

Garner, Ken, Glasgow Caledonian University. “Ripping the Pith from the Peel: Institutional versus internet cultures of archiving popular music radio - The case of BBC Radio 1’s John Peel Show”

The BBC’s policies on the processes and purposes of archiving its popular music radio programming have evolved dramatically over the past decade. Although long gone is the era when almost all live original studio sessions were wiped (in the interests of efficient recycling of tape), networks like the national pop station BBC Radio 1 have moved rapidly: from the introduction of CD-burning of every show at the moment of broadcast from 1997 and the digitization of its entire surviving concert and session archive between 1998-2001; through the launch of a digital radio network, BBC 6 Music, designed to feature the archive, in 2002, and deals for licensing for commercial release relevant recordings with major record labels 2005-2007; to its announcement in 2008 that its commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, was planning an internet music download/streaming service based on its ongoing and archive recordings.

But something else has been going on simultaneously outside the corporation. Since the death of BBC Radio 1 DJ John Peel in 2004 a world-wide network of his listeners has come together to collect, digitize and re-assemble thousands of hours of his shows dating back to 1967 from off-air tapes, developing shared principles and technical standards through social media. This alternative online archive is discovering, documenting and preserving much material – such as complete show recordings – never kept by the BBC.

Based on new interviews with both senior figures in BBC archiving past and present, and members of the social media networks engaged in ripping listeners’ off-air tapes, this paper will aim to explore what these archiving cultures have in common and where they differ: in purpose, principles and process. The resulting case study of these two Peel archives - official and inaccessible, unofficial and public - may suggest growing tensions for popular broadcast archiving in the online age.

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