

Marian Arnold's address to ABC Friends NSW & ACT Awards Night November 27, 2015 - Ultimo

Let me say first of all, many many thanks to you for presenting me with this wonderful award. It means a lot to me on several levels, and with that thought at the front of my mind, I'd like to tell you a story.

A story that takes us back about 70 years to the Second World War. Imagine a young cockney man of just 21, so fascinated by watches and radios that as a little boy he has spent all his spare time taking them apart and learning how they work. This young man is now an electronics expert; he has joined the army to fight with his big brothers even before he's legally quite old enough...but his obvious talents and expertise have been recognised, and now he's been posted to Normandy ahead of the landings to set up vital communications' systems. Dangerous, but critical. Radio was then, and would always be, in his blood, and after the war, even after having started a new career, and having taken a growing family to Australia as "Ten pound Poms", his home will always be filled with radios: crystal sets, valve radios, transistors, radiograms; as well as tape recorders, TVs, clocks, watches and sewing machines.

When his little daughter is seriously ill, he has a magical remedy to pass the time. The strange-looking home-made device he gives her has her interest immediately... she twiddles a knob and listens in to a police transmission... what excitement! ...twiddles some more and finds Alastair Cooke's "Letter from America"; here's the Wilfrid Thomas Show, here are the magnificent Glums in "Take it from here": remember the Glums? "Oh Ron, is anything on your mind, beloved?" "No, Eth." Here's H-Hancock's Half Hour, here's something in another language, fading in and out of snowy interference, here's a symphony orchestra. This is an entry into worlds beyond previous imaginings; this is enchantment.

Well, that radio man was my father, and I was his 8 yr old daughter, snuggled under the bedclothes with my magic radio. Radios, oscilloscopes, TVs, gramophones and tape recorders in all states of repair were the backdrop of my childhood. ABC Radio in Orange, where I grew up, was a lifeline of culture for my parents; I became Achilles 31 in The Argonauts' Club, my sister Christine, who is here with me tonight, was and in our household no Sunday morning was complete without Ralph Collins and 'Sunday Morning Concert'. Because music was the driving passion in our family.

So you could say the die was cast. When I did my very first audition for my job at ABC Classic FM, I felt I'd come home.

Classical Music broadcasting is traditionally the poor relation in the context of the greater ABC, and that is another way in which I'm especially pleased about this award. Journalists of course have extremely important roles, and might expect to receive awards for their difficult and sometimes dangerous work... but I am not a journalist, I have always been purely and simply a music broadcaster.

Some see this role as an opportunity to de-mystify the world of classical music. I have never been of that view... my ambition was always to allow my listener to actually experience/ live in and share the glorious mystique of that world... In my 34 years of music broadcasting I have attempted firstly to understand my listener's world, and then to share it with others. And for myself, the challenge - and it's a challenge that can be met in many different ways- but that challenge is of course to go right out through the microphone and straight into people's lives.

ABC Classic FM's "Listener Requests", or "Your Concert Choice" as it was originally known, was something nobody wanted when I took it on. And weekends at the time rated very poorly. That all changed, because behind the closed door of my office I constructed a very vibrant work life with our listeners. Taking Requests

on, and staying with it for 25 years, has repaid me 1000 fold, and I am now very moved, not just by the quantity of letters and emails I've been receiving on my retirement, but by their huge variety.

In the last dozen years or so it's become a radio cliché that we speak to just one listener... For those of us on air that's something you learn very early, but over the years my thought has been that we must go further and name that listener... Because that one listener is Everyman. Everyman, and Everywoman. In one is all, in all is one. And therein lies the beautiful and challenging paradox of radio.

So my own particular world of radio, made up of me, my listener and the music has been truly wonderful. And arriving at the ABC every day to work on my listeners' letters for all those years was quite something... Imagine this as the first thing you find in your inbox on a Monday morning.

"Dear Marian,

Every Sunday morning, I make bread. I find it a much more spiritual exercise than attending church.

And, of course, I always listen to your show.

I have to tell you that I don't know if it was the Schubert or Perlman's playing that caused my dough to have the most extraordinary proving (I might even have said an erection)...

Anyway, the bread turned out beautifully... So, thanks!"

That was from Ian Parmenter the chef...

Just the first letter of a Monday morning!

What lies ahead, people keep asking? Maybe career #3, who knows... I've certainly been having helpful advice ...A listener recently sent me a handcrafted leather stockman's purse, and strongly recommended pursuing a career in leather.

Or there's this one:

"Dear Marian, you are too young to be retiring. You have such a cheerful, comforting, soft, sensuous, caring voice ...which would be very useful at Rugby League games, Soccer Finals, any form of crowd control and of course in countries currently experiencing war."

And of course, I've loved speaking to my listeners in all the contexts in which I've been a broadcaster.

There are a great many pleasures I glean from the honour of this award. I love the great institution of the ABC, and I am passionate about its survival and growth in rather uncertain times. I particularly appreciate that through me, the Friends are recognising and honouring the role of classical music in ABC broadcasting. And I have to say that I derive much personal satisfaction from knowing that this award recognises what I've tried to bring to the realm of music as both presenter and producer for my entire career. I have been invited to retain my links with ABC Classic FM through broadcasting our live-to-air concerts, and I'm very happy about that. I still firmly believe in the magic of radio, and my goal from the very beginning of my career was to be a good and faithful servant of the ABC. My father is, I'm sad to say, not with us any more... but he would undoubtedly have been "tickled pink" by this moment.

To all of the Friends, may I close by saying how much the ABC appreciates your existence and your work on our behalf. I am truly honoured by this award, and will always treasure it. Thank you very, very much.