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**GOUGH WHITLAM,
DOUBLE J AND THE
YOUTH RADIO REVOLUTION**

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The Whitlam Legacy

The Whitlam Legacy is a series of occasional papers published by the Whitlam Institute offering contemporary insights on matters of public interest inspired by Gough Whitlam's public life and the legacy of the Whitlam Government.

About the Whitlam Institute

The Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University at Parramatta commemorates the life and work of Gough Whitlam and pursues the causes he championed. The Institute bridges the historical legacy of Gough Whitlam's years in public life and the contemporary relevance of the Whitlam Program to public discourse and policy. The Institute exists for all Australians who care about what matters in a fair Australia and aims to improve the quality of life for all Australians.

The Institute is custodian of the Whitlam Prime Ministerial Collection housing selected books and papers donated by Mr Whitlam and providing on-line access to papers held both at the Institute and in the National Archives.

The other key area of activity, the Whitlam Institute Program, includes a range of policy development and research projects, public education activities and special events. Through this work the Institute strives to be a leading national centre for public policy development and debate.

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Foreword

It is 40 years since Double J commenced broadcasting on 19 January 1975 at 1540 khz on the AM band. That January proved to be the hottest month of the year.

The reformist zeal of the Whitlam Government remained undiminished in spite of the myriad obstacles thrown in its path. The bold gamble of the double dissolution election in May 1974 had paid off to the extent that the unprecedented joint sitting in August that year had seen the passage of legislation establishing universal health care and fundamental electoral reforms cementing the principle of one vote-one value. But the dark clouds were massing overhead and the threats to the Government's political survival were unabated.

It was a new year and who knew what might lie ahead.

As it turns out no one really did. Gough would not have known that the Governor-General was secretly convening a group of legal experts at ANU and in conversation with a High Court judge to advise him on the extent of the so-called 'reserve powers'.

He most certainly would have had little idea of the cultural cyclone that was about to be unleashed with the creation of a 'youth station' within the mildly stuffy ABC in an abandoned basement in Kings Cross; not far in fact from the offices in 100 William St he was to occupy from the time he lost government till his death in October last year.

Dr Liz Giuffre in her fine paper re-visits the genesis of Double J interweaving original material and her personal observations as a self-declared JJ devotee. She does so in a way that not only captures something of the times and the place that JJ has come to hold in the lives of many hundreds of thousands of young Australians, but stakes a claim for Double J's enduring significance.

Dr Giuffre's paper is the product a very happy collaboration between the Whitlam Institute and the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University.

Whether you're sixteen or sixty-six I am confident you will join Dr Giuffre, as we do, in declaring the launch of Double J on that hot January day forty years ago 'a big day for the young men and women of Australia'.

Eric Sidoti
Director
Whitlam Institute within
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GOUGH WHITLAM, DOUBLE J AND THE YOUTH RADIO REVOLUTION

Double J, the station that would become national youth network Triple J, began broadcasting out of a makeshift studio in inner city Sydney at 11am on Sunday, 19 January 1975. Double J, or 2JJ as it was officially named via the AM dial, was a radio station established by the Whitlam Labor government. The station was designed as a dedicated space for young people in the Australian media. This paper develops research first aired at a lecture celebrating the 40th anniversary of Double J's debut. The commemoration was held at 11am on Monday, 19 January 2015, and was sponsored by the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University and the Whitlam Institute. The event was also supported by Triple J, and was recorded for broadcast by ABC Radio National for its *Big Ideas* program.¹ A video of the event was taken by the Whitlam Institute and has been made available on its YouTube channel.²

The lecture was attended by academics, fans, friends and interested citizens. We all gathered on the Monday morning in the downstairs gallery room of the Whitlam Institute, housed at The Female Orphan School, on Western Sydney University's Parramatta campus. Those present were still a little saddened by the loss of Gough just three months earlier, but the continued vibrancy of institutions he helped to establish, like Double, and Triple J, ensured the occasion was a celebration. Across the city at the ABC studios in Ultimo, a group of current and alumni Double and Triple J staff had also gathered to celebrate. They were launching an exhibition of memorabilia and rebroadcasting some of the station's first on air moments. This time they were using much more than a small AM regional signal – a national FM radio signal, online simulcast systems, and the digital-only station that once again carries the iconic name, Double J.

Launching with Australian sounds: Skyhooks “You Just Like Me Cause I’m Good in Bed”

On 17 January 1975, just two days before Double J's official launch, *The Sydney Morning Herald* proclaimed that the new station would ensure that “radio will never be the same again”.³ The editorial praised the emphasis on young production staff and a commitment to “nothing false … no fake accents and no fake names”.⁴ This was a reference to Double J announcer Holger Brockmann who the station had allowed to use his real name rather than a fake assigned to him by his former commercial employer.⁵ Brockmann's voice was the first heard on the station, and was immediately followed by a now infamous piece of Australian popular music, Skyhooks' *You Just Like Me Cause I'm Good In Bed*. This first song and sound heard on Double J had been deliberately chosen for a number of reasons. It was Australian, it had been shunned by the commercials, it was hilarious and serious all at once – and, most importantly, it was a great tune. Double J producer Ron Moss had selected the track for the station opening and kept it secret from the rest of the staff until the needle hit the vinyl at 11am on 19 January. In the lead up to the launch, Moss told the station's founding co-ordinator, Marius Webb, that the tune was “the perfect launch song, it was a bit naughty, and something that would never get played on Australian radio”.⁶

1 The Radio National recording can be accessed online via <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/triple-j-turns-40/6058822>, last accessed 14/4/15.

2 A video of the original event is also available via the Whitlam Institute's YouTube channel, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6TmW8bTr0w>, accessed 14/4/15.

3 *The Sydney Morning Herald* (1975): “An Air of Change at Aunty ABC: Countdown Begins for Rocking 2JJ”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/1/75, p 4.

4 Ibid.

5 Brockmann had appeared on commercial Sydney radio as Bill Drake prior to joining Double J.

6 Marius Webb, email communication with Giuffre, January 2015.

The “naughtiness” of Skyhooks’ song was obvious from its title, *You Just Like Me Cause I’m Good In Bed*. Songwriter Greg Macainsh would casually tell biographer Jeff Jenkins that he “[could]n’t remember why he used that particular phrase,” but did suggest that it was “maybe to capture a mood”? There were several moods present in the recorded track, least of all a young person’s feeling of isolation from broader society at the time. It was something the existing powers that be were doing little to counter. The song and its recorded performance energetically focused on young and carefree relationships, while also being clever enough to give an interested listener other gems to find. It was blatantly and overtly sexual, using its theme and tone to rebel against the still relatively repressed expectations of the times. Skyhooks’ *You Just Like Me* was an expression of the sexual energy, confusion and rebellion that many young Australians wanted at the time – and a starkly different approach to the conservative and relatively naïve portrayal of youth on commercial radio.

Double J staffers were strongly committed to using the station as a unique space for young Australian voices and the diversity of their experiences. Double J founder Marius Webb explained the station’s mission to the press in early 1975: “All that’s happened [with the launch of Double J] is that we’ve created a new market with music that none of the other stations are playing”.⁸ This “new market” soon started to threaten the establishment, as headlines like “Rock station’s threat” appeared in coming weeks, confirming that “the advent in January of Double J, as their dee-jays call it, has shattered the complacency of commercial broadcasters”.⁹

You Just Like Me became emblematic of Double J’s early days. From Skyhooks’ long-player *Livin’ in the 70s*, it was a track among a collection of distinctly local stories with a noticeable Australian twang. The sound was edgy and deceptively simple. It had only four chords holding it together, a catchy chorus to hook audiences (and scare their parents), all delivered with a top-heavy riff. Commercial radio banned it for its overtly sexual theme, however it was a song that also provoked wider assumptions about representations of Australia’s young people. Were they just bodies to be co-opted and objectified (or in the case of mainstream media, sanitised or ignored)? And how and who might be part of these processes? Along with other songs like *Horror Movie* (a commentary on mainstream news and its presentation), music from the Skyhooks’ album became part of a new wave that was emerging – Australian artists highlighting local issues and experiences. As reviewers at the time said, “the entire album is underpinned by a perplexing nervous tension … the saving grace of an Australian rock identity… Satirical, outrageous, rocky, sexist, theatrical, bizarre, decadent, anti-establishment, hilarious”.¹⁰ The song and its sound were perfect for Double J, a station experimenting with how to represent the then contemporary experience of young men and women of Australia.

Double J’s choice to open with *You Just Like Me* became emblematic of the station’s function as a cultural institution – a place to challenge existing assumptions and let young Australians express themselves in their own way. As academic Kath Albury explained, the song “represents a number of popular Triple J [and Double J] mythologies: that Triple J plays Australian music, which the commercial stations do not; that Triple J is irreverent and anti-censorship; and that Triple J is a radical, young station”¹¹ Albury’s assertion that *You Just Like Me* has come to represent Double/Triple J is supported by the continuing references to the song in a number of histories of the station.¹²

7 Jenkins, Jeff (1994): *Ego is Not A Dirty Word: the Skyhooks Story*, Kelly and Withers, Clifton Hill, Melbourne, p 52.

8 This from an article reproduced on Triple J’s 30 years In 30 Days website called “Double J Rocks the Airwaves” – no author or further publication details are listed, but the full piece is available at http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/30years/gallery/2jj_1975.pdf, accessed 14/4/15

9 Ibid.

10 Reviewers from *The Nation* and *Stages* quoted by Jeff Jenkins, 1994: 53.

11 Kath Albury (1999): “Spaceship Triple J: Making the National Youth Network”, *Media International Australia*, no. 91, p 55.

12 In January 2005 Triple J ran a special series to celebrate its 30th anniversary on air called “30 Years in 30 Days” during which then new young musician, Missy Higgins performed a cover of “Good in Bed”. For details see www.abc.net.au/triplej/30years, accessed 8/4/15.

Letting young people talk directly to power – Double J interviews Gough

Double J also changed the local political broadcasting landscape. In addition to featuring new local music and other forms of artistry (including comedians, commentators and others), Double J was committed to providing young Australians access to widely informed and engaged talk programming. In its opening year the station established talk shows exploring alternative cultural movements, frank discussions of sexuality, and youth-targeted news. These programs were important fixtures that provided listeners with ways to connect with issues, and each other, in a centralised way.¹³ Double J's talk programming established places where young people could question those in power – a culture that would continue throughout the station's life.¹⁴

Political engagement was high on the agenda for the station, and while the records of those early broadcasts are sparse, a lengthy interview with Gough Whitlam from the first year of Double J remains. It is a significant piece of the station's history given the interview was conducted just after the infamous dismissal in November 1975, and in the lead-up to the subsequent federal election. At this time both the broadcaster and the politician were in a precarious position – unsure of what, if any, support they might continue to have from the Australian public in the months and years to come. Gough Whitlam donated the written transcript of the interview to the Whitlam Institute in 2003, and it remains publicly available through the Whitlam Institute's Prime Ministerial Collection.¹⁵

The next section of this paper focuses on this lengthy interview with Whitlam in order to establish Double J's political context as it was born and then grew. Many of the issues discussed during the exchange between the politician and the Double J announcers remain familiar to Australians today. Throughout the interview there is discussion of media ownership and its concentration, political responsibilities and broken promises, speculation about possible cuts to the ABC, and the responsibilities of public figures to the diversity of Australians they represent. Also present in this interview are the beginnings of a new way for young men and women of Australian to participate in the media – as active producers and engaged audience members.

Chasing a significant moment in time for Double J and Whitlam

Many media scholars, commentators and listeners have praised the persistence and adaptability of radio. It is a medium that should have been “killed” by subsequent new technologies like TV, online and social media – but continues to be popular and influential. Its immediacy and intimacy are what allows this to happen – as well as relative flexibility of access. Radio can be taken with us in cars, on public transport, or hidden under a pillow to be listened to late into the night. It’s also cheap to access and maintain – something that makes radio easily accessible for young people on limited budgets or with limited space and resources.

The documents left behind suggest that all involved with Double J in 1975 were aware of radio’s power as a form of communication. While those on air at the time talked about radio and its connection to audiences via music and talk, Whitlam also talked about the significance of radio in this post-dismissal 1975 interview. It seems apt to have this comment about the medium from the interview serve as an introduction to the historic radio piece:

13 For a comprehensive overview of some of the earliest programs and their countercultural impact, see Cathy Hope and Bethany Turner (2014): “The Right Stuff? The Original Double Jay as Site for Youth Counterculture”, *M/C Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 6, accessed via <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjourn/article/viewArticle/898>, 14/4/15.

14 One of many examples of this was the success of Pauline Pantsdown, a character developed to parody radical political figure, Pauline Hanson, in the early 2000s. The parody character was featured on Triple J for only a few days before being taken off air following legal action, but the impact of this was covered in detail by Bruce Johnson (2003): “Two Paulines, Two Nations: An Australian Case Study in the Intersection of Popular Music and Politics”, *Popular Music and Society*, vol. no. 1, pp 53–72. There are many other examples of such engagement, with significant examples featured on the Triple 30 “30 Years in 30 Days” online archive, available at <http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/30years/stories/default.htm>, accessed 14/4/15.

15 The interview can be accessed via http://cem.uws.edu.au/R/3UXBI17U9FY9ARBJKPHY93HMY3KBKYAMU1T2STJPM9M48DHG91-00218?func=results-jump-full&set_entry=000009&set_number=000005&base=GEN01-EGW01, last accessed 14/4/2015.

... the public is coming to rely on radio more than on TV, and on T.V. more than on newspapers for their news and views and I think the control by this trinity of all the newspapers in Australia has diminished the standing of the newspapers as organs of news, information, discussion in Australia. The three proprietors have been so heavy-handed, so monolithic, that they are destroying their organ.

This comment comes from about eleven minutes into the interview. Talking about the lack of diversity of opinion and power, he described “one person, Murdoch, there is one family, the Fairfax, there is one company, the Herald and Weekly Times, that run all the daily papers in Australia”. Whitlam’s comments followed on from the Murdoch press’ infamous campaign against him in the lead-up to the dismissal.¹⁶ The role of Double J as an educator of the public was, then, paramount.

Whitlam’s aim and Double J’s specific task was to contribute to the variety of voices, particularly for young people. A diversity of ownership, as well as a diversity of media forms, is central to a healthy democracy. The surviving archives of the interview between Whitlam and Double J don’t include any details about the context of its broadcast – it could have been part of a news feature, or a regular segment, or an election special. This is important because it would be easy to look back and assume that because Whitlam’s government helped to establish the station, the outlet would simply become a Gough party branch. But to just assume this without digging a bit further does neither the integrity of the politician nor the station a service.

On 16 December 1975 Double J staffer Lee Duffield wrote a letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* defending allegations of Left bias at the station. Objecting to suggestions in the press that “2JJ has been promoting the Labor Party during the election campaign, and denying access to others”, Duffield itemised a series of political activities featured on air that were designed to encourage engagement from voters and campaigners across the spectrum.¹⁷ He reported that “a series of eight one-hour debates have been held on air between leading spokesmen for the Labor Party and the Liberal Party”, and referred to recent on air events where “the station provided a free rally service, open to all political groups.”¹⁸ Here Duffield explained that for the station “The idea was to give frustrated local campaigners some access to the general mass media, to advertise their meetings”¹⁹.

Finally, Duffield included an estimate of the relative airtime received by the two major parties over the preceding seven weeks leading up to the election, asserting that “each side was given no more than six hours and 20 minutes. On the final count, the ALP had 7 minutes more than the Liberal-NCP – only one more per week”²⁰. Duffield’s Letter to the Editor confirms the station’s commitment to developing a culture of broad political engagement for young people. Since Double J’s establishment in 1975, the station has continued to actively engage with political discourse. As well as covering elections and political developments, Double and then Triple J has been a major force in informing young Australians about how to become part of the political process in the first place, with initiatives like the *Rock Enrol* drive designed to encourage listeners to sign up to the electoral roll in the lead-up to their 18th birthdays.²¹

16 Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media from War to Dismissal* (Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2009)

17 Lee Duffield (1975): “Letter to the Editor”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16/12/75, p 6.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Rock Enrol has been in place for several years and runs in the lead up to Federal elections – for more detail see Triple J’s dedicated page on the drive, <http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/rockenrol/>, and the Australian Electoral Commission’s 2010 coverage of the success of the campaign, http://www.aec.gov.au/education/democracy_Rules/files/Blackline_Masters/Topic4_BLM07.pdf, both accessed 5/5/15.

Developing a culture of youth broadcasting and political engagement

The post-dismissal interview with Whitlam shows Double J determined to approach the politician from a variety of angles. In addition to the length of the piece, there were also four interviewers on the panel – each helping to draw out the politician on issues of the day. While the written text from the Whitlam Institute Prime Ministerial archive does not reveal the identity of these participating Double J staffers – the original text only labels each inquiry as “question” – there were small hints in the body of the text – brief mentions of four first names: “Marius”, “Nick”, “Dennis and “Tina”. I have since been able to confirm who these voices were, and discover more of the context of the interview.

Marius Webb, the station’s founding co-ordinator, was one of the participants in the 1975 interview. Following email and phone correspondence in late 2014 and early 2015, he was able to give some further details of the other interviewers and the context of the Whitlam piece. He explained that the interview originally appeared as part of a Sunday night program hosted by Tina Jorgenson. Jorgenson had been a folk singer (performing under the name “Tina Date”) before becoming a broadcaster, and following her work on Double J, she would eventually go on to work in the US (including for the UN). While I have not been able to confirm that “Tina” was Tina Date/Jorgenson yet by contacting her directly, she did do an interview with ABC Radio Canberra in 2012 in which she recalled interviewing Whitlam around the time of the dismissal/election. In the ABC interview she talked about a broadcast interview she did with Whitlam around the same time, making comments consistent with the context of the 1975 Double J interview. Her recollections were not as precise as those of Webb, however her desire to engage on air with the political process, and with a variety of agendas, was clear as she noted that she would have liked to get Whitlam on air “with her friend Germaine [Greer]”.²² No doubt that would have been an explosive event if it could have been organised!

The other Double J staff members featured in the clip were Dennis Altman, a regular contributor to the Tina Jorgenson program as a specialist political commentator, and journalist Nick Franklin from the Double J news department. Franklin, now retired after many years of service as an award-winning broadcaster, recalled the interview in early 2015:

It’s a long time ago – but I do remember interviewing Gough – we were in a studio in Sydney and Gough was in a studio in Canberra. [However] I’m afraid I recall very little of the interview itself, other than, rather nervously, asking Gough what he thought his biggest mistake was – [Sir John] Kerr, of course.²³

When listening to this interview I was struck by the sound of the voices of the Double J staff – they were not “typical” of what I had thought of radio at the time. The interviewers’ voices did not appear deep and hyper-masculine like those on commercial stations of the time (or indeed, now) – instead they were higher in pitch, more conversational in style. There was a twang in the accent and a respectful, but also bold, tone. The sound was familiar and unintimidating, while also direct in approach. I can imagine it would have been a breath of fresh air for listeners as well as something of a change for Whitlam on the election campaign.

The topics for conversation in the interview were clearly focused – an important journalistic tool to draw the politician towards the station’s audience. At several points the interviewers actively remind Mr Whitlam that the experiences of young people in Australia were distinct from the rest of the electorate. It is of great importance that the voices in the discussion were recognisably those of *young people*, thus leading conversations designed for young people to hear. This created a legacy that the station continued to foster in coming years and decades, including during the transition from local to national broadcasting, and from Double to Triple J.

22 The full audio of this 2012 interview are available via <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/06/26/3533281.htm>, last accessed 14/4/15.

23 Nick Franklin, email correspondence with author, January 2015.

Asking Whitlam about Double J's audience and its own future

About half way through the interview there is an in-depth discussion of Whitlam's plans for the future. He discusses a desire to continue to develop existing infrastructure, particularly in terms of social reform. Following an exchange about Australia's responsibilities to the region broadly, the Double J interviewers draw Whitlam's focus back to young people at home and their concerns. Tina respectfully but directly reminds the politician that his experience may be starkly different from those of her listeners – therefore asking him how he seeks to meet this divide when looking to represent those members of the community. The piece begins²⁴:

Question: Mr Whitlam, could I tempt you back for a moment. You mentioned schools and so on. Again, our audience is often largely a very young one. How realistically can wealthy graziers and Prime Ministers [represent us], they are minority groups really... can a generation that politicians and parliamentarians are, honestly represent with some understanding and compassion, a generation who would quite often, lately, think that laws are being made just purely and simply against their existence and sort of lifestyle, which is obviously very different to that of the life style of the generation who's the ruling power?

Mr Whitlam: I think that's right. But I suppose, well I suppose you're asking me these things and expect me to be a bit subjective. I've been saved to a certain extent by having children—you know in their teens or their twenties during this period. And so I do at least have that contact with the age groups to which you mention. I do believe that the public is alert to the difference between the Parties. We have spent a very great deal of money on new programs, education, health, welfare and urban programs. Now this costs money, it takes taxpayers money, but at least these programs are for the benefit of everybody.

Here the interviewer (Tina) directly gives Whitlam, and her listeners, a reminder of the purpose of the broadcaster. She directly draws in her audience ("largely a very young one") and asks the politician to be "real" about his responsibility to the diversity of demographics he is being asked to serve. Whitlam acknowledges that he was somewhat removed from a young person's experience – and this acknowledgment is an important part of this exchange. He responds by calling Double J "a very economic investment ... run on a shoe-string", a comment that places the listener in a powerful position. Here Whitlam confirms his position on Double J and his consideration of young people's perspectives – showing his support for them as valuable and distinct. Whitlam's admission of "having contact" with young people via his experience of having children gives the listener a clear idea of his context for decision making that's directly related to them. The interview stops short of saying whether this should be adequate – instead the young listener is left to make their own decision about whether they think that context is appropriate for a leader.

The end of the interview turns to questions of the possible future of Double J and a new Whitlam government. This section includes a clear question that is asked, and answered, with a type of directness that we don't really see in political journalism today. What was striking was the way Double J's Tina asks quite a controversial question in a very measured way, with her voice sounding polished but without the urgency or stress of address of many contemporary political interviews. Again she reminds the politician to consider the position of the listeners, with this exchange towards the end of the interview:

Question: Mr Whitlam do you have any idea, it's of particular interest to us and our listeners, what might happen to us [at Double J] if your government isn't re-elected?

Mr Whitlam: All I can say is that Senator [Ivor] Greenwood, who is ideologically very close to Mr [Malcolm] Fraser, has questioned the propriety of all these new radio stations. And of course, 2JJ and 3ZZ could be closed just by taking their transmitters from them; and making them standby transmitters once again. It's not generally realised that these two stations rely on transmitters which have always been there, but which were just idle, they were just standby transmitters for 2BL and 2FC in your case. And if anything happened to 2FC or 2BL transmitters, I suppose you'd be off the air immediately, but nothing has ever happened to their transmitters. So you could be closed down at the whim of an executive; the Parliament wouldn't have any say in it at all.

²⁴ Note: the piece below has been edited slightly to omit a response from Mr Whitlam which still carries on from the last question. The full transcript is available as listed earlier.

Following this comment, Whitlam continued to delve into the different types of legal arguments that an incoming Fraser government might make in order to decide the fate of the station. This included arguments over the Federal Wireless and Broadcasting Acts, with a complexity that reminds a contemporary audience member that the fate of Double J (and Triple J) was not certain. Indeed, from this exchange, at that point in time, it almost appears that the station's immediate continuation was based as much on luck as it was on a unified vision as one government was swiftly replaced with another.

How we got here: Putting 1975, Whitlam and Double J into context

Double J was finally launched in January 1975 after a significant effort. The station was developed partly in response to the *Independent Inquiry into Frequency Modulation Broadcasting* report. The report was presented by Sir Francis McLean, the Chairman of the Telecommunications Industry Standards Institution and a former Director of Engineering at the BBC, and Professor Charles Cyril Renwick, Director of the Hunter Valley Research Foundation, in 1974.²⁵ After extensive consultation with "public bodies, religious associations, industrial organisations, interested bodies and private persons",²⁶ the authors presented the report with a view to developing Australia's broadcasting capacity.

In canvassing the interest and infrastructure needed to introduce new broadcast services,²⁷ the inquiry uncovered other areas of concern in the media landscape. The authors note "the ABC request was for creative programming", given "they have a need for fine music, other music, educational drama and entertainment and news programs".²⁸ They concluded that "it was widespread opinion ... that the AM band was full and that new licences could only be available for the FM band".²⁹ McLean and Renwick sought to explore "the Australian government's policy of encouraging plurality of involvement in the media"³⁰, hoping this might be achieved by using existing institutions more effectively. In order to establish a new station the government would either need to wait for the launch of FM, or somehow find room on the already crowded AM band. The latter was the solution finally employed for 2JJ and new ethnic broadcaster 3ZZ in Melbourne, each given the green light when unused call signals were identified.

Throughout his political career, Whitlam had been committed to developing a broad spectrum of media and arts programming for the Australian public. In addition to working to ensure that the Australian people had access to a diversity of media forms, Whitlam squarely aimed at ensuring local voices, artists and opinions were given a public voice. The Australian media and arts industry had developed significantly during the first half of the twentieth century, first with the introduction of radio in the 1920s, and then television in the 1950s. With each subsequent new media development, however, local practitioners were concerned that their work might be overlooked in favour of cheaply imported international materials.

Whitlam was all too aware of the power of the media in informing, educating and developing debate for a growing nation. He was interested in how different platforms could engage different citizens, and was committed to ensuring that a diversity of media was available to reflect the diversity of the population. This was demonstrated many times during his time in office and leading up to it, including in 1960, when as part of a debate over the allocation and spending of funds for the ABC, he said: "Only a minority of mankind was literate and only a very small minority could view television, but radio could be heard everywhere."³¹

25 These descriptions come directly from the biographies included in the opening pages of the report (McLean and Renwick, 1974: iii).

26 Ibid, p 3.

27 The report's emphasis was on the development of FM broadcasting, a format that would not be successfully adopted by commercial broadcasters until 1980.

28 Ibid, p 11.

29 Ibid, pp 11-12.

30 Ibid, p 3.

31 Whitlam quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (1960): "In Federal Parliament: Expenditure on Radio, Television Services Passed in the Lower House", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 October, p 13.

Broadcasting's power to influence cultural, political and democratic life was something of which artists, audiences and industry were already acutely aware. As media scholar and adviser Franco Papandrea recalled, appeals had been made to those in power since at least the late 1960s, where "various interest groups initiated concerted lobbying for program regulation to generate increased employment opportunities".³² The groups argued that "should the supply of Australian content to audiences continue to be a desirable national objective" then the government may need to intervene to ensure local production could compete with international products.³³ In 1968 Whitlam addressed the annual conference of the Professional Musicians' Union of Australia in order to demonstrate his commitment to developing the local industry. Speaking in response to the then Liberal government's arts budget, Whitlam argued that "government intervention [in media policy] should be positive, not merely prohibitive".³⁴ He also asserted that artists should be treated as professionals and receive adequate money for their work, arguing against the "underlying if unspoken impression that artists should labour for love rather than lucre".³⁵ This was a stance he continued to develop in response to growing concerns from the local industry about its future. One notable event was the "TV – Make it Australian" movement in 1970, an event which drew Prime Minister John Gorton and opposition leader Whitlam into discussions with a group of "500 actors, writers, producers and others associated with television industry ... unhappy [with the] state of the television industry in Australia for Australian performers".³⁶ While television was the focus of this event, the future of cross industry media participation by local artists was also likely to have been discussed, best evidenced by the eventual regulation that was put in place when Whitlam came into power. Some commentators saw this as an attempt to keep friends close and enemies closer, or as one political scientist put it, "Gough, mindful of the venom of the media, courted it outrageously, and for quite a time, very successfully".³⁷ This was not a new idea, with R.G. Menzies, for example, exploring "the potential of radio, [by] using it competently as a means of reaching his desired audiences" while also seeking to counter the "bad [newspaper] press" he had been receiving.³⁸

Whitlam's most iconic use of cross media engagement came via his 1972 election campaign. The "It's Time" advertisement and jingle directly sought to help develop the Labor Party's profile and gather support, with new media reforms and funding initiatives but featuring the artists and industry workers who would go on to benefit from the proposed changes. There was an emphasis on local producers and young commentators, providing an audio-visual preview of the types of media participants and leaders Whitlam intended to foster in the future, as well as a blueprint for subsequent campaigns decades on like "KEVIN07".³⁹ The 1972 campaign is now remembered as an iconic piece of Australian media. As the curator for the National Film and Sound Archive, Adrienne Parr, explained, it had been decided that the 1972 Whitlam campaign would "produce a campaign song 'with hit qualities'...The song was written by Paul Jones and Mike Shirley, and sung by media and entertainment personalities – predominantly from television and other media, popular amongst the target demographic".⁴⁰

Following the successful 1972 campaign, the Whitlam government established Australia's first Department of the Media – an important enabler in Double J's conception and eventual realisation. There remained significant challenges for media reform attempts at the time, however, and public policy expert Glyn Davis argued "it was ironic that 2JJ would become a symbol of a radical government prepared to experiment when, whatever their intrinsic value as innovations, 2JJ and 3ZZ were substitutes for the more sweeping media reforms specified by the ALP platform".⁴¹

32 Franco Papandrea, (1995): "Television Stations' compliance with Australian Content Regulation", *Agenda*, vol. 2, no. 4, p 468.

33 Ibid, p 477.

34 Whitlam quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (1968): "Starving in garret idea 'dying hard': Arts Budget Attached", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November, p 5.

35 Ibid.

36 Lenore Nicklin (1970): "Smile (if you can) ... We're on TV", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August, p 11.

37 Max Teichmann (1987): "Assessing the Whitlam years", *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 20, p 101.

38 Lyn Gorman, (1998): "Menzies and Television: A medium he endured", *Media International Australia*, no. 87 (May), p 50.

39 For a comparative analysis of these two campaigns and the context of "It's Time" in the broader Australian political advertising landscape, see Joel Penney (2011): "KEVIN07: Cool Politics, Consumer Citizenship, and the Specter of "Americanization" in Australia", *Communication, Culture & Critique*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp 85-6.

40 Adrienne Parr (no date given): "ALP: It's Time", Australian Screen Online, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/ads/alp-its-time/clip1/>, accessed 20/4/15

41 Glyn Davis (1984): "Government decision-making and the ABC: The 2JJ case", *Politics*, vol. 19, no. 2, p 40.

Double J as it began may have been something of a concession for the Whitlam government; however it was the realisation of a long held belief in the power of a strong and diverse local broadcast media. Davis continued to applaud the government's eventual development of "Sydney's first new radio station in 43 years, and the ABC's first venture into sustained programming for an 18-25 year old audience", adding that "despite reception problems, 2JJ quickly captured around 22% of its target audience."⁴² Furthermore, he acknowledged the difference the station made in the broader broadcast landscape, saying that "2JJ's innovative, brash, lively and sometimes offensive format challenged the predictable, staid programming of commercial radio ... 2JJ not only provided alternative music, news and views; it altered the market place".⁴³

Giving young men and women of Australia a sound

Double J was established in 1975 to meet a clear existing demand. As Dawson noted, the rest of the world had experienced its "youthquake" of the late sixties, so Australia's dedicated attention to youth culture via "the rise and rise of JJ (borne from JJ) was surprisingly late".⁴⁴ The delay could be attributed to many factors, not least the nature of the relationships between cultural industry players at the time. By the 1970s the Australian media, especially radio, had come to be dominated by commercial alliances between broadcasting and the recorded music industry.

Commercial radio tended to champion certain types of music and avoid others – securing its audience (and therefore its commercial livelihood), but ensuring that other sectors of the music industry remained unrepresented.⁴⁵ Local creative industries were suffering from the narrow view of established broadcasters, resulting in drastic action when, in 1970, the recording industry withdrew its support for radio. The argument was over revenue and a diversity of exposure for artists, with an unexpected outcome being that some local independent artists, not yet big enough to be caught in the cross fire, found themselves with a chance to consider radio as part of their futures. As Agardy and Zion reported, "the dispute resulted in the commercial radio stations banning [many copyrighted] recordings from airplay. Since the ban lasted some six months, and stations were obliged to fulfil the Australian composition requirement, an opportunity arose for smaller independent Australian record companies to have their material played on radio and thus gain a foothold in the industry".⁴⁶

The six-month ban gave some promise for new music and voices in the broadcast space, but this was to be short-lived. The establishment of Double J five years later however would finally help develop a new type of relationship between broadcasting and music in Australia – one where previously overlooked artists and their ideas could be aired. Reports in the press just prior to Double J's launch confirmed the need for something new in the broadcasting arena. As Cassi Plate recalled two decades later, "the rapid growth of Australian bands and music since the inception of 2JJ is evidence of the galvanizing effect of the ABC initiative".⁴⁷ This was a view also expressed by ABC historian Ken Inglis who recounted Double J's vision of being a station that "would cater for people from eighteen to twenty five, mainly giving them a wide range of popular music in the rock, jazz, pop and folk fields".⁴⁸

The conditions described/outlined above helped to create a perfect storm for Double J when it finally launched with Skyhooks' tune in January 1975. The sound of young Australian artists had continued to bubble away in live performance and underground spaces despite a lack of formal support, but the youth station provided the push needed to help develop the scene and connect otherwise isolated audiences. Young Australians could hear their own experiences reflected back in their own style and with a local approach – no longer dependent on sanitised and Americanised versions of youth culture.

42 Ibid p 41

43 Ibid.

44 Jonathan Dawson (1992): 'JJJ: radical radio?' *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, p 37.

45 This has been well documented, but a good overview is by Homan, Shane (2014): "Music" in Griffen-Foley, Bridget (ed) *A Companion to the Australian Media*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, pp 283-5

46 Agardy, Suzanna and Zion, Lawerence (1997): "The Australian Rock Music Scene" in Ewbank, Alison and Papageorgio, Fouli (eds) *Whose Master's Voice: The Development of Popular Music in Thirteen Cultures*, Greenwood Press, USA, p 20.

47 Plate, Cassi (2003): "Music on Radio since 1970" in J. Whiteoak and A. Scott-Maxwell (eds), *The Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, Currency House, Sydney, p 19.

48 K. S. Inglis (2006a): *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-1983* (2nd edition), Black Inc Books, Melbourne, p 375.

Conclusion – the legacy of Whitlam’s dedicated “youth” voice in the media

The perspective offered here is of Double J’s beginnings from a necessarily removed position – my first-hand experience is not of Double J in 1975, but of what it would become. I am a listener, writer and fan who was born in 1980 – therefore I literally don’t know the Australian media that doesn’t include a dedicated place for young people. Double J has grown into the national youth network that is Triple J, and it can now be accessed on air via broadcast radio all over Australia, as well as online all over the world via digital broadcast. The station also features national and international mini-festivals of music and culture like its Hottest 100 countdowns and triple j Unearthed competitions, as well as history programs like the J files and a digital only station named after that first pioneering Sydney AM outlet, Double J.

In looking back at the history of what began 40 years ago, I have also started to wonder what might *not* have been if 2JJ had not kicked off and kicked on. The interaction between the 1970s Double J staffers and Whitlam serves as an example of how the station and the politician built an expectation that young people could directly engage in politics and the broader democratic process. I hope that in the future researchers will be able to explore interviews with other political leaders from around the same time as this 1975 interview, so that a more comprehensive picture of the broadcast landscape of the time can be uncovered. But in the first instance this question moves towards showing the development of a way of addressing young people in the media. It was not a dictation of “what to do”, but a presentation of context that invited them to draw their own conclusions. The interviewer’s appeal to Mr Whitlam to consider the direct impact of his actions on this particular group is something that contemporary media audiences are used to, but although something we take for granted now, it was highly unusual in 1975. Before this, there would have been little opportunity for young voters to directly access political leaders in this way and have them respond so publicly.

As for January 2015, it is not unusual for young and diverse voices to be part of the national conversation – commentators on Triple J, and commercial outlets, with a variety of race, gender, religious and political perspectives. The original brief to develop Double J as part of the ABC’s quest for “creative programming” is now going strong. 1975 was a significant moment in the histories of both Double J and Whitlam as public figures. The reason for returning to this piece of broadcast and political history is to mark the station’s 40th birthday, and its establishment as a dedicated place for young Australians in the media. Double J became a place where young Australians were not talked about, nor were they talked down to, but a place where young people could actually lead the conversation.

New media outlets are emerging and different technologies are being developed at a rapid pace. This change poses a new challenge – and one for young people in today’s media to navigate for the future (with any luck, doing so with the same good will, and good humour, as their Double J ancestors). All of this is not to say that the station and its offshoots have not been subjected to, or undeserving of, questioning and criticism. But, as music writer Ben Eltham argued, “Triple j is a keystone of contemporary Australian culture and a kind of strange hybrid that sits in an uncomfortable middle ground between its commercial and community radio cousins. Indeed, the level and intensity of criticism the network attracts is a sign of the network’s importance”.⁴⁹

There may well be many other interviews like the Whitlam one I offer here sitting in archives, garages and attics somewhere – and hopefully the discovery of these will contribute to an even broader conversation about the place of Double and Triple J in continuing to shape the democratic lives of young Australians. Looking back at the station’s history and its subsequent development “matters” because this is also an example of young Australians learning to find a place in the media, taking and developing opportunities for themselves, and building foundations that others could also build on. So happy Birthday Double (and then Triple) J. Long may your legacy continue to influence what is on the air.

49 Ben Eltham (2009): “The Curious Significance of Triple J”, *Meanjin*, vol. 68, no. 3, p 52.



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