

Tony Hall and the BBC

Monday, 20 June 2016

The reply to my query as to why previous Director General Mark Thompson's decision not to edit me out of Top of the Pops repeats has been reversed...

Dear Jonathan

Thank you for your emails about the archive edition of Top of the Pops shown on BBC Four on 9 June. Tony Hall has asked me to respond.

Decisions about which episodes we show, and the editing of these programmes, are made on a case-by-case basis. We aim to strike a careful balance between the expectations of those viewers who wish to see BBC original archive performance, and the need to minimise the risk of causing upset to any of our viewers.

Since your original complaint, and the response of the then Director-General Mark Thompson in 2011, new facts have come to light about the behaviour of some presenters on TOTP and we believe that audience expectations have changed. In light of this, and the publication of the Dame Janet Smith Review in 2016, which considered the impact historic sexual abuse has had on those individuals affected, we believe it is appropriate to review and edit our TOTP archive.

As a result we have chosen to remove the short New York sections in which you feature.

These sections do not contain any original BBC musical performances, and we believe their absence is not to the detriment of these repeats. We reserve the right to continue to review and edit our content in this way.

Yours sincerely

Cassian Harrison

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And my reply

Firstly - it is of course quite right that the BBC should remain totally free to decide what is or is not suitable for broadcast.

I remain a big supporter of the BBC and its independence. Indeed I hate the current attempts by commercial rivals to damage the BBC.

Secondly - I disagree that removing my American (not just New York) segments on music as featured in Top of the Pops is not to the detriment of these repeats. I would submit they were an essential ingredient in those shows and that the majority of viewers would agree with me. Indeed I would suggest that removing them will cause far greater upset to far more viewers than their inclusion would do to the odd bigot.

Thirdly, I consider the removal from broadcast of programmes hosted or including innocent men and women such as Jimmy Savile (innocent until or unless found guilty by a court of law) is morally and editorially wrong. I personally feel that even those found guilty of past crimes should not be further punished by excluding them (as the BBC used to do when they employed released murderers and other past criminals). I am sure there were some victims of the crimes of Nelson Mandela, who may have been upset by including him in programmes after his release.

Fourthly, whilst understanding that times change and, since Mark Thompsons response, new facts may have come to light, many rumours and unproven media driven gossip do not make False Allegations become facts. Even when juries find false allegations true, they may not necessarily be so and the thousands of appeals granted illustrate this. I found Dame Janet Smiths review disgraceful. If she had asked some of us who attended many Top of the Pops shows, we would have sworn that there was very little lack of security. False Accusers can be genuinely mistaken, memories change, some become confused and some may even be after money. I think recent Cliff Richard events, in which the BBC behaved very badly, immorally and possibly illegally, illustrate how badly wrong many top BBC executives are getting things these days, let alone back in the 60s. Dame Janet appears to have been reviewing according to an agenda and she should be ashamed of herself. As indeed should the current Director General, to whom this is copied. He will be aware, as we all are, that the majority of the BBC feels the wrong Tony left the BBC after the publication of that shockingly partisan report.

Fifthly, I repeat my initial comment about editorial independence. But I also believe that the BBC should, as an organisation, support staff and employees past, present and future. The backbone of top executives seems to have been surgically removed - and this has been a long time problem; I described it at length to Marmaduke Hussey when he was appointed Chairman in 1986. I also quite understand Tony Hall bowing to anticipated criticism by tabloids and others keen to damage the BBC but might I suggest that someone, instead of nervously protecting their own careers, starts protecting those working for the corporation and, most of all, protects the quality and honesty of the BBC output?

I do not expect a change of policy direction on this - I was astonished by Mark Thompsons courage in doing so. And to be honest I really dont care. A few seconds once a month on BBC4 is not essential to my happiness. I have only bothered to complain because of hundreds of requests to do so by your viewers - upset by my removal from the repeats. I wrote to Mark Thompson of the Stalinist revision of history. If the current management of the BBC is happy with that, good luck to them. They have to live with themselves and their legacy.

Best wishes

Jonathan King