Soar Sound Music Policy

Contents

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Author: Sam Hunt (Operations and Events Director of Soar Sound)

Soar Sound's Safeguarding Officer:

Policy Validity Statement: Policy users should ensure that they are consulting the currently valid version of the documentation. This document will be reviewed one year from its issue date.

Approval: The policy will remain valid, including during its period of review. However, the policy must be reviewed next year and afterwards at least once in every three-year period.

2   Introduction

This policy sets out how Soar Sound will fulfil its statutory duties and responsibilities effectively, both within its own organisation, and for the affiliated groups and members that help with Soar Sound's not-for-profit vision and public purpose objectives.

2.1   Vision

Soar Sound seeks to provide broadcast radio and other online and legacy media services that are not for private gain, with any surplus or assets used principally for the benefit of the community.

2.2   Objects

The objects of the Company are to carry on activities which benefit the community and in particular (without limitation) to carry out radio broadcast and media production services that will benefit communities resident in Leicester and Leicestershire, and in particular, and without limitation, with a focus on public education, wellbeing, mental health, economic development and employment.

Soar Sound supports all services, projects and activities that meet our not-for-profit objectives, as above, through offering publicity in our Soar Sound radio service and other media services.

3   Purpose of this Policy

The purpose of this policy is such that listeners will experience a unified experience across all shows and that all music played should be neutral between all listeners such that most of our target listener audience will not refuse to listen simply due to finding the music objectionable.

The document is the Soar Sound Music Policy, detailing how Soar Sound intends to meet its statutory duties effectively, both within its organisation and for affiliated groups. It outlines the vision of providing community-beneficial broadcast radio and media services, and the policy's purpose to ensure a unified listening experience that doesn't alienate the target audience with objectionable music. The policy includes guidelines on music selection, categorization of shows, music blacklist and A-list, and specific considerations for music during journalistic and entertainment programmes. It aims to appeal to listeners aged thirty-five to sixty-five, avoiding aggressive or excessively repetitive music, and encourages lesser-played, album-oriented music.

4   Definition of Shows

- **Primetime** - This is weekday breakfast (6:30am to 9am) and drive time (3pm to 6pm)
- **Journalistic** - This is a show with an emphasis on editorial content.
- **Entertainment** - A show with an emphasis on general entertainment with local information. Weekend morning.
- **Specialist Music** - A show with a clear focus on a particular genre of music ("Best of British" - new British unsigned bands). The whole point of this show is that it is completely exempt from this policy. It is expected that the music will be presented with great care and skill.

4.1   Overview of Music Policy

4.1.1   Blacklist

Perhaps the easiest group to define is the "Blacklist". This is music that must never be played for any reason.

This is defined as music that is either not commonly deemed "decent and acceptable", such as "Jack the Ripper" by "Screaming Lord Sutch", music by artists that are not generally considered acceptable anymore, such as Gary Glitter, or any music that contains offensive language (although radio edits may be acceptable).

The only exception would be when presenting a program within the "Journalistic" category, where a short clip of the music may be important to remind listeners of the artist. The short clip must, by itself, be of generally accepted standards, such as two to three seconds of a Gary Glitter song during a documentary relating to that artist. This would only be for the purposes of allowing the listeners to identify that song if necessary. Profanity, therefore, would always be unacceptable.

4.1.2   A-List

At the opposite extreme is the A-List. A-List music are tunes that are played more frequently (currently two songs per hour come from the A-List) in order to give a station its own distinctive sound or style.

In the case of LCR Daytime, our A-List is a very varied selection from the 50's to today, with emphasis on songs from approximately 1968-1995.

A-List songs are not necessarily chart music, and we have made an active decision to choose the lesser played songs by well known artists. For example our A-List includes "Abba - Voulez Vous", "Ce Ce Peniston - Finally", "Duran Duran - A View to a Kill", "Elton John - Nikita", "Jefferson Airplane - White Rabbit", "Pet Shop Boys - Rent", "Scissor Sisters - I don't feel like Dancin'", "Tasmin Archer - Sleeping Satellite", "Van Morrison - Moondance". There are approximately 80 tracks on the A-List, representing around 5% of our main "timeless" list.

A-List songs are deemed to be the very best examples of our music policy and will be played approximately 10 times as often as the rest of the music within our collection. It is recognised that tweaking the A-List can significantly change the feel of a station, and as such, A-List songs will only be selected after prudent consideration.

4.1.3   Selecting songs to be loaded

Provided that the songs fulfil our criteria of music we play, then presenters of entertainment programmes may bring their own music to be loaded and maintain their own "personal playlist", to be used as the first song after each break (on the hour, half-past the hour).

Songs to be loaded onto the timeless list may only be carried out by members of the daytime music selection group. Anyone may put forward suggestions.

4.1.4   "Spice" category

It is becoming increasingly common in radio today that a "spice" category is used, which are wildcard songs not normally played by a station but nonetheless have had considerable chart success. Currently, we do not use our "spice" category but are developing this. Normally, one "spice" song per hour would be played.

For this to be effective, at least 100 songs should be loaded, since by its very definition these songs are not going to appeal to our core audience, but instead extend the appeal to a wider range of people, such as within a workplace.

We have moved some songs that do not satisfy our main criteria into this group. Songs currently include "Queen - Bohemian Rhapsody", "The Clash - London Calling", "Rick Dees - Disco Duck", but this category is neither used nor developed at this stage.

4.1.5   Music during journalistic programmes

During a journalistic programme, we would expect the emphasis to be on the content rather than the music. Whilst it may seem very tempting to "theme" the music around the topic being discussed, this is not recommended. You can end up losing listeners because they if they do not like the content, then they probably also won't like the music and so will almost definitely tune out.

If a short clip of music that we would otherwise not play would enhance the story, then it should be constrained in duration such that the minimum to get over the style of the music is conveyed, which would normally be thirty to forty-five seconds.

Music can be a good way to provide continuity on journalistic programmes by constraining the duration of speech to no more than 4 minutes and then playing a song. This ensures listeners are likely to stay tuned even if they do not like the programme.

The music should be selected completely at random, in line with our normal programming clocks. The computer playout system will normally do this for you, and the music selected should not be changed, otherwise bias will result.

Where there is a real clash between two songs that are scheduled (such as a fast-paced song followed by a slow song) then two songs within the existing playlist may be swapped (such as moving the fast-paced song to later in the show and bringing another slow song forwards). Only two such swaps may take place in an hour, but never with the second song after a break (A-list).

4.1.6   Music during entertainment programmes

During entertainment programmes then presenters are encouraged, within limits, to adjust the style to suit themselves. In fact, within the clock, the first song after each break (on the hour and approximately half-past) is defined as "presenter selected" and presenters are actively encouraged to change this to suit themselves (particularly as an opening song into their show).

It is very surprising how having just two songs per hour changed can entirely change the feel of a programme whilst not alienating listeners. By following the "presenter selected" songs with an A-list tune (as per the clock) then if a song is played that listeners won't like then it will be mitigated by playing a favourite.

If a song which really is not acceptable is in the list, then it may be substituted. Where possible the artist should be kept the same, or if not, then a similar genre and age song should be selected to avoid bias. No more than two substitutions per hour should take place, and never with the second song after the break (the A-List song).

When listeners request songs, then, if possible, this should be inserted into the "presenter selected" slot. Otherwise, if possible, a similar song close to the desired play time should be substituted with the requested song (so if a 1960's song was requested then, if possible, this would replace another 1960's song).

4.2   Types of Music We Play

Our general policy is to play music that will appeal to thirty-five- to sixty-five-year-olds, independent of any other markers, such as ethnicity, race, religion, socio-economic group or similar.

Whilst this is clearly impossible to achieve, as a rule the following makes for a song that will fulfil this category:

- Chart music that is fifty to twenty years old, which currently is the years 1968-1998.
- Music that is in the style of this era is also acceptable, such as some of the "retro" music that is currently popular, non-processed, non-autotuned, non-chart contemporary artists. Therefore, whilst "Ed Sheeran" fits most of this criterion, many listeners find modern chart music by itself a turn-off by association. Mika is a good example of modern music we play.
- The music is "easy listening". Again, whilst this is difficult to define, we feel the following characteristics represent the music we play.
- Vocals are clear and "bright" (noticeably louder than the music and easy to understand)

- The tune is not excessively repetitive and progresses at a reasonable pace, so no three-minute-long slow introductions, although "Hotel California" by the Eagles is acceptable because the introduction progresses well.
- The music is not considered "aggressive". Vocals that are shouted or heavy metal/rock can be considered by some to be aggressive, and as such are not within our playlist. Queen therefore is not played.
- The music is generally 115-135 BPM. Music slower or faster than this may be acceptable depending upon other factors, but generally, we would not seek to play music slower than 90 BPM or faster than 150 BPM.

Generally, where possible, we aim for the more extended versions of songs. When selecting between a shortened 3 minute and full five minute edit, we would aim for the full five-minute edit, providing this does not result in a repetitive or unnecessarily long version. Note that extended versions may not be "radio safe".

Our average song duration is around four minutes, fifteen seconds. Our typical song length is 2:45 to 5:22. We aim not to have songs longer than 6 minutes or shorter than two minutes.

The music is one that you could imagine playing whilst carrying out most activities whilst listening to (resting, working, eating, socialising, etc).

We encourage lesser played but nonetheless popular music. We classify ourselves as an "album music station", which means we do not just play music that has made it to singles (as most other radio stations do).

5   Monitoring and Review

Soar Sound will monitor and evaluate the information that is appropriately collected in relation to the prevention of bullying and harassment duties, and will make periodic reports to the Director Board, making recommendations for improvements and changes to the Soar Sound's activities and communications.

Signed: Sam Hunt

Position: Operations and Events Director

Date: 9th March 2024

Review Date: 5th April 2024

Soar Sound