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daydreamer
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★★★★★

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 09:27:23

This article recently featured in Record Collector and I thought (if you can actually read it!) that it might be of interest.



United Kingdom
5404 Posts

SOUNDS INCORPORATED

The BBC's *Sounds Of The 60s* is a radio institution that continues to go from strength to strength. Legendary presenter BRIAN MATTHEW and producer PHIL 'THE COLLECTOR' SWERN take a few requests from TERRY STAUNTON

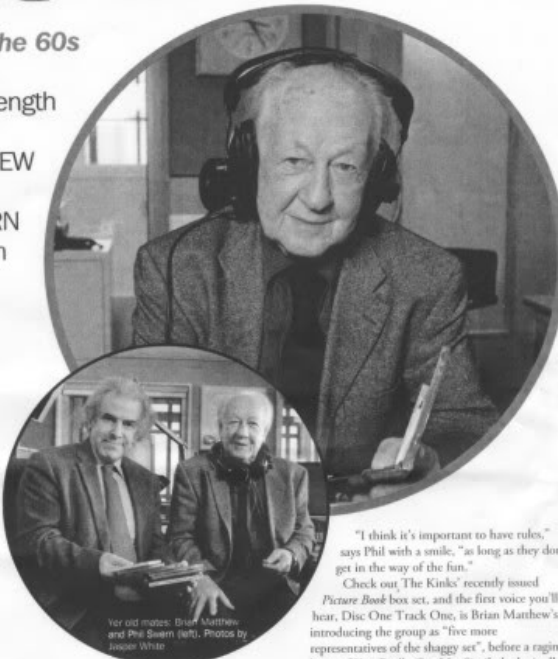
In a studio high above London's Great Portland Street on a Tuesday afternoon, Brian Matthew and his producer Phil Swern are poring over the script for the edition of *Sounds Of The 60s* they've just finished pre-recording, but are still labouring to get an important link just right. It's a slightly convoluted introduction to the show's regular three-in-a-row segment, this one involving The Crystals, Vikki Carr and Gene Pitney, that has the potential to bamboozle listeners - which is the last thing they want to do.

Deciphering the proper wording for who recorded what, which was written by whom and what that whom later recorded themselves is hardly as complex as *The Da Vinci Code*, but it will require a corrective "drop-in", ie a short passage to be inserted into the master recording. It's all part of the trivia heaven and unbridled celebration of great music from a thrilling decade that has close to four millions listeners - quite possibly double that on the internet - tuning in to Radio 2 every Saturday morning at 8am.

The three-in-a-row is usually selected by a listener, but I've come up with one myself for this week's show, and it's proved to be a little confusing," says Phil in the BBC Club, once editing on the programme has finally been completed. "None of it is particularly obscure, it involves relatively well-known facts, but there's always a risk of getting the information and time-lines twisted in the excitement of it all."

"Every now and then, maybe once a year or so, Phil gets even more ambitious and attempts to programme an entire two-hour show so that the first record is somehow linked to the next, and so on," adds Brian. "That can be really exciting, especially when he manages to come full circle and link the last record to the very first."

Here is an 80-year-old broadcaster and his 60-year-old producer casually using the word "excitement" to describe their job, a job thousands of RC readers would willingly kill for. *Sounds Of The 60s* was launched in 1983 with erstwhile *Ready Steady Go!* presenter Keith



Yer old mate: Brian Matthew and Phil Swern (left). Photos by Jasper White

Fordyce at the helm. Brian took over in 1990, with Phil, affectionately nicknamed 'The Collector', joining as producer two years ago.

In the multi-media 21st century where the public are bombarded by sights and sounds at every turn, *SOTS* - as Brian likes to call the show - is a handy institution, a warm and friendly place where bygone tunes both famous and forgotten are lapped up by devoted listeners who are welcomed into what amounts to a radio 'family'. Brian signs off each week by referring to himself as "yer old mate", and we can't help but believe him.

The format is simple but strict. Any record released during the 1960s, or that became a hit at some point in the decade, is eligible to be played: a dozen or so Buddy Holly chart entries, for example. Come January 1, 1970, all bets are off. The week *RC* visits the *SOTS* studio, the original 1966 recording of James & Bobby Purify's I'm Your Puppet makes an appearance, whereas the Top 20 version from 10 years later, with belatedly overdubbed strings, never would.

"I think it's important to have rules," says Phil with a smile, "as long as they don't get in the way of the fun."

Check out *The Kinks'* recently issued *Picture Book* box set, and the first voice you'll hear, Disc One Track One, is Brian Matthew's, introducing the group as "five more representatives of the shaggy set", before a raging burst of *You Really Got Me*. Similarly, he is all over sessions *The Beatles* recorded for the Beebs, latterly released on CD and as part of the mammoth *Anthology* project. No other radio figure was ever such an integral part of the fabric of a generation's popular music, with the possible exception of John Peel in the heyday of punk, although Brian was already on the airwaves when Peelie was still in school.

Brian trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art before joining the BBC in 1954, his contributions to what was known as the Light Programme including the long-running *Saturday Club* (which itself started in 1957 as *Saturday Skiffle Club*) and *Easy Beat*. It was here that he forged strong working relationships with the Fab Four and other stars of the era, cemented further by his stint on TV's *Thank Your Lucky Stars*.

The 1970s found him hosting *Radio 1's My Top 12*, where celebrities of the day were invited to compile an imaginary album of their favourite songs, and he moved on to a broader arts brief on *Radio 2's Round Midnight* from 1978 to 1990, before taking over on *SOTS*. Phil's early links



"Billy Fury and Dusty Springfield have long been the artists most requested by our listeners."

with the BBC were more tenuous, producing pop singles for another well-known DJ, Tony Blackburn, as well as more successful ventures for the likes of Horace Faith and R&R Stone.

Brian, you seemed to have The Beatles' ear throughout most of the 60s. Do you think you ever had a small claim to the fiercely-debated position of Fifth Beatle?

Brian: Oh, I don't know about that, it wasn't as if we had unfettered access to them at any given time, although it was probably a lot easier to get hold of them then than it is the superstar names of today. I was very friendly with Brian Epstein for some time before The Beatles came along. I'd been at RADA, as had he, and we started a theatre group together, and the plan was that we were going to build a theatre together in Bromley in South London. The local council gave us a piece of land for what amounted to a peppercorn rent, Brian was going to raise the funds to build it, but the council ended up building their own arts centre and pretty much put the blocks on our plans. Ultimately, though, that helped in establishing a rapport with Brian's acts.

When you were playing these records first time round, did you ever think that, more than 40 years later, there would still be such an appetite for the music?

Brian: No, absolutely not. When I've been asked about the enduring appeal of 60s music, I tend to say that it's because it's so much better than the music that's being made now! There is still good

music around, yes, but I do kind of think there was more of it back then.

Phil: I'm often amazed by the listening figures. We're Radio 2's most listened-to show on the weekends, which is just incredible. I don't think the appeal of 60s music will ever go away. If that was ever likely to happen, it probably would have happened by now.

Is there such a thing as a typical listener?

Brian: I wish I knew the answer to that. We get lots of letters from people wanting us to play something for a friend or loved one's 60th birthday, so that's one group, but there's also an astonishing number of requests to play things for teenage sons and daughters who have discovered this great music that was made a couple of generations before they were born!

I suppose The Beatles continue to play a big part in it, because more than any other artists in history they're the ones that keep getting rediscovered by future generations. Young people hear the Fabs for the first time and then want to investigate the sounds of those times further, and would appear to view our show as a good place to satisfy that curiosity.

I know I couldn't do the show without Phil, and when the last producer left I rushed into the

management office and pleaded that we have him come on board. He'd already been part of the show for some time, because we'd often gone to Phil to source his phenomenal collection (*Phil is also a director of Broadcasters International, a vast archive supplying music for film and TV*).

Whenever something we wanted to play wasn't in the BBC library, or couldn't be found in the library because it wasn't always that well organised, we knew that Phil could get it for us at a moment's notice. He always has, and he's still adding to that collection. He goes round the world, to New York, to Australia, there's dealers he's constantly in touch with across Europe, and his has to be one of the biggest archives in the world.

The show's variety, is one of its key strengths. In these days of rigid playlists, did you have to fight for that freedom?

Brian: I remember a few years ago a particular controller told me "I want to hear more Number Ones on the show". I kind of ended up doing battle with him and asking "So you want to hear the same 30 songs on the show every week, do you?". I think the whole strength of the programme is that it's so vast, that you plainly get a much better show by digging things out that have been forgotten.

Phil: If you stuck to just the big hits of the decade, you'd end up with a show that sounds like just about every TV-advertised compilation going, and you'd find yourself repeating almost the exact same show every few months. Not that I think we're being wilfully obscure, we'll gladly play something like A Whiter Shade Of Pale every now and then, but it's more that both Brian and myself are enthusiasts. We're not trying to be clever, we're just trying to play some interesting music and put across some interesting facts.

Brian: Phil chooses the whole thing, I may once in a while suggest something, but very seldom. It actually makes the show more fun for me, I'm always being pleasantly surprised by something Phil's scheduled.

Is there another radio show like it anywhere in the world?

Phil: No, I don't think so. Most of the "gold" stations, as they're known, both here and in the US, are just playing the big hits, they're hamstrung by playlists. I think we've got the balance right between the really familiar songs and the less celebrated. Today we played the Tommy Hunt version of I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself, rather than the Dusty Springfield recording that more people remember, and that gave us an opportunity to follow it with one of Dusty's more minor hits, I'll Try Anything.

Nowhere else in the world is there a radio network that has the freedom to do this sort of show.

Radio 2 broadcast a variation on the format, Sounds Of The 70s, but it never seemed to take off.

Phil: I think a 70s show is a really good idea, but in the past it's only been a half-an-hour show. If it was given a two-hour slot, it could really build up a following. I don't think it would be quite as popular as the 60s one, but there was a lot of small independent labels that sprung up during punk and new wave, lots of stuff that was pretty good but never gets heard on the radio now. Having said that, it was also the days of the albums bands and you'd use up a lot of time playing some really lengthy album tracks!

Brian: It never took off as a radio show as much as the 60s one did, no, and our audience seems to be growing all the time. I mean, it's ginormous! It's close to four million listeners now, and that's without factoring in the overseas audience who listen to us via the internet. I don't say this with malice, but there is an enormous switch-off when Jonathan Ross comes on after us. We're always getting mail from people suggesting we carry on for a couple more hours.

Who are the most popular artists with your listeners, the most requested?

Brian: Billy Fury has long been top of the list – not that we've ever done anything as formal as compile a list.

Phil: He's certainly the clear favourite, followed by probably Dusty Springfield. Elvis always makes a showing, but that's to be expected, I guess.

Has the show influenced record labels when they come to choose what archive material they revive? Both Billy Fury and Dusty have had compilations of their BBC sessions issued recently.

Phil: I don't know about archive BBC session material, because it's not something we tend to play much of, but certainly there are greatest hits compilations out there which may have been triggered by the demand for the artists on our show. It's when we play something a little more obscure on vinyl that the can of worms truly gets opened. Listeners are always asking us how they can get hold of it, but it's most usually something from my own collection that's long been deleted and almost impossible for anyone to go out and buy themselves.

There are a lot of vinyl junkies out there, I have to deal with as many as 300 emails a week from people desperately looking for the very same pressing they've heard on the radio. Maybe we should direct them all to your magazine! ☺

Sounds Of The 60s is on Radio 2, Saturdays at 8am

"There are a lot of vinyl junkies out there, desperately looking for the same pressing they've heard on the radio."

Carole x

"There's a part of you that's a part of me..."

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 09:42:52

Clive
I'll try anything
★★

thanks Carole, really interesting article and interview.

Brian Matthew must be one of the greatest radio voices.

Delighted Dusty is so high profile.



1455 Posts

Cas19
Wasn't born to follow
★★★★★

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 10:50:39

Thank you for this Carole, If I tilt my screen I can just about read it all! 😊

Casx

'Something in your eyes'



8313 Posts

Cardiff Bluesgirl
I'll try anything
★★

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 14:19:22

yes thanks for that I struggled with my eyes but managed it all. I liked the Dusty bit and I know the Billy Fury fans on here will like hearing how popular he is. my sister loves him and Elvis.

"every day I find you're in my heart and on my mind"

liz.



United Kingdom
1809 Posts

Will
Wasn't born to follow
★★★★★

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 18:19:09

Fabulous - what a treat! Thank you, Carole :)

Will





"..a voice on the travelling wind and a glimpse of a face at morning.."

Gallery: www.askyofhoney.com

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7603 Posts

trek007
I'll try anything
★★

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 19:31:49

Nice one, from a Dusty and Billy fan!



Trek.
often called Carole.

United Kingdom
1100 Posts

humboldt
I'll try anything
★★

Posted - 11/07/2009 : 20:37:25

Thanks Carole. 😊



Humboldt



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