn 'light' ensembles (Governors' minutes 05.02.59; BBCWAC R338/2). Scottish national interests diverted action at the time, but it was clear that eventually the BBC would need to disinvest in its roster. Marriott was willing to cross swords with the Musicians' Union on it, despite—or because of—two union issues:

- (a) Up to 1955 the BBC recognized only its own Staff Association founded in 1940. In 1955 the new Independent Television Companies Association promptly made an agreement with unions to attract skilled workers away from the BBC. Between 1955 and 1958 the BBC was compelled to grant negotiating rights to the same organizations. Meanwhile in 1955 the BBC's internal staff association became independent and changed its name to the Association of Broadcasting Staff so that ITV personnel could participate.<sup>3</sup> All of this greatly strengthened the hand of the MU, which could now use, for the first time within the corporation, its traditional tactic of strategic alliance in the company of potent forces;

3. The ABS became affiliated to the Trades Union Congress in 1963 (Burns 1977: 65). It led its first strike against the BBC in 1969 (Briggs 1995: 789).

- (b) The BBC had recently suffered a strike by the MU. Because the new ITV was paying musicians a higher basic rate, in February 1955 the MU withdrew labour from BBC TV. Pianists replaced orchestras. The strike spread to radio. After two weeks the BBC resolved this short but effective strike by offering concessions in a fairly costly manner. The MU gained strength thereby.

## The Music Programme

Needletime soon became the reason why Marriott chose to negotiate with the MU rather than fight it. Due to the threat of commercial radio being developed on the back of commercial television, the BBC had to make full use of its wavelength allocations to avoid surrendering transmission frequencies to competitors. Marriott spotted such a gap due to the Third Programme's lack of a daytime service. He proposed an education strand at teatime and a light classical music sequence through the day. He wanted some Home Service music items moved over to his new 'Music Programme' (BBCWAC R34/1035). He planned it in 1959, but due to delays in negotiations with the MU it did not air until 1964 (it continued up to 1970, when it became Radio 3). Marriott sought 47 hours a week of extra needletime to make his schedule work, but for four years the MU declined dispensation (BBCWAC R27/847/1).

The union changed its mind in 1964 when the corporation cannily picked up on a campaign by MU executive member Basil Tchaikoff to create a training orchestra for young musicians. The New BBC Orchestra of 65 players (1966–77, see Table 1: item 17) expensively met this need, and in return the MU conceded needletime for the Music Programme, so long as the BBC house orchestras were maintained 'for the foreseeable future' (Carpenter 1996: 227). The government used this same agreement later to secure an extra hour's needletime per day towards the BBC's pop programming, for the following reason. Just before the Music Programme began airing, BBC radio faced unexpected competition in the provision of pop from an armada of off-shore 'pirate' radio stations. Following Radio Caroline's launch in March 1964 there were soon up to ten stations competing for attention around the coastline. Yet the pirates provided the practical evidence the BBC needed that a new audience could be developed through the broadcasting of popular music—a vindication of Marriott's substantive project.

## Pirate radio stations and needletime

Pirate stations like Caroline did not face needletime restrictions. Politicians such as the Postmaster-General of the time, Tony Benn, claimed that the pirate stations

evaded paying for a PPL needletime licence; he used the term 'stolen copyright' in Parliament. Yet in fact the PPL—under pressure from the Musicians' Union—rejected their overtures and refused to negotiate with them. Conversely, most of the pirates paid a negotiated fee to the Performing Right Society for permission to broadcast the music on the record (*Times* 22 May 1964: 6; Harris 1977: 24). The MU's view on the pirates was put forward by its dogmatic General Secretary, Hardie Ratcliffe (1906–75; Gen Sec 1948–71). He turned it into an attack on recordings and radio. Ultimately his view was exposed as an aesthetic attack on pop. In the *London Evening News* on 3 June 1965, under the headline 'Canned Music Crisis at Boiling Point', Ratcliffe wrote:

Broadcasts of continuous pop rely on gramophone records, because they are the cheapest source of the 'sound'—a synthetic product of the recording studio—which most pop groups cannot repeat live anyway. And if there were any permitted increase in the broadcasting of records—pop or any other kind—musicians would be compelled, in defence of their own interests, to stop making them. There would be no new music recorded.

Music has become debased and cheapened. Most people hear it only from radio and records. It is no longer associated in the listener's mind with the activity of those who perform it... Some members of Parliament are screaming along with the teenagers for a pop-record jukebox on the air. But 20 years hence the MPs may not be here then—the teenagers will be asking, with the BBC and the record manufacturers, 'Where have all the musicians gone?'

(*London Evening News*, 3 June 1965: 8).

Marriott ignored Ratcliffe's Luddite gripes. He listened instead to the pirates. The bureaucrat was all too aware of the need for the corporation to address the weak presence of current pop on the Light Programme. He considered that this had been due to two factors:

- (a) needletime restrictions and the aversion of listeners to hearing cover versions by BBC bands. As he put it, 'No one, for example, really wants to hear *Get Me To The Church On Time* in any version but the one made famous by Stanley Holloway, or *Thank Heaven For Little Girls* in any but Maurice Chevalier's... Pop music is also the music of the gramophone record and can only to a limited extent be presented successfully in any other form' (BBCWAC BM [65] 29);
- (b) the insecurity of the BBC in its presentation of popular music in contrast to the confidence and panache of the pirate stations (BBCWAC R78/3231/1).

Tony Benn later claimed in his published diary that:

In dealing with the pirates one line of attack was to use the popularity of the pirate stations to persuade the BBC to reschedule its own programmes so as

to provide a channel of continuous popular music comparable to the pirates. BBC radio was at this time divided into three channels ... and, with its paternalistic attitude, declined to do that and said it was not there to pander to popular taste. Ultimately, the pirate radio stations had the effect of altering the pattern of broadcasting at home, not only in the BBC but, of course, in forming a beach-head for the development of commercially-owned radio, to which I was opposed (Benn 1987: 160).

This rather vainglorious summary is unfair to Marriott, who, since he took up his post as Chief Assistant in 1956, had been attempting to accommodate 'popular taste' in acts of policy. It was Marriott rather than Benn who first suggested in early 1965 dividing the Light Programme into two channels—eventually Radios 1 and 2—in order to increase the availability of pop to the public. On learning of Marriott's proposal in March of that year, Hardie Ratcliffe and Stephen Stewart, Director-General of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), met Postmaster-General Benn. Aware that Benn was holding a meeting about the BBC without its presence, a senior member of the Post Office 'phoned the BBC's Secretary, Charles Curran, with an account of this meeting which was noted by Curran and copied to Marriott. The PO official emphasized that Ratcliffe and Stewart had shown themselves opposed to any wholesale conversion of the Light Programme to 'pop' music, 'although they felt that the BBC's proposed compromise arrangements for dividing the Light's transmissions at certain times of the day to increase the availability of "Pop" music might be acceptable' (BBCWAC R78/623/1, 10 March 1965). It was anyway the belief of senior management that the Light Programme as a general mixed-entertainment service should not be fundamentally disturbed (BBCWAC BM minutes, 3 March 1965). This position allowed Marriott to conceive of a pop service with a separate identity, which in turn rekindled his option of splitting the Light's frequencies between long-wave and medium-wave bands.

## **The formation of Radios 1 and 2**

With the dissension of the MU and IFPI on one side and Marriott's signal-splitting on the other, Benn proposed that 'continuous light music ... both live and recorded' should be carried on a BBC service equivalent to that of the Music Programme. Comprising a roster of 50% records and 50% played by live musicians, it would satisfy Benn 'so long as the interests of live music and the musicians who provide it and the legitimate rights of the recording companies are safeguarded' (letter to BBC Chairman, 6 June 1965). It was at this time that the idea became mixed with a plan to provide a network of local radio stations, a pet project of Marriott's talented colleague, Frank Gillard. Gillard had been inspired by the American practice

of urban stations. He also wished to pre-empt the threat of commercial local radio, which was the next step in the pirates' move to legitimization (they achieved this in 1973). The BBC's 'National Music Network' (later renamed the 'Light Music Network') was costed out at ten stations, each employing local musicians to play 50% of the music content (BBCWAC R78/623/1, 13 June 1966). With running costs calculated at £2.4 million a year, excluding MU payments, and a capital cost of £1.8 million, this came across quickly as a ludicrously expensive scheme driven by a concern to attend to the requisites of the Musicians' Union. The corporation returned to Marriott's proposal, now called the 'Popular Music Service', and spent capital on erecting four high-powered transmitters to boost quality and coverage of the proposed national services.

Yet the pirate stations were still in operation, gaining audiences and advertisers. Neither the Conservative party nor the Labour government was keen to tackle the issue. Some MPs welcomed the pirates' commercial enterprise while others, like Benn, were all too aware of their constituents' enthusiasm for the free pop stations. While Benn was in office it was correct to assume that the government would 'do nothing' to ban the pirates. Time and again MPs mocked his recurrent claim that 'legislation will be introduced as soon as practicable' (Hansard HC 12 May 1965, 27 Oct. 1965, 8 Dec. 1965, 1 Feb. 1966, 23 Feb. 1966, 3 March 1966). One MP exclaimed in the House, 'This chap cannot decide anything' (Hansard HC 3 March 1966 vol. 725 cc1509). Three months later Benn was replaced by Edward Short (Briggs 1995: 562). Just before Christmas 1966, Short publicly announced the proposal for a BBC all-day music station. 'It won't be all pop', he confirmed clumsily, 'but on the other hand it won't be all *We'll Gather Lilacs*' (Rider 1977: 10). He took the 'Marine etc. Broadcasting (Offences)' Bill through its stages, where it gained royal assent on 13 July 1967 despite at every turn a consistent Conservative vote against its passage. Short's act became law on 15 August 1967, and all stations but Caroline ceased transmission on the midnight preceding that day (Henry and Von Joel 1984: 67; Harris 1977: 218). This Act was a blunt but effective legal measure to force the stations to close themselves down (Barnard 1989: 45–46; Briggs 1995: 565–57).

Robin Scott, the corporation's well-liked and savvy Controller of Light Music, had been appointed in 1966 to prepare the splitting of the Light Programme into its pop (247m medium-wave) and sweet (1500m long-wave) functions (Briggs 1995: 572; Rider 1977: 6). Scott later told his staff that:

I soon lost any illusions I might have entertained to the contrary when faced with the daunting task of carving two new radio networks with a mere £200,000 a year added to the programme budget and about seven hours of existing 'needletime' [to serve both services]. Total separation of Radios 1 and 2 (the ultimate and still unrealized dream) for 20½ hours per day was clearly out of the ques-

tion; yet I had to give a new identity to Radio 1—at least during the daytime peak listening hours. Eventually we added 53 hours a week to the radio output.  
(R78/3231/1)

53 hours a week amounts to 7.5 hours per day between the two stations, and £200,000 levels out at £545 per day 'above the line' (Barnard 1989: 53; Briggs 1995: 572; Skues 1968: 36). Scott did emphasize, however, how well Marriott's policy of developing the presence of popular music on the Light Programme had succeeded between 1963 and 1967. The transition fell into two stages starting with the autumn schedules of 1964, in the wake of the initiative of the pirate stations:

Stage 1 (1964–66):

- (i) Strips: reformulation and extension of programmes most adaptable to accommodating the personality of the subjective DJ rather than the objective presenter (BBC Handbook 1968: 22);
- (ii) DJs: re-branding of certain BBC presenters as individualistic personalities (such as David Hamilton, Jimmy Young, Alan Freeman);
- (iii) conditional contractual employment of the most suitable pirate DJs able to select material consistently corresponding to the nature of the programme;
- (iv) introduction of phone conversations ('chats') with listeners, interviews with guests, in order to reduce the needletime content of the programme.

Stage 2 (1966–67):

- (i) Adaptation of programmes into DJ-centred shows (at its peak period *The Breakfast Show* becomes *The Tony Blackburn Show*);
- (ii) conditional employment of 14 pirate DJs on chains of short or medium contracts; reformulation of the relation between the producer and the DJ in favour of the DJ's interests; gradual reduction of the role of engineers in the operation of the turntable;
- (iii) introduction of pre-recorded station, programme and DJ 'jingles', 'idents' (on cartridges for optimum use) and time checks, to replace the variety and role of commercial ads;
- (iv) heavy cross-promotion of programmes and 'trails', with augmented attention to listener correspondence, dedications, and competitions principally to reduce needletime content.

The effects of Stage 2 can be identified in Table 4, which compares one of the last Light Programme schedules with one of the early schedules for Radios 1 and 2 in tandem. In this case speech programmes are moved onto Radio 2, freeing up Radio 1 as a continuous music station. Radio 2 has an independent life between 11am and 10pm, an average weekday total of eleven hours. Yet dual transmission covers 73% of the 41 hours per day of output, leaving only 27% for split diffusion. This is a consequence of the needletime constraint. In the face of this Scott has shown much ingenuity in his management of the double schedule. Music programmes are highlighted in bold.

Table 4: Comparison of schedule between the Light Programme (1967), Radio 1 and Radio 2 (both same date, 1969)

Time	Light Programme Wed 26 July 1967	Radio 1 Wed 12 Feb. 1969	Radio 2 Wed 12 Feb. 1969
0530	Weather, News <b>Breakfast Special</b>	News <b>Breakfast Special</b>	As R1 <b>Breakfast Special</b>
0700		<b>Tony Blackburn Show</b>	
0830	News & Metcast <b>Housewives' Choice</b>		As R1
0900		<b>Family Choice (Alan Freeman)</b>	As R1
0955	Five to Ten		Five To Ten
1000	<b>Jimmy Young</b>	<b>Jimmy Young Show</b>	As R1
1030	<b>Music While You Work</b>		
1100	Morning Story		Morning Story
1115	The Dales		The Dales
1130	<b>Melodies For You</b>		As R1
1200	(1215) <b>Records Round The World</b>	<b>Radio One Club</b>	<b>Sam Costa</b>
1300	<b>Parade of the Pops</b>		Cricket
1350	Cricket Scoreboard		
1400	<b>Swingalong</b>	<b>Keith Skues Show</b>	Woman's Hour
1510	Racing		As R1
1525	<b>Swingalong</b>		
1615	The Dales	<b>Sounds Like Tony Brandon</b>	The Dales
1631	Racing Results <b>Newly Pressed</b>		Racing Results <b>Roundabout</b>
1730	News <b>Roundabout</b>		
1830		<b>Pete Murray</b>	Sports Review <b>David Gell</b>
1920	Sports Review		
1930	The Navy Lark	News, Weather (1945) <b>The Johnstons</b>	News, Weather (1945) I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again
2000	Newstime		
2015	Midweek Theatre	<b>Jazz Club</b>	Midweek Theatre
2115	<b>Time for Old Time</b>		<b>Time for Old Time</b>

2200	<b>The Piano Magic of Ronnie Aldrich</b>	<b>Late Night Extra</b>	<b>As R1</b>
2230	News <b>Music Through The Night</b>		<b>As R1</b>
0000		News <b>Night Ride</b>	<b>As R1</b>
0100	<b>It's One O'Clock</b>		
0200	News	News	As R1

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Source: *Radio Times*

## Live music on Radio 1 and Radio 2

Fifty producers were employed to run the two stations (Skues 1968: 143). Scott pointed out that 'much of the responsibility for the pop music content would lie with the producers of the live music sessions with bands and groups' (ibid.). Pressure was placed on the producers to fill the time left bare by the needle-time constraints. However, Scott's idea of sessions for groups—as opposed to in-house band sessions—would evolve into one of the most distinctive and valuable aspects of the BBC's engagement with popular music. After all, there was little evidence to support General Secretary Ratcliffe's claim that members of groups could not play live or 'as live'. Several groups were able to undertake recording sessions at the BBC's Paris and Maida Vale studios, such as those made for DJ John Peel (1967–2004). One of Scott's 'live' producers, Ron Belchier, was able to claim in 1968 that, 'We now have ten hours of music as against two in the *Easy Beat* days. We used twelve groups which are pre-recorded in six separate sessions... A number of groups, then unknown, have made their first broadcast on our show, including The Grapefruit, The Honeybus, The Equals, and The Love Affair' (Skues 1968: 149).

But Scott also had to deal with the in-house BBC ensembles. As far as possible he corralled them into the schedule of Radio 2. Yet he still was forced to programme 'covers' of tracks on Radio 1 in order to fill stretches not covered by needletime. This proved to be the station's Achilles' heel, attacked by the outspoken radio DJ Keith Everett when he mocked 'vileness like Albert Scron and the Strumalongs, and Rita Blurnge singing "Strawberry Fields Forever". John Lennon does it much better but we never seem to hear it. Druggy connotations I believe' (*The Londoner*, 4 May 1968). By developing a policy of organizing pre-recorded sessions with groups, the Musicians' Union-approved policy of in-house and freelance orchestra 'covers' became redundant. Following a dramatic call in 1968 to disband various house ensembles, made by a new internal body called the Policy

Studies Group, Ratcliffe called on Prime Minister Harold Wilson. The Postmaster General of the time, John Stonehouse, made a quiet deal with the BBC by increasing the license fee while maintaining 'employment of musicians at current scale' (Agreement 13 Aug. 1969). It was from this point on that the BBC used its high cultural remit, in particular the core orchestras, as a bargaining tool with government in securing satisfactory license settlements, a practice it continues to this day. The full-time light music ensembles were eventually turned into freelance ones before their ultimate detachment in the 1980s, when the anti-union ethos of the Thatcher government encouraged the BBC to disinvest itself of such commitments.

### **Marriott, the Musicians' Union, and the DJs**

Marriott was ultimately responsible for the conduct of radio presenters, and therefore accountable for their employment. Disc jockeys presented a particular problem, in that the BBC's codes of practice and routines were designed to inhibit personality and idiosyncrasy. This was done in order to develop a universal institutional style that would furnish the broadcast voice with authority, though no loss of humanity was intended thereby. The very programmes of DJs, on the other hand, were branded in their name (see Table 4). They were the centre of attention, and all the more so on the BBC, as needletime constraints made more demands on their participation as personalities, in terms of filling time and as a focus of aural interest. The process of conditional employment of DJs fell into the two stages already outlined. During the first stage, Scott recruited DJs who worked on pirate stations but who, he felt, were most likely to match and modernize the BBC house style while acknowledging the customary conventions of BBC music presentation. These included Tony Blackburn, Tony Brandon, Simon Dee, Keith Skues and Jimmy Young. In September 1967, fourteen ex-pirate DJs were offered a sequence of short-term (eight- or thirteen-week) contracts. They included Pete Brady, Dave Cash, Kenny Everett, Stuart Henry, Mike Raven, 'Emperor' Rosko and Tommy Vance (Davies 1999–). In each case they were chosen for:

- (a) their previous success in gaining a listenership—a fan base or 'following';
- (b) their suitability within the BBC for generic or specialist presentation;
- (c) their strong and distinct oral personality (BBCWAC R78/2569/1).

Three issues arose about their contractual obligations. First, those who operated as pirates had worked for an illegal organization under the terms of the new Marine Offences Act. The BBC had to be seen to take care in offering them work

and money. Secondly, exclusivity became an issue. Because the DJs were being 'tried out' and therefore on short-term contracts, Marriott believed that they should be allowed to operate freely to gain work, as many of them had sidelines which helped them build a following; both Jimmy Young and Tony Blackburn were singers. Similarly, Marriott felt that the BBC should be able to pick and choose between them (BBCWAC R78/2569/1). Thirdly, as they could not be asked to sign exclusive contracts, they could not be tied to the minutiae of the corporation's codes of practice. Therefore their contracts were not as binding or restrictive as those of a salaried employee. It was for this reason that, when the MU started to complain about certain comments of DJs, the corporation had difficulty in asserting discipline.

For example, in a short article for *The Londoner* magazine on 4 May 1968,<sup>4</sup> much of which was repeated in the *Daily Mail*, DJ Kenny Everett wrote the following:

Auntie, with her million corridors and countless rules and regulations—vital, they tell me in any large organization—is a big bring down. 'Why', I hear you cry, 'work for such an organization?' The answer is quite simple—'tis the only one... The only solution I can see, to put it in a nut shell, is to remove Broadcasting House out to the Isle of White, drop an atom on it, and start from scratch. Only this time ban the Musicians' Union which forces us to play only a certain amount of records per day.

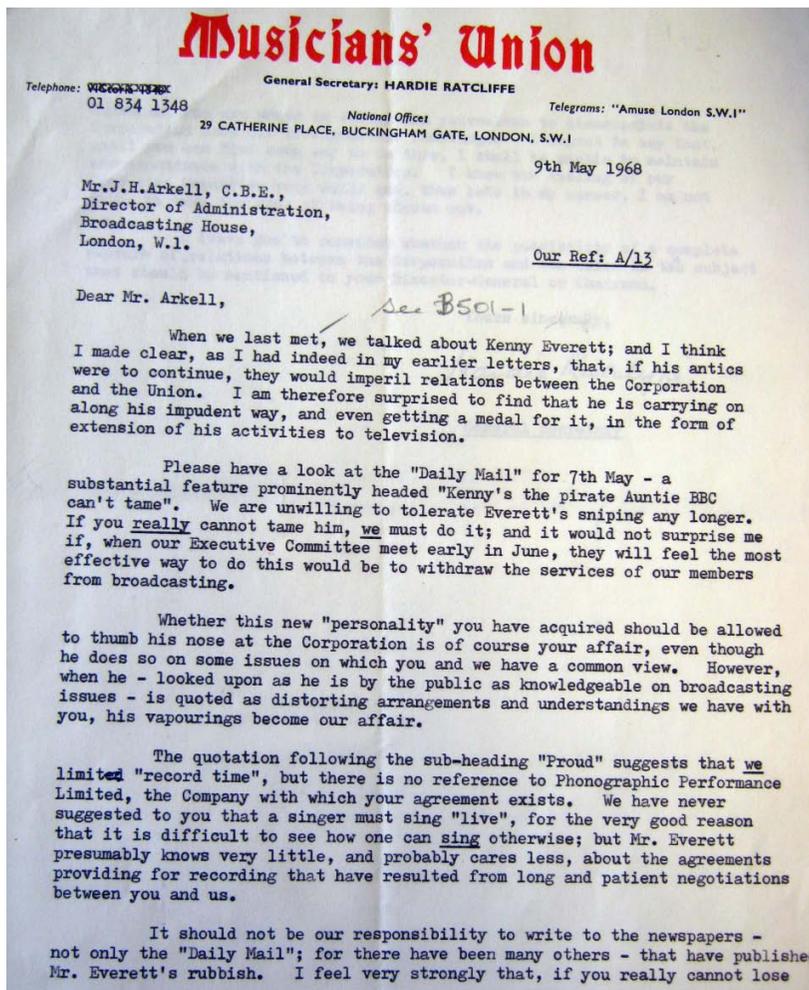
This drew a call from Hardie Ratcliffe to arrange an urgent meeting with the Director of Administration, J. H. Arkell, who was the person within the BBC delegated to deal with external relations in employment. A few days later Ratcliffe wrote:

When we last met we talked about Kenny Everett; and I think I made it clear, as I had indeed in my earlier letters, that, if his antics were to continue, they would imperil relations between the Corporation and the Union. I am therefore surprised to find that he is carrying on along his impudent way ... Please have a look at the *Daily Mail* for 7th May—a substantial feature prominently headed 'Kenny's the pirate Auntie can't tame'. We are unwilling to tolerate Everett's sniping any longer. If you really cannot tame him, we must do it; and it would not surprise me if, when our Executive Committee meet early in June, they will feel the most effective way to do this would be to withdraw the services of our members from broadcasting ... I regret to say that until you can find some way to do this, I shall be unable to maintain correspondence with the Corporation.

The quotation following the subtitle 'Proud' ['as long as the MU limits record time and says that Miriam Cridge has to sing *Strawberry Fields* live'] suggests that we limited 'record time' but there is no reference to PPL, the Company with which your agreement exists. We have never suggested to you that a singer must sing 'live', for the very good reason that it is difficult to see how one can sing otherwise.

(9 May 1968, in R78/2569/1)

4. There had been a similarly critical article in *The Londoner* on 23 March 1968.



Letter dated 9 May 1968 from the General Secretary of the Musicians' Union to the the BBC's Head of Administration, complaining about comments made by BBC DJ Kenny Everett (printed by kind permission of the Musicians' Union).

Gillard, Marriott and Arkell met Everett and arranged for him to sign a restrictive clause in his contract. But at the end of the month Ratcliffe wrote to the BBC's legal adviser, E. C. Robbins:

As you mentioned in your letter dated 22 May that Mr Gillard was arranging to see Mr Everett, do you think he could get a few minutes of Stuart Henry's time as well? ... The pop merchant, a product of the pirates, wrote rubbish for 'Cue'—a rag that doled out some drip of his on 16th March that distorted the needletime arrangements and was additionally untrue and offensive to our

Union ... What are you doing? Keeping the pirates' pets in practice for commercial radio? Perhaps you are just trying to annoy us and our members as much as you can. You might consider whether in the end this will be to your advantage (29 May 1968).

A memo from Arkell to Robbins (4 June 1968) followed in which Arkell believed that the DJs were placing the BBC in a difficult position in getting the agreements the BBC required from the MU at a sensitive moment, for it was at this time that the secretive Policy Studies Group called for the culling of house orchestras. Arkell asked if they should reconsider 'what type of contract we should employ disc jockeys ... whether we should ensure that they are subject to the normal staff regulations'. Robbins then 'phoned the department heads dealing with DJs to check that all artists would sign the 'Everett' clause. Anna Instone, Head of Gramophone Records, promptly sent a memo to Robbins, with a copy to Marriott, as follows:

Disc Jockeys: New Undertaking.

Until your telephone call I was not aware that the signing of a similar agreement [to Everett's] was to be enforced on all disc jockeys ... As we both book and produce these personalities it would be enlightening to know what they are being asked to sign.

Meanwhile Scott wrote to Marriott that the proposed document was 'absurdly restrictive in its terms but quite unrealistic' and simply brought on by the MU's 'over-sensitive reaction to comments about their attitude to the use of gramophone records'. Arkell saw this memo and wrote to Scott (8 July 1968) that, on the issue of needletime, the BBC had done 'an honest deal' with the MU. Scott wrote swiftly back to express his amazement that a 'grudging release of one hour's extra needletime per day to set up a new network "to replace the Pirates" can be described as "an honest deal"' (9 July 1968). As a result of a subsequent meeting on the contract issue, held between Gillard, Marriott and Scott, Marriott prepared the following memo, signed by Gillard to Arkell (6 Aug. 1968):

He [Scott] has made me realize (a) what a very small proportion of his contributors are suspect; (b) how offended the innocent majority be if we imposed compulsory undertakings; (c) how difficult it would be to divide possible goats from possible sheep in some arbitrary way. I think his proposed formula for dealing with the problem is likely to be sufficient to satisfy the MU.

Scott's addendum ran as follows:

The engagement described in the enclosed contract relating to ... is offered on condition that you undertake for so long as you remain associated with the BBC in any way to refrain from making any public statements or comments to the Press or from writing articles or making any remarks on the air of any sort which the BBC has asked you to avoid as being in the BBC's opinion damaging to the BBC or its relations with outside bodies or organizations. It is a further condi-

tion of the offer that if you fail to observe the undertaking the BBC shall be entitled to cancel any contract which the BBC may then have with you. Acceptance of the enclosed contract will be treated as acceptance by you of the two conditions of this letter.

(R78/2569/1, undated draft)

Nevertheless Everett continued to snipe at the Union. For example *The Sun* newspaper asked Everett what he would do if he were Controller of Radio 1. 'I'd start a big battle with the MU over this business of needletime', he began (*The Sun*, 16 Dec. 1969). Arkell wrote urgently to Gillard that, 'reading page 17 of *The Sun* at breakfast this morning, I decided to have a word with you about Kenny Everett since this is a delicate moment for the MU to be irritated more than is necessary. Even before I had dictated it, I had Ratcliffe on the telephone.' Arkell's 'delicate moment' concerned the meetings that followed the government's directive for negotiations between the corporation and the union in the wake of the publication of the Policy Studies Group report titled *Broadcasting in the Seventies*. Everett was sacked in 1970 (Stafford and Stafford 2013: 116–17).

John Peel was another culprit in the eyes of the MU. In a column for the March 1969 edition of the magazine *Petticoat*, Peel wrote that:

I see the MU are trying to stop foreign pop groups from appearing on English television. I quote from an official statement: 'Pop guitarists strumming a few chords on a guitar can earn a fortune, especially when accompanied by frenzied contortions and sexually suggestive movements...' This is absolute rubbish. The MU has to be the largest single retarding force to pop music in the world today.

Ratcliffe wrote promptly to Gillard as follows (14 March 1969 in R78/2569/1):

Our Executive Committee ... are infuriated by the drip that some of these [disc-jockey] upstarts put into print. There is another of them—John Peel ... It is impossible to disassociate John Peel the journalist if that is the right word, from John Peel the disc-jockey; for it is only because he is a BBC disc-jockey, helping you to use up needletime, that any paper will publish his work. It is partly this nonsense that causes our members to criticize us for tolerating broadcasting of gramophone records at all; and if Peel and other rascallions are allowed to continue making a parasitic living out of the needletime arrangements, we shall be compelled to demand an even greater reduction of the permitted time than our members already think should be made.

## Conclusion

At a broad level, correspondence of this nature offers a practical example of the intertwining states of the corporation's internal and external relations, how one impinges on the other, and of the extreme level of care that was taken by the institution's bureaucrats over discourse in print. Here is a bureaucracy where rational policy change has been diverted and suspended by a caste of technical

specialists—musicians—operating through their craft agency. Their position has been buttressed by the level of investment in tools of high culture that the BBC has itself found useful, if arduous, to maintain through the years in terms of political protection. More specifically the succession of papers from Ratcliffe and Arkell have emphasized the extremely brittle condition of relations between the BBC and the MU; it has demonstrated how claustrophobic it has been, too. The situation in play through these papers helps to show why the BBC had to wait until the early 1980s—notably after Ratcliffe's death in 1975—in the period of Thatcher's 'union bashing' Conservative government, to disinvest itself of a number of its ensembles that had already been identified as outmoded two decades earlier. The BBC still retains five orchestras. Here is a campaign over which the union for those musicians remains ever heedful in its incessant ambition to 'keep music live'.

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