



MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND

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AIDAN BUTLER, ex-R.T.E. Radio 1 Senior Music producer
Member of MEAI Committee

Dear Members of the Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sports and Media.
I have been asked by MEAI to attend this afternoon's session to offer my perspective, as a former Radio producer, on the importance of Radio play for Irish artists. I took up the post as Senior Music Producer on RTE Radio 1 in 2010 with the retirement of Brendan Balfe.

I was very interested in developing a platform for new young Irish musicians and through working on a Playlist and providing the Pat Kenny radio show with music acts – I was able to give a diverse taste of what was happening in the music scene in Ireland.

I saw firsthand how important this was to a new career. As a National Broadcaster playing live or having their music on the Playlist opened the opportunities for concerts and being picked up by the smaller stations, who wouldn't have had the resources to explore the vast amount music in the country.

At this stage I should give an outline as to how we went about the selecting and operating of the music picked for Radio 1.

Since R.T.E. Radio 1 is predominantly a Talk Show station- music shows constitute between 43 – 45 hours per week.

We set out a very open music policy and try to cater for as big a diversity as possible. Included in those hours are programmes dedicated to Irish Traditional music, Country Music and at times Jazz and Classical music.

We changed title of our Playlist to Recommends for a few reasons;

Unlike most other Radio stations Radio 1 does not mandate a strict Playlist rotation. Our presenters or producers on other shows have complete control over what music is played in their programme.

Since the music shows are spread out during the day – mostly at night with only one hour during peak hours – trying to dictate a rota just wouldn't be feasible.

We also felt that since we were hiring people who we regarded as experts or well versed in music it would be best to let them decide what they play. Thankfully, they all bought into our ethos of highlighting Irish artists and the weekly list of our Recommended List, which contains an exceedingly high percentage of Irish music, is very well received, and played.

Most other stations will have a strictly rotated Playlist – usually consisting of 3 separate lists;

A – current top 10

B – Top 20 and hot picks for top 10

C – New and classics

Presenters are given little latitude in picking their choices and as a lot of these stations are now owned by or controlled by companies from the U.K. Irish music takes a very back seat.

The positives of Radio plays for Irish artists will be very well highlighted by other members of our group – helping to build new fan bases, generating sales and attracting other media attention.

The number of times an artist has told me how important RTE recognition played in their getting either gigs or plays on the international markets was.

There are problems - from the broadcaster's point of view – that do need to be addressed.

As I said earlier - a lot of smaller stations just do not have the resources to oversee the vast amount of music being released every week.

The amount of music I was getting in every week, either by email or hard copies, was staggering and this has only increased since COVID.

As a music producer, you try and leave your personal likes or dislikes at the gate and try to pick what you feel suits the music ethos of your station – not an easy task!

It is usually down to one, maybe two people on each station to try and sort through the mountain.

The first casualties in any choice comes down to quality or production values – it is amazing how many badly recorded songs are sent to radio stations.

Then comes the targeting of special times of the year by the big corporations – e.g. Christmas, Valentines, Easter etc. They swamp the scene with big artist acts that are impossible to ignore – so the small independent artists are squeezed out.

From my perspective again – we do need a much better and constructive definition as to exactly what defines Irish Music.

Trying to force Radio Stations into playing a quota of Irish music just will not work realistically – stations are commercially driven and will fight or circumvent the mandate. We need to encourage stations to play lip service to any quota but be rewarded in some for going beyond it.

We need to encourage and incentivise stations to take up the challenge of playing more Irish music and at the same time encourage Irish musicians to up their production standards. This could be done by using the Canadian method but would require a high involvement from Government.

The number of Canadian musicians I was dealing with was amazing – their recordings and touring were all supported by their Government Cultural department. Thankfully, I see this is starting to happen, in a smaller degree, here in Ireland and hopefully it can expand in future years, with the help of our broadcasting stations – both radio and tv.

We have seen the success of shows like Other Voices and The Temple Bar Trad. Fest. Videos spreading the wealth of Irish music both new and old around the world. Anything we can do to help encourage and promote these will do nothing but bring prosperity and enhance our cultural legacy.