



in my view
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When freedom of choice belonged to the DJs

Petula Clark made her first film appearance in 1944; 14 years later Cliff Richard released *Move It*. In light of this, their fellow Gold Badge recipients Capital Radio look like relative newcomers as they celebrate their 30th anniversary.

In 1973 I was a music-loving schoolboy and it's easy to forget just how fresh was the breath of air that Capital brought with those early broadcasts from Euston Tower. There must have been a similar sense of exhilaration in the Sixties when the pirates began playing records that were largely ignored by the mainstream stations.

Several years later, I got to know Nicky Horne, who in his early twenties was one of the original DJs at Capital and who was responsible for the ground-breaking evening rock show 'Your Mother Wouldn't Like It'. Like a couple of old codgers, we would often open a bottle of fine wine and moan about how predictable and formulaic radio had since become.

Recently, I stumbled across the website vintagebroadcasting.org.uk – God bless the anorak – which contained the playlist from Capital's first day of broadcasting on 16 October 1973.

At 5am, David Symonds roused London's earlybirds with a recording of the National Anthem by the Royal Choral Society and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. This was immediately followed by *Bridge Over Troubled Water* by Simon and Garfunkel, Neil Diamond's *Chelsea Morning*, and *Amoureuse* by Kiki Dee.

As the morning went on, the programming that was to make Capital so special began to take shape. During Symonds' four-hour breakfast show, there was music by Steely Dan, Ray Conniff, Nazareth, The Who, Val Doonican, Sergio Mendes, The Bee Gees, Nat King Cole, McGuinness Flint, Martha and the Vandellas, the Rolling Stones and many more. It was like radio muesli, when others were offering porridge.

This pattern continued throughout the day, with Tommy Vance treating listeners to *Give a Damn* by Spanky and Our Gang, followed by high camp in the form of Bette Midler's *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*.

Nicky's first show opened with Santana's *Soul Sacrifice* and went on to include *Right Place Wrong Time* by Dr John and Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song*. This stuff just wasn't available on the radio, certainly not

without some pretty advanced dial twiddling. On 'Your Mother' – as it came to be known at mine and presumably many other schools – I heard The Eagles for the first time and also Bruce Springsteen.

There's an old cliché in Radioland that talks of "the soundtrack to your life" and in all honesty I can't remember whether it was ever a Capital catchphrase. Although the words "tinted", "rose" and "spectacles" are always dangerously close, the high level of presenter choice that was part of Capital's philosophy flagged up some milestones that are

inseparable from my teenage memories. It's said that, in terms of recall, smell is the most powerful of the senses, but hearing certain records must come a close second. They don't even have to be songs that, looking back, you would describe as particularly good. Chicago's *If You Leave Me Now* is without question one of the cheesiest records in pop history, yet it will always have a special place for me. ... I blame Jacqui Stevenson.

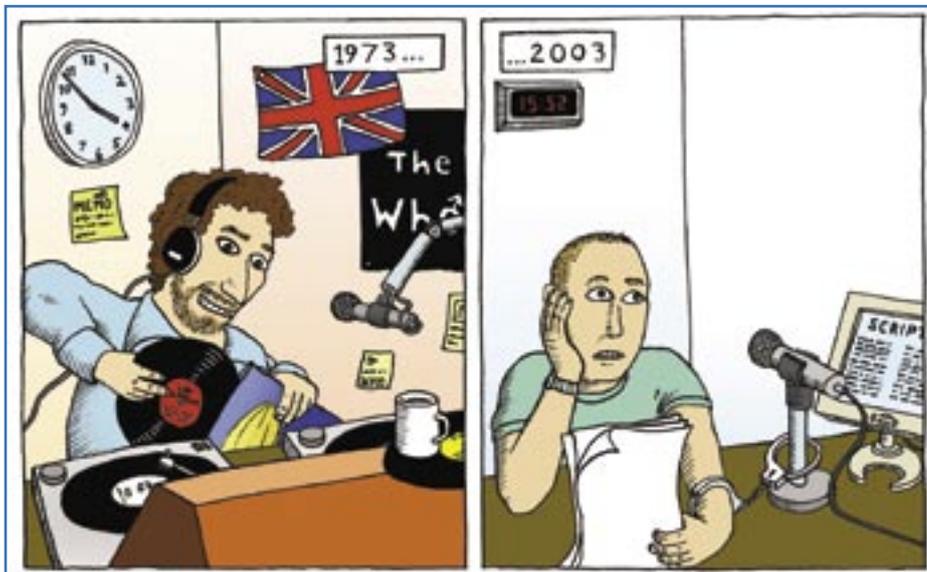


Illustration by Howard Gardner

With Capital Radio a constant companion from the age of 14 to 18, those DJs – Nicky, Dave Cash, Tommy Vance, Mike Allen and the late greats Kenny Everett and Roger Scott – made the jukebox choices that accompanied my growing up.

“ It was like radio muesli, when others were offering porridge ”

Radio was a key issue during the passage of the Communications Bill. The doomsday scenario was that a huge US conglomerate would buy up a number of British stations and send down homogenised playlists from a boardroom somewhere in America ... San Antonio, for example.

Reality rarely turns out as scary as the fears, but it is fair to say that the influence of the individual DJ has diminished to such a degree that they often do little more than provide scripted links to a predetermined and computer-managed sequence of records.

Those early days of Capital can rightly be remembered for being as free spirited and pioneering as Radio Caroline and the other pirates had been a decade before.