Hands Off Radio National Music Campaign
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30 November 2016

An Open Letter to Members of the ABC Board and ABC Managing Director Michelle Guthrie

As musicians and music industry professionals, we are appalled by the decision taken by ABC management to scrap *The Daily Planet*, *The Inside Sleeve*, *The Live Set* and *The Rhythm Divine*, and to remove *Jazztrack* from Radio National. This decision was taken without proper industry and public consultation and must be reconsidered and reversed.

The cuts deliver a fundamental blow to diverse, vibrant and independent sectors of the Australian music industry, which receive minimal national radio coverage elsewhere.

These programs are among the remaining windows for Australian artists to tell their stories about Australian life, for people to hear and learn from those stories and for all Australians to hear the songs and stories of other cultures from around the world.

Further, they support and underpin a music sector that, according to Music Australia, contributes between $4 and $6 billion to the Australian economy annually and which generates close to 65,000 jobs, over half of which are full-time.

They are essential listening for those working in this vibrant industry and should not be discarded on the grounds of ratings.

We do not believe that the proposed additions to Double J in any way compensate for Radio National’s losses, especially given that Double J is only available in digital format. We are deeply concerned about listeners in regional, rural and remote areas where the Internet and digital radio access is problematic at best. Many of these listeners rely on linear broadcasting.

It is clear that the cuts contradict the intent and spirit of the ABC Charter, which outlines two of “the functions of the Corporation” as:
- “broadcasting programs that contribute a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community;”
- “to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia.”

Collectively, The Daily Planet, The Inside Sleeve, The Live Set, The Rhythm Divine and Jazztrack provide specialist, linear broadcasting of diverse music that is not broadcast nationally elsewhere with equivalent depth, breadth and expertise. This music is often outside the mainstream. It includes folk, roots, world, blues, jazz and adult contemporary, among the many genres. It champions unique voices, small communities, alternative perspectives, story telling (particularly of Australian stories), experimentation, live performance, improvisation and excellence.

Much of this music is released independently by highly-respected Australian musicians who have developed enthusiastic audiences through extensive touring, depending on RN’s Australia-wide reach for promotion. Many perform regularly in regional, rural and/or remote areas.

The shows set for axing also provide promotion and national live broadcasting of numerous Australian music events, including major festivals, such as Byron Bay Bluesfest, Woodford Folk Festival, the National Folk Festival, Port Fairy Folk Festival and Wangaratta Festival of Jazz and Blues, as well as small festivals and community gatherings. These provide regional, rural and remote areas with opportunities for place-making, musical education, tourism and economic growth.

While we value and admire Double J, we do not believe that it can fill the hole left by the cuts, despite additions proposed for 2017. These additions are limited to a four-times weekly (rather than weekly) programming of The Beat Eclectic, which covers “post rock, punk and pop, ambient and acoustic sounds”; the introduction of Fat Planet, which ran on FBi from 2003-2008 and “showcases new music from around the world, such as Scandinavian folk, Japanese dubstep and Chilean post-punk”; and a “new live music show” to feature “new recordings from local and international artists”. Meanwhile, Triple J’s primary focus will remain the youth market.

Without The Daily Planet, The Inside Sleeve, The Live Set, The Rhythm Divine and Jazztrack, how will ABC Radio possibly “reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community”?

We also emphasise the importance of RN Music’s expert broadcasters. Lucky Oceans, Paul Gough, Geoff Wood and Alice Keath are some of Australia’s most
experienced, knowledgeable, passionate and intelligent musical minds. The casting off of these irreplaceable staff members contradicts RN’s commitment to “specialist content across arts and culture” broadcasting, as outlined on RN’s website.

We are far from alone in our opposition. A petition to save RN Music, launched on November 14th, has already attracted over 12,000 signatures, and numerous high-profile figures – both Australian and international have officially endorsed the petition statement. These include Paul Kelly, Missy Higgins, Archie Roach AM, Gurrumul, Kate Ceberano, Tim Winton, Neil Murray, Sarah Blasko, Megan Washington, Mike Nock, Shane Howard AM, Don Walker, Tim Freedman, Lindy Morrison OAE, Glen Hansard, Andy Irvine, Gina Williams, Paul Grabowsky AO, Rob Hirst, Deborah Conway, John Butler, Iva Davies AM, the Waifs and many, many more.

In a public statement, author Tim Winton writes:

“At a time when it seems every element of home-grown culture is under siege, it’s bewildering to see Radio National stripping music shows from its programming. To musicians, composers, producers and listeners alike, this retreat feels like a betrayal, a signal that ABC management feels no need to repay the loyalty of its audience. For years Radio National has been a defender of Australian culture and a means by which new writers, players and composers find an audience.”

Also in a public statement, Katie Noonan writes:

“I simply can not fathom how anyone would have thought this was a good idea for the Australian people … In regional Australia these radio shows are literally the lifeline for cultural connectivity … Having been lucky enough to tour this great big country of ours many times, I know how absolutely vital these programs are to people’s lives … The catastrophic effects of these cuts will be enormous on multiple levels - this decision has simply not been thought through properly and absolutely needs to be reversed”.

We urge the Board and management to respond to the following questions:

1. Can you assure the listening public that the changes will not reduce the diversity of music styles played, the amount of new Australian music promoted, the number of Australian musicians profiled and the resources devoted to these activities?

2. Will the changes reduce regional access to Australian music?

3. Is the ABC confident the changes won’t reduce audiences for the genres covered by RN Music, or adversely impact the live music ecosystem for these musicians and their audiences?

4. Has the ABC considered, in delivering on its charter, its responsibility to the broader music community and to the country, to contribute to an
original, national musical culture and identity, to support viable careers and to support an important national industry, culturally and economically?

We also ask the board to look at the thousands of comments on the petition as well as others on social media.

https://www.savernmusic.com

Finally, we again call on the ABC to review this ill-considered decision, as outlined in the petition statement, and to return The Daily Planet, The Inside Sleeve, The Live Set, The Rhythm Divine and Jazztrack to Radio National in 2017. It’s our ABC.

We would be happy to discuss these issues further.

Link to petition: https://www.change.org/p/michael-mason-hands-off-radio-national-music

Yours Sincerely,


Adrian Jackson - Artistic Director Wangaratta Jazz & Blues Festival
Andrew Legg - UTAS Director, Conservatorium of Music
Andy Irvine (Ireland)
APRA/AMCOS Board
Archie Roach AM
Association of Australian Musicians (AM)
Australian Independent Musicians Association (AIMA)
Barney McAll - Peggy Glanville Hicks Resident
Ben Northey - Associate Conductor MSO
Bernard Fanning
Black Market Music
Bob, Margaret & James Fagan
Brett Kingman
Cameron Undy - Owner Venue 505
Chong Lim - MD John Farnham/Dancing with the Stars
Chris Wilson
Craig Scott - Chair of Jazz Studies Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Country Music Association of Australia (CMMA)
David Spelman - Artistic Director NY International Guitar Festival
Dan Sultan
Deborah Conway
Djakapurra Munyarryun
Djolpa McKenzie
Dobe Newton
Don Walker
Eddie Perfect
Elizabeth Rogers, CEO Regional Arts NSW
Fairbridge Festival
Fred Smith
Folk Alliance Australia
Genevieve Lacey
Gina Williams
Glen Hansard (Ireland)
Greg Fleet
Gurrumul Yunupingu
Head Records
Helen Marcou & Quincy McLean – SLAM & Bakehouse Studios
Iain Grandage - Artistic Director Port Fairy Spring Music Festival
Iva Davies AM
James Morrison AM
Jamie Oehlers - Coordinator of Jazz Studies, WAAPA, Edith Cowan University
Jack Charles
Jane Clifton
Jazz Queensland
Jeff Lang
Jim Conway
Joe Camilleri
Joe Geia
Joe Henry (US)
John Butler
Jonathan Dimond - Head of Program/Senior Lecturer, Melbourne Polytechnic
Julian Burnside AO QC
Dr Jon Rose (Don Banks Award)
Jordie Lane
Kate & Phil Ceberano
Katie Noonan - Artistic Director Queensland Music Festival
Kavisha Mazella
Ken Stringfellow (US)
Kerrie Glasscock - Artistic Director Sydney Fringe Festival
Kutcha Edwards
Leah Flanagan
Lindy Hume - Artistic Director Opera QLD
Lindy Morrison OAM
Lior Attar
Liz Frencham
Lucie Thorne
Lyn Williams OAM - Director Gondwana Choirs and Sydney Children's Choir
Marcia Howard
Marc Ribot (US)
Margaret Roadknight
Mark Atkins
Mary Black (Ireland)
Mary Mihelakos
Megan Washington
Melbourne International Jazz Festival
Melbourne Jazz Coop (MJC)
Michael Franti (US)
Michael Tortoni - Owner Bennetts Lane Jazz Club
Mick Thomas
Mike Nock (Don Banks Award)
Miroslav Bukovsky - Distinguished Artist in Residence, School of Music, ANU
Missy Higgins
Monique Brumby
Mullum Music Festival
Music Australia
The Music Trust
Nannup Music Festival
National Celtic Festival
National Folk Festival
Nick Bailey - General Manager, ANAM
Dr Nick Haywood – Coordinator of Contemporary Music, UTAS Conservatorium
Paul Dempsey
Paul Grabowsky AO
Paul Kelly
Dr Paul Williamson - Coordinator of Jazz Ensembles and Honours, Monash Uni
Peter Noble OAM - Artistic Director of Byron Bay Bluesfest
Port Fairy Folk Festival
Rebecca Barnard
Rhonda Burchmore
Richard Letts AM - Founder, Music Council of Australia, President, International Music Council
Associate Professor Robert Burke - Coordinator of Jazz & Popular Music, Monash Uni
Dr Robert Vincs - Head of Jazz & Improvisation, VCA, Melbourne University
Rod Vervest - Program Manager Perth International Arts Festival
Ross Wilson
Sarah Blasko
Shane Howard AM
Simon Burke AO
Skinnyfish Music
Slava & Leonard Grigoryan
Spiderbait
Stephen Pigram
Steve Nieve (England)
Sydney Fringe Festival
Sydney Improvised Music Association (SIMA)
Thirsty Merc
Tim Freedman
Tim Rogers
Tim Winton
Tracy Bartram
Truckstop Honeymoon (USA)
Vince Jones
The Waifs
William Barton
Which Way Music
Woodford Folk Festival