

My response to media coverage of BBC censorship

Friday, 10 October 2014

The media has picked up on the ludicrous BBC decision to delete all the Dave Lee Travis Top of the Pops shows. They point out that my appearances in the show will not be edited out, correctly quoting then Director General Mark Thompson agreeing with my complaint about "a Stalinist revision of history" and pledging that I will not be taken out of future repeats of the show.

The BBC received a few complaints from the usual suspects when I appeared in the recent Genesis documentary. But several eagle eyed viewers noticed the Harriman's Herbal Tea hoodie I wore on the programme and intelligently got the message. I expected to end up on the cutting room floor, though I suspected it would be difficult to ignore the man who discovered the band as teenagers, produced them and gave them their name.

A recent Pick of the Pops radio show featuring the 1965 chart glossed over Everyone's Gone To The Moon at number 4, mentioning it but not playing it whilst spinning the rest of the chart.

But it's not just a BBC block. Most of the media declines to use my name or reflect my words. In general they find it easier to avoid it without giving a reason but, if pressed, say the contribution was unsuitable or not appropriate to the discussion. One of my games to amuse myself has been sending letters under assumed names, which are almost always printed, where virtually identical letters carrying the Jonathan King name invariably get ignored.

It doesn't worry me. I anticipated the expected approach years ago and made sure I had other platforms. My films are watched by thousands online free of charge. My website gets loads of views. My books sell through Amazon and other internet retailers. My music sells loads and I even crop up in one of the biggest movies of the year as Ooga Chagga dominates Guardians of the Galaxy.

But censorship of history is very dangerous. Especially when, as in my case, someone's conviction was wrong or unsafe. Unless you have great faith in the judicial system and choose to ignore the hundreds of appeals granted every month - as the media generally tries to do - such manipulation of the facts is not just unfair but foolish.

Where does the media draw the line? Should criminals who get speeding fines or parking convictions or, God forbid, licence fee breaches, be erased from the archives? Should music from the past have any mention of criminals convicted of drug offences erased? And it's not just convictions. Travis was, of course, acquitted of nearly all the false allegations against him. Jimmy Savile, presumed innocent unless or until proven guilty in a court of law, is chopped out of shows even if he hasn't spoken but just cropped up in the background. The Court of Public Opinion is more powerful than the Old Bailey.

If the expected scandal about Prime Minister Edward Heath catches fire, and moves from conspiracy theorists to the barmy majority, will he be erased from all coverage of the 20th Century? Was there ever an MP called something like Cyril Smith? From a party led by Jeremy Thorpe? Who is he?

And don't mention the war.

There will soon, naturally, be censorship online. Already there is pressure. Quite rightly in some cases. I'm in favour of stopping the oxygen of publicity for terrorists.

But as far as I'm concerned - this lady is not vanishing from the archives any time soon, if I have anything to do with it.

Jonathan King

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