

It was the ides of August, the highest of the high summer, the apex of that glorious Summer of Love, the 15th of August 1967, and a particularly bleak day for UK music lovers. For on that day the provisions of the Marine Offences Act, passed by Parliament and given Royal assent, came into effect. The legislation empowered the Postmaster General to pursue action against any British citizen who, in any manner, assisted or participated in the activities of the pirate radio stations that had been broadcasting back to the UK from outside British territorial waters, mainly in the North Sea. Most operations folded under such threat and ceased to transmit the previous day.



Of the 15 or so stations that had followed the lead of Radio Caroline in 1964, and had established themselves in a collection of anchored freighters or abandoned gun emplacements outside the, then, 3 mile limit, far and away the best and most influential was Radio London. Wonderful Big L, filled an opportunity for commercial radio (an unknown concept in Britain in the '60s) to broadcast 'pop' music from records that existed because the hitherto monopolistic BBC was severely limited in its use of 'needle time'. This was set by long standing arrangements with the Performance Rights Society to only a few hours of records played each week. BBC Light Programme (now Radio 2) was then paying sparse musical attention as the swinging '60's unfolded, so, as part of the Legislation, a new radio channel was to be established. But it was only on the last day of September 1967 that Radio 1 was to begin transmitting, and the BBC were certainly not going to hire their new staff from the DJ ranks until after the pirates had ceased to transmit. Thus the returning jocks were facing an uncertain employment future.

John Peel had been a DJ on Radio London for only 5 months when the station went off the air. A Liverpudlian, armed with a Public school education and brief radio experience in America, he had been hired and given the midnight to 2AM shift. In a very short time he had established his show 'The Perfumed Garden' as de-rigueur listening for all aspiring hippies. The music he located and introduced to his listeners was truly extraordinary, reflecting the massive upheaval of pop into rock that was the signature of that acid tinged era. Big L played UK Top 40 for 22 hours a day (itself a rich tapestry in 1967: The Beatles, Engelbert Humperdick, Pink Floyd, the Johnny Mann Singers, Otis Redding, Nancy Sinatra and Desmond Dekker all charted that August), but for a couple of hours after midnight John Peel, every night, had sustained the sonic appetites of willing radio listeners across Southern and Central England and into the Low Countries with weird and wonderful sounds. These lyrics, from the only true Peel session performance of August 14th 1967, stand as a fitting memorial.

The Perfumed Garden Blues (John Peel's Lament) By Jeffrey Prowes

*I was sitting at my radio, alone and feeling blue
When over the airwaves, there came a sound so true
It's gonna be a sad, sad day when the Perfumed Garden wills and dies away,
A song so soft and gentle, came into my brain
I listen very slowly, it's a number by the Jefferson Airplane
It's gonna be a sad, sad day when the Perfumed Garden wills and dies away,
He blew my mind...the lovin' kind...makes everything so fine, fine, fine
I really feel for the tender lovin' times the DJ spins
He played the Mothers of Invention and the Velvet Underground
He played some freaky music from the Zodiac Cosmic Sounds
It's gonna be a sad, sad day when the Perfumed Garden wills and dies away,
Looking dark and gloomy, what am I gonna do?
Between those same grand hours of twelve 'til two
It's gonna be a sad, sad day when the Perfumed Garden wills and dies away.*

The man was, of course, ultimately hired to join Radio 1, and, of the 46 DJs paraded on the steps of the BBC with Radio 1's controller at the launch of the station, while he is not the only one not wearing a tie, he is, 35 years on, the only one still broadcasting on Radio 1. Peel wrote to the BBC asking for a job and described the playlist of the Perfumed Garden as "a forum for the better sounds in popular music, with the emphasis on the music rather than myself, by better music I mean the West Coast groups and British groups that are trying to do something new and imaginative." After a very cautious start, and on an eight week initial contract, Radio 1 found a role for the resident 'house hippy' with his single minded dedication to his musical muse.

The rest is the stuff of British radio legend. The Peel Sessions, known now world wide, numbered some 8000 in its first 25 years, often offering aspiring stars their first broadcast; and his solitary, anti-establishment, campaign for the acceptance of punk stands as a landmark personal achievement. By my reckoning he seems to have been voted Britain's top DJ by readers of the *Melody Maker* for 30 of the last 35 years.

Veteran BBC producer John Walkers went so far as to describe Peel as "the most important individual in British rock music history."



Starting at midnight on August 14th 1967 Radio London allowed Peel a swansong five and a half hour broadcast, and as a teenager I listened through that night, trying to stay awake and change my reels of tape every hour or so. For decades I idly imagined performing a Reconstruction of this show, retaining Peel's original dialog from the very poor quality masters, but replacing the music with clear sounding copies, fully agreeable to the ear of the modern audio sophisticate. Then, this year as I finally assembled the 90 minutes of recordings that had survived in my collection, I met, across the misty mists of the Internet, Velvet Fogg Ben who had a major chunk of the same program on tape from a different source. Further, using what must have been excruciatingly difficult analogue tape editing on a 4 track machine, Ben had performed exactly the kind of reconstruction of his portion of the last night of the Perfumed Garden that I had attempted using a PC. Immediately I recognized a fellow fanatic. Over the last few months, using as our guide a full, but slightly inaccurate, track listing of the full playlist as published in *Mojo* in June 1994, we planned my assault on a full reconstruction of the entire five and a half hour show. Ben found a tape trader who had most of the last 2 hours – a perfect compliment to our early weighted portions. Meanwhile we scoured our record collections, our friends, contacts and even made an occasional purchase, so as to round up hi-fi copies of all of the material Peel played. New 20 bit dubs were made of Beatles mono vinyl, and, alongside the Pink Floyd and Jefferson Airplane tracks, these powerfully illustrate the clarity and authority of those contemporary sixties mono mixes. Most of the rest is in stereo of course (I think it would have been churlish to do otherwise), despite the fact that Peel was almost certainly listening in a mono studio.

Some recordings needed a whisk with a software depopper to quell their aged vinyl crackle, one even came from an MP3 emailed in when both our vinyl copies were found to be absurdly poor. These efforts resulted in this concoction that includes 87 of the 89 played records present in glorious high fidelity, leaving only the Jeffrey Proves session item and an unknown artist rendition of 'Dust My Blues' unreconstructed and here present with all their 'as broadcast' flaws. Over 150 separate computer WAV files were balanced for volume, EQed, corrected in pitch, and finally cross faded together to reconstruct this last 'benign nocturnal' visit to the Perfumed Garden. Almost 90% of Peel's intros and outros survived on one or other of the source tapes, leaving only a dry sequence towards the end of the first hour and midway through the fourth. Perhaps these missing pieces will eventually surface and allow some other obsessive to complete our task. Overall the music is fabulous, Peel's observations on the state of the Underground priceless, and the early morning *Medium Wave* whine mostly tolerable.

Ben Chaput, my fellow train spotter, leads the list of thank yous, for his efforts in supplying me with many of the musical and Peelian primitives patched together here, as well as his leadership in setting me straight on vital aspects of UK Psych. Gary Pfeifer who came through with that copy of the crucial last hours. Craig Gibbs whose tenacious search for the obscure B-Side by the Attack ensured that the show opens in hi-fi. Paul Moews who supplied an MP3 when it seemed to be a showstopper. And finally David Aspin whose Ferguson tape recorder, entrusted to me to 'look after' in the summer of 1967, paid the ultimate price – it never worked properly again after I used it to make my portion of this epic recording!

-----**Guy Brown**, October 2002, Santa Barbara, California