

## Diversity and Public Broadcasting

Diversity is a fact, not the subject really for a debate. We can observe the fact that in so many ways we diverge in our tastes, our lifestyles, our beliefs, our relationships, our expectations. But while we diverge, there is so much more that we have in common in terms of shared humanity, and what does that involve: it involves the need to make relationships, to be part of society, to be included, to have one's opinions heard and be taken seriously. In this respect, discussing diversity in media is rather an abstract pursuit. Ideally, diversity should be at the centre of our life experience, and media just one product of this. When we talk about diversity, it is often racial - and implicitly faith - diversity which is being referenced.

For many people this is steadily becoming the reality. To judge by a recent report from the British Equality and Human Rights Commission, we can see some positive trends:

- 32% of people aged 16-24 mix daily compared to 5% of people aged 65 or over.
- 40% of 16-24 year olds from a ethnic minority background think there is more racial tolerance than ten years ago compared to 25% for 65+.
- Four in five people from ethnic minority communities (78%) mix socially with people from a difference ethnic background at least once a month outside of work/ school, with two thirds (66%) welcoming friends from other ethnic backgrounds into their home with this regularity.

I am part of a project which is like a socio-ethnic dating agency, in which the participants form pairs with people from other ethnic and faith communities, and discuss what really matters to them. I should say this is extraordinarily enjoyable, and I have gained really good friends, and a fantastic learning experience. Importantly, we come to know ourselves better and become more aware of what may drive us. If we want to discern areas where stereotypes and prejudices might be hidden in our own psyches, can I recommend Project Implicit, a series of online tests devised at Harvard which all too clearly clearly show where there is work to be done!

It is a good thought that increasing cross-cultural interaction will lead to increasing representation, but we do not live in a utopian world in which knowing people leads to opportunity... Sometimes, intervention is necessary – not in every case to overcome ill-will, but simply to raise an issue into public consciousness and overcome casual laziness. And while I have concentrated on ethnicity, we might make the same comments in various areas of life around gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, faith groups. And one exists, which is more rarely referred to, namely social exclusion from being raised in a deprived area, with poor education and health provision.

That has been a rather long introduction, but what I want to underline is that diversity is something to be lived, not just the task of returning statistics in the corporate environment. What do we draw from the above into our media experience? The ethos of public broadcasting is to engage the whole population with its content, and therefore it is axiomatic that no artificial boundaries should be constructed. If there is a golden law of diversity in broadcasting, it will surely be that people need to hear themselves on the radio, or see themselves on the screen. If not, then it is not for them... and frankly, why should they – whoever they in the circumstances - be interested?

At Radio 3 we have been working at this consistently over the last decade, and perhaps some lessons can be shared. We started dramatically with a trail shown in cinemas, alongside Moulin Rouge:

ZEPHANIAH

In Berlin at a forum for cultural channels directors in 2002, I posed the question of how we should see our radio stations. Are we to view them as castles, surrounded by water, and with the drawbridge firmly shut - are we in protecting mode, or welcoming mode, with the bridge down, inviting people into our world. Defending or embracing?

I am pleased that we have been in embracing mode across various parameters of our output. And underpinning all this is the fact that our voices on the station have come to reflect the richness of the UK as is currently is. Your situations and countries will be different but here are what some of the landmarks have been for me over the past decade or so - all initiatives based around achieving openness:

Late Junction:

A mixed programme, bringing together a late-night selection of music, and presented with mood and time of day in mind, rather than primarily information. Exploring new horizons, and encouraging openness to new sounds and cultures.

- World Music Days: January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 and following
- Awards for World Music: Celebrating musicians from around the globe for seven editions... Now Would Routes Academy
- Amateur Performance: Choir of the Year, broadcasting amateur orchestras and choirs, as well as commissioning for them
- Proms: Family Ensembles: not a competition, simply enjoyment
- Pianothon: amateur performance in public places,
- Free Thinking: audience encounter, ideas programmes out of studios, and real dialogue between philosophers, politicians and thinkers, outside London

All this, I believe, has helped change the tone of voice on the station, towards one which does not sound like a club, and in which people are genuinely invited in and encouraged to participate. We are a long way from an early marketing campaign....

And yes, we still continue to broadcast the highest quality recording and broadcasting 1000 concerts a year, run five orchestras and a choir, organise the Proms, have partnerships with the major festivals, participate actively in the EBU. And it goes without saying, and for this reason I have not discussed it, that we need to make our programmes available so people can

But the challenge remains... A UK survey showed that 65% of children cannot name a classical composer, some composers named were Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare and Elvis. 14% of children knew that Mozart and Beethoven wrote music. And only 30% could recognise a cello. Clearly, broadcasters do not exist in a vacuum from the rest of society; there are many dependencies with education provision and all other attitudes, preconceptions and prejudices. But we are unusually well placed to make a difference. The BBC's public purposes have something to say in this area:

#### **Promoting education and learning**

...the BBC will offer engaging ways for everyone in the UK to build their knowledge and skills across a broad range of subjects.

#### **Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities**

BBC viewers, listeners and users can rely on the BBC to reflect the many communities that exist in the UK. These communities may be based on geography, on faith, on language, or on a shared interest such as sport.

There is a great deal of work to do. Moving the situation forwards, we have recently had a project in which Radio 3 team members have been out talking to some audience members and importantly also, those who currently do not listen. We have been sharing the varied insights from conversations in shaping our future development. Listening is perhaps the first step, as is the recognition that neither ourselves nor our organisations are as monolithic or as static as they appear. We can be optimistic, and here I cite Fred Gage from the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, California:

In the last years of the twentieth century, a few iconoclastic neuroscientists challenged the paradigm that the adult brain cannot change and made discovery after discovery that, to the contrary, it retains stunning powers of neuroplasticity. The brain can indeed be rewired. ... It can activate long-dormant wires and run new cables like an electrician bringing an old house up to code, so that regions that once saw can instead feel or hear. It can quiet circuits that once crackled with the aberrant activity that characterizes depression and cut pathological connections that keep the brain in the oh-god-something-is-wrong state...

The adult brain, in short, retains much of the plasticity of the developing brain, including the power to repair damaged regions, to grow new neurons, to rezone regions that performed one task and have them assume a new task, to change the circuitry that weaves neurons into the networks that allow us to remember, feel, suffer, think, imagine, and dream.

Yes, change is possible!