

Public Sector Radio in Scotland: A View from The Tenementals

As has been well documented in the media, there is considerable controversy over the significant changes to the BBC Radio Scotland schedule with the cancellation of evening and late-night shows. These changes, which were implemented at the end of 2025, provoked extensive protest from the music-making community in Scotland, with over 300 musicians and bands signing a Scottish Music Industry Association Open Letter to Radio Scotland calling for the changes to be shelved (<https://www.smia.org.uk/news/smia-open-letter-to-bbc-radio-scotland/>). The musicians and bands perceived this move as one which would significantly reduce the amount of new Scottish popular music being broadcast, amidst fears that there was a move to what was termed 'easy listening.' Against this backdrop, we thought it would be useful for the committee to hear the view of The Tenementals, a Glasgow-based band made up of academics and musicians who have been creating a history of Glasgow in and through song. We have extensive experience as radio listeners, musicians, record label owners (Strength in Numbers Records), ex-BBC employees, recording studio owners (La Chunky Studios), and academics at Glasgow-based higher education institutions (University of Glasgow, Glasgow School of Art and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland).

The Tenementals focus on making new songs about Glasgow and its past; however, our debut release consisted of two versions of Die Moorsoldaten (Peat Bog Soldiers), a classic anti-fascist anthem, first performed in Börgermoor concentration camp in August 1933. Our versions of the song received international recognition when we were contacted by archivists at Documentation and Information Centre of Emsland Camps, who requested that materials related to our recording – a CD, a video and sleeve artwork – be placed in their archive. We start with this story because we want to highlight that there is a lot more to music than 'easy listening'. Rather, In the spirit of *Taking Popular Music Seriously* (2007), edited by University of Edinburgh's Emeritus Professor of Popular Music, Simon Frith, we are aware of the multifarious ways in which popular music impacts on cultural, political and economic life.

On 29 February 2024, Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, tweeted as follows:

 **Angus Robertson** ✅ @AngusRobertson · Feb 29 ...

Check out 'The Peat Bog Soldiers' (Die Moorsoldaten) by Glasgow band @tenementals - commemorating German concentration camp prisoners. Sung in German and English. #DieMoorsoldaten ▶ #NieWiederFaschismus



youtube.com

The Tenementals - Peat Bog Soldiers (Die Moorsoldaten) was first performed in August 1933 in Börgermoor, a nazi ...

10

14

1.3K

Similar tweets were also posted by the Scottish Government office in Germany. These tweets demonstrate the cultural value of music in relation to international solidarities and international relations. We do not know how our versions of this song came to the attention of the Scottish Government; what we do know is that the track was broadcast on *The Iain Anderson Show*, one of the cancelled shows. With the planned changes emanating from BBC Radio Scotland, it is difficult to imagine songs such as 'Peat Bog Soldiers' being played in the future, which is worrying.

The Tenementals have been fortunate in that our music has featured on various BBC Radio Scotland shows, BBC Radio Orkney, 6 Radio (UK-wide BBC show), BBC Radio 2, and we have appeared on BBC Scotland television (*The Nine*). Our track, 'The Owl of Minerva' was played on *The Roddy Hart Show* with Hart commenting: "Absolutely brilliant It's like The Fall meets a slightly angrier Public Service Broadcasting." These types of radio plays (and favourable commentaries) are important for grassroots musicians for various reasons, including:

- 1) they introduce new music to new audiences. A key signifier of this is that we identify a noticeable growth in social media followers when our songs are heard on the radio.
- 2) when presenters add positive commentaries, this works to validate the music and can be leveraged effectively when attempting to secure public funding, for example from Creative Scotland, to cover recording costs.
- 3) they help to attract the attention of promoters and bookers, e.g. for music festivals
- 4) they generate revenue (when grassroots musicians receive virtually nothing from streaming platforms).

Questions of finance are, of course, vital. In 2024, music tourism accounted for £857 million of economic activity (both directly and indirectly) and generated 7,160 full-time equivalent jobs in Scotland's live music industries (UK Music, 2025a, p.16). Local grassroots music production is as important as high-profile global acts (from Scotland and beyond) in sustaining this activity. Another report from this industry body emphasises that the:

biggest single factor that makes the UK music industry a global success story is its ability to develop new UK artists, songwriters, musicians, and producers who generate revenues not only at home but around the world, and deliver export revenue back to the UK, which boosts GVA [gross value added]. In this context, the success of homegrown talent, and its continued development is extremely important. (UK Music, 2025b, p. 8)

Nurturing the grassroots is essential, particularly at a time when this form of music-making faces significant challenges, including the closure of small venues and the rising costs of recording and performing. Local radio, particularly BBC Radio Scotland, has long been a cost-effective way to promote and develop local musical talent. In his doctoral thesis (2015), Bob Anderson highlights the important role local radio played in developing Glasgow's music scene in the 1980s and 1990s. Shows, such as those presented by Peter Easton and John Cavanagh on Radio Scotland, validated Glasgow musicians whose music was broadcast, but more than that, the shows provided a focus for the local ecosystem built around performance venues and studios. These shows would not only play recorded music but also provide airtime for interviews with local musicians and live sessions. Community radio shows continue to do this, but they lack the broad reach (and stature) that a national station can provide.

BBC Music Introducing, a UK-wide radio scheme with local foci, provides a platform for unsigned and under-the-radar musical talent, yet it falls far short of fulfilling the role played previously by public sector radio. Reflecting on his experience in the mid-1990s, one of our band members, Bob Anderson, played drums with Kite Monster, and was provided with two opportunities to perform live on the John Cavanagh show in the BBC's Glasgow studios. He recalls the sense of achievement that these sessions gave the band and the extent to which they were then able to build network connections, both within local music communities and further afield, leading to a release on the London-based Fantastic Plastic label. Alas, sessions such as this are rarely on offer by Radio Scotland, signifying that the programme scheduling changes noted above are part of a longer-term trend, one which is diminishing BBC Radio Scotland's role in nurturing grassroots music activity in Scotland.

Commenting on her experience in the 1990s, Emma Pollock (solo artist, formerly of The Delgados and co-founder of the Chemikal Underground record label) sums up the centrality Radio Scotland can play within a grassroots creative hub. Her quote is lengthy but summarises what has been lost.

The original 13th Note in Glassford Street, Glasgow ... was of huge importance when we got together as a band in 1994. We were going along weekly to hear Radio Scotland presenters Peter Easton, John Cavanagh and Mark Percival DJ, and also watch a load of new bands that were being put on by Alex Kapranos and RM Hubbert at the time. There were loads of musicians there, all chatting about up-and-coming albums and tours, and there was a real sense of excitement that there was something to build on. The DIY scene was alive and well, and the idea of starting Chemikal Underground came out of all of that activity as there were so many great bands around. (quoted in Brash, 2018).

In our estimation, while there is still vibrant grassroots music scene in Scotland, there are significantly less opportunities for new bands to have their music played on BBC Radio Scotland than there was in the period Pollock discusses. Notably, in online discussions about the recent controversy, many bands commented that they had never had their music played on Radio Scotland, nor did they expect to.

These new proposals mark a further retreat from having an engaged and active community of radio and music practitioners, meeting with bands and audiences within and outwith the studio itself. In these circumstances, the move to diminish new music is a step in the wrong direction. In fact, community media is far more supportive of grassroots Scottish music. Stations such as CamGlen Radio, Sunny Govan Radio, Buena Vida Radio, podcasts such as Scots Whay Hae and websites such as The Ginger Quiff, provide extensive space to showcase new music in Scotland. BBC Radio Scotland managers might well benefit from looking at the approach taken by these community organisations.

We could close this short report with a list of recommendations; however, we think it would be more beneficial to open a broader conversation, one which places the recent controversy within a wider context. As such, we recommend that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee organise an inquiry focusing on the grassroots music scene in Scotland, including the role of broadcasting within it.

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The Tenementals are Bob Anderson, David Archibald, Ronan Breslin, Mark Ferrari, Olivia Maclean, Therese Martin and Simon Whittle.

<https://tenementals.com>

