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## Peter Young, DJ: A Master of Spin

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Picture it. The kitchen radio, a glistening hunk of bakelite, its alignment of valves producing a sound that commanded attention. You're a kid busy hanging onto your mother's skirt as she cooks the evening meal. It's a moment of inspiration.



You didn't realise it, of course, but the soundtrack to your life had just begun. It would be the music to score your first kiss, your first fight, your first death. It was the sound of popular music from the golden age which helped stitch your soul to the fabric of society. It was the sound of the people's art and it bound us together.

But that was then and this is now, because the radio station and the dulcet tones of a disc jockey whose taste and sensibility we could trust are things of the past. Well, almost.

One man has kept his head while all around him others, owing to faddism or the

boardroom guillotine, have lost theirs.

Peter Young, aka PY (pictured, second from left) began his broadcast career with the BBC and went on to work for Capital Radio in the early days. He was also one of the original DJs recruited alongside Gilles Peterson, Jez Nelson and Chris Phillips when Jazz FM first launched in 1990. And he's still there, currently spinning classic slices of soul, funk and rhythm and blues every Saturday afternoon, come rain or come shine.

But the medium of radio, in these intervening years, has become a propagandist's tool with studio mics commonly hogged by the adepts of fakery and bombast, and by those who think it's cool to pour scorn on the history of music.

Perhaps younger DJs have been misled and intoxicated by the notion of rating figures and are happy to take orders from above, blissful in golden handcuffs. One can only guess.

But this isn't for PY. "My taste is extremely broad, but I haven't got much time for obsessives. I choose what I play, so I make my own decisions. There's room for everything. But if you try to play to anoraks and your fans only, you'll end up with a very loyal, but small audience. Most people like to hear a tune they know in among the rare grooves and new releases.

"A band like Incognito have been very consistent for over 30 years, and of the more recent bands, The Sunburst Band, Robin McKelle & The Flytones and Snarky Puppy are about as good as it gets."

The term "disc jockey" was first coined in 1935 by Walter Winchell and the need for the superbly curated presentation of music, old and new, persists. "The role of a DJ is to put the music first and never hog the show with meaningless drivel. A DJ should shut up and get on with it!"

PY has always been the go-to man to hear music of the golden age delivered in a joyful manner. But he may disagree. "Actually, I don't disagree. Everyone is different and brings something unique to the table. Whether you like what that happens to be is another matter."

*Fingertips* by Stevie Wonder was the first record he bought in 1963 when both he and Little Stevie were 12, and with parents he describes as "very old school and who could just about tolerate *Yesterday* by The Beatles", PY was of the generation that got high on the sounds of the '60s and made the break with an insupportable societal staidness. His is an appreciation of just how good music can be which today sustains his enthusiasm for broadcasting.

But is the public being failed by the mainstream? "It depends what you want out of it, but for me, yes it is. These days [in radio], it's down to who shouts the loudest. I haven't listened to Radio 1 since John Peel died. Radio 2 is good for special programmes and documentaries, but I don't listen to the daytime output."

Which is understandable given that mainstream BBC radio programming seems to be predicated on the need to lull a listenership into a coma while refusing point blank to give airtime to new music.

There is scope and depth to PY's knowledge of popular music which he shares with the DJs of taste such as Bob Jones, Eddie Piller, Kev Beadle, Norman Jay and Ady Croasdell, sound archivists and music historians one and all.

"Most of my heroes are either dead, or off the air," he says. "There was Alan Freeman (pictured far left), Mike Raven, Jack Jackson and Kenny Everett, and from the land of the living, Emperor Rosko. These days, I'm too busy enjoying the music to make political points, or preach to anyone. That would be an abuse of my position and of the trust invested in me."

So retune that dial, because the radio still has the power to enchant thanks to a dwindling band of DJs who know the difference between pewter and gold. And what is more, who still care about what counts in the world of music.

Photograph courtesy of Peter Young

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