

Problems with the Triple J Monopoly

I am a 27 year old composer, musician and music teacher based in Melbourne. I perform regularly ~2-3 times a week in the Melbourne bluegrass, pop-punk and jazz scenes in 3 different outfits

One of the primary problems that myself and other musicians have is: attracting an audience outside of our local area/city. In my case it is relatively easy to be played on local radio stations in Melbourne (such as PBS, Triple R, SIN radio etc) and attract a strong local following in the local area you perform. However, from touring experience, and from listening to fellow musicians, I know that it is difficult for bands to bring in new listeners outside of their own local area. There is generally only one assured way to get out of this parochial rut for a band, and that is: try to get Triple J to play your music so that you can attract a national/interstate audience.

Triple J holds a monopoly over our national music scene. They command what young people listen to, determine what artists are ‘hot’ on the national music scene, and influence what bands will be attractive to medium/large festival bookers. Considering the influence that Triple J holds over the national music industry, it is disappointing to see that a publicly funded radio station only chooses to expose a narrow section of Australian artists to the public.

Musicians around Australia have argued for a long time that Triple J only gives a platform to artists with a particular ‘Triple J sound’¹ and Australian artists that do not fit that narrow criteria have extreme difficulty reaching a national audience. Here are some comments from Australian musicians from an article published in musicfeeds.com.au to highlight this frustration:

1. “We were that they were neglecting us when we were young and we were a lot more headstrong or whatever,” Schroeder says. “And it’s like, well...you’ve just gotta deal with it.” Schroeder likens the influence of the station to that of a powerful stock market insider, saying:

“Basically if you put it in a metaphor of the stockmarket, Triple J is the insider that says ‘Buy these shares’ and everybody rushes to buy them. There’s stuff that just falls by the wayside consequentially.

¹ <http://musicfeeds.com.au/news/triple-j-under-fire-for-sound-bias/>

2. “It definitely affects bands Australia-wide,” the artist says. “I feel like you shouldn’t have any sort of worry or any other thought except, ‘I’m going to make exactly what I want to make’.” But as the artist reveals, many musicians are plagued by anxiety over whether Triple J will like their music.

“It really is , it really is frustrating. I talk about this with nearly every musician friend...that there’s no other station that’s up there with Triple J,” he concludes. The station’s influence, with an average weekly reach of 1.8 million listeners Australia-wide, can even have a silencing effect on some.

3. “Once this got published our publicist rang up and screamed, ‘What the have you done, you’ll never get played on Triple J again!’” says one respected 26-year-old Sydney musician of the fallout following comments she made suggesting that a certain “sound” was needed to be on Triple J.

“I was like, ‘What do you mean? I didn’t even say anything bad’ and then our manager was calling up, and then [our people] made me write an apology...that is ridiculous. It shouldn’t be this dictatorial thing where you’re not even allowed to criticise Triple J because that’s ,” she says.

The frustrations expressed in these comments all converge on the same opinion that Triple J does not accurately reflect or serve the interests of the Australian music community at broad. Although a select few Australian artists are given a national platform and put on high rotation on Triple J, unfortunately the majority of Australian artists never do. This musical bias in Triple J has even been highlighted by conservative pundits such as 3AW’s Tom Elliott who has said:

“Why, for example, do we pay triple j to play youth-oriented pop/rock music when several commercial FM networks already cater to that audience?”²

I am not an ABC/public broadcaster basher and I don’t agree with other people’s calls for Triple J to be privatised, however I do agree that there are already enough programmes that give exposure to a lot of the artists that Triple J promotes. Looking at the list of winners for the past triple J hottest 100 poll, I see this:

2017 – Kendrick Lamar
2016 – Flume
2015 – The Rubens
2014 – Chet Faker
2013 – Vance Joy
2012 – Macklemore

² <http://musicfeeds.com.au/news/shock-jock-says-triple-j-isnt-worth-funding-because-commercial-stations-play-the-same-music/>

2011 – Gotye
2010 – Angus and Julia Stone
2009 – Mumford and Sons
2008 – Kings of Leon
2007 – Muse

Half of those artists are international superstars and the other half were already well established, signed and internationally touring Australian acts. All the above artists were already and still are receiving high rotation on commercial radio stations and do not need a publicly funded radio station to promote there music.

I would like to see the mandate of Triple J change so that it becomes a platform to promote and reflect the ENTIRE Australian music community. It is very frustrating that one of our only national music radio stations does not reflect or promote the rich and diverse musical talents this country has. Instead Triple J selects a narrow range of commercially-palatable acts to play on high rotation to the exclusion of other deserving acts.

I believe **Triple J Unearthed** should be given the same national and regional platform that Triple J has.

I would recommend these changes to Triple J/public radio landscape:

- Introduce a mandate that requires the station to play at least 50% local unsigned artists on all programmes.
- Give Triple J Unearthed a national FM radio station so that local and unsigned artists can attract a national audience
- Establish a committee composed of a broad cross-section of Australia’s music scene (geographically, culturally and stylistically) to supervise and better inform the musical director of Triple J.

Australian musicians need Triple J to promote their music and serve their interests. The Australian music scene is so much more rich and diverse than the music that Triple J promotes, but unfortunately our country is not able to listen to it as Triple J has developed a strong ‘commercial-music’ bias. Fixing this bias would open up national audiences to local performers and increase opportunities for touring and festival appointments.

Thank you,