

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

CONTEXT (PRODUCTION)

BBC

- **Desert Island Discs** is a radio show on **BBC Radio 4**.
- First recorded in 1942 (one of the longest running radio shows).
- Aired on Sundays, repeated five days afterwards.
- Available as a **podcast** with 'listen again' function.
- **Lauren Laverne** is the current presenter of the show.
- **DID** is known by 70% of the British public (popular with 44%).
- **Desert Island Discs** blends music and speech broadcasting as a radio programme with a **specialist audience**.
- **DID** is a recognisable part of the **Radio 4 brand identity** – a **diverse** range of guests from different nations and regions within the UK – it is considered a **flagship programme** for the BBC.
- **DID** is described by the BBC as 'the home of intelligent speech, journalism, comedy and drama'.
- **Show premise**: guests imagine they are a cast away on a desert island – they have a copy of the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, but must now decide on 8 audio recordings, one book and one luxury item to take with them.
- This **format** allows guests to give a retrospective of their life.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

BBC RADIO 4

- The first episode was recorded during WW2 and aired on the Forces programme.
- After 5 years absent from the airwaves, it returned in 1951 to the Home Service in time for the Festival of Britain.
- In 1967, it transformed to the newly formed Radio 4 and has become a **'heritage show'**.
- For its first 46 years, it was presented by men.
- Since then, it has been presented by three women, illustrating **changing gender roles** in society and increased visibility of women in media after several **waves of feminism**.
- One **website section** features 'Motivational Women' and other **Black/ethnic minority guests** highlight **multicultural ethos** (Ian Wright, Claudia Rankine) that has developed after a **White dominant history**.
- It has featured politicians such as Boris Johnson, Theresa May, Nicola Sturgeon, Keir Starmer, Kemi Badenoch, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Benn.

INDUSTRY CONTEXT

[The BBC]

BBC STUDIOS

- **BBC** is financed through **public funding** in the form of a **license fee** – for access to all TV channels, and **streaming/downloading** services via **BBC iPlayer** and **BBC Sounds**.
- The **BBC** has some **commercial subsidiaries** (**BBC Studios**) with content sold to **global audiences** – as a result, the BBC can be seen as a **conglomerate** – a **parent company** with **subsidiaries** – a **vertically integrated** company with **production, distribution and sales division** – **DID** is made by **BBC Studios** (its for-profit arm).
- **BBC Radio 4** is a national radio station produced and run by the **BBC** which is a **global media organisation**.
- The **BBC** is a **public service broadcaster** with the **remit 'to inform, educate and entertain'** – **DID** caters for this remit.
- **BBC's Public Purposes are**:
 1. Provide impartial news and information...
 2. Support learning for people of all ages.
 3. Show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output...
 4. Reflect, represent and serve diverse communities...
 5. Reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world.

CONVERGENCE

BBC SOUNDS

- **DID's** **podcast archive** is approaching 2500 episodes through the **BBC official website**, **BBC iPlayer** and **BBC Sounds app**, reflecting the **digitally convergent** nature of the industry.
- **BBC** has invested heavily in **BBC Sounds**, its **on-demand audio streaming service** launched in 2018 with the aim to 'reinvent the BBC for a new generation'.
- **DID** are to extend its audience beyond the traditional, more **specialised Radio 4 audience**, encouraging new, younger listeners to the programme as well as making it available to **global audiences** for greater **overall reach**.
- **DID** is one of the Top 5 on-demand programmes on **BBC Sounds**, whilst being outside the Top 10 for live broadcasts, suggesting that the programme lends itself to **time-shift non-linear consumption** and **binge listening**.
- **Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB)** began in 1995 with **Web 2.0 capabilities** becoming mainstream in the early 2000s, opening the door to higher levels of **digitally convergent media** content – **BBC Sounds** was launched in 2018 for a new era of **diversification** for **Radio 4** programmes such as **DID**.



EPISODE ANALYSIS: 11 FEB 2024 GUEST: CILLIAN MURPHY

Radio show conventions:

- **presenter-led interview**: Lauren Laverne.
- **theme music**: 'By The Sleepy Lagoon', seagull sound effect
- **formula**: introduction of guest, discussion, 8 chosen tracks, choice of book, luxury item, favourite disc.
- **distinctive features**: personal anecdotes/biographical storytelling, informal conversational tone, polished transitions/sound bridges, sound effects such as waves.
- **conventions**: music show, chat show, documentary.
- **PSB values applied**: intelligent discussion, cultural appreciation, educational insight, respectful interviewing.

Cillian is very **candid** about his upbringing and influences, identifying with growing up in Cork, his teenage obsession with bands, discovering acting emotionally, protecting family privacy and his emotional connection to certain songs – audiences may develop a **parasocial bond** with Cillian.

REGULATION

Ofcom

- The **BBC** is regulated by **Ofcom** and all its radio programmes in order to meet **Ofcom's regulatory requirements**.
- **DID** rarely receives complaints that would go to **Ofcom**.
- The producers **self-regulate** prior to broadcast to make sure each episode meets **Ofcom** criteria.
- **DID** is a **pre-watershed** programme and is considered appropriate for all ages.
- Controversies have included Norman Mailer requesting marijuana as his luxury item in 1978, Sue Lawler asking Gordon Brown if he was gay in 1996, Yoko Ono mentioning abortion in 2007 and Morrissey discussing suicide in 2009.

8 chosen tracks:

1. Paul Simon – The Boy in the Bubble
2. Seamus Ennis – The Wandering Minstrel
3. The Frank and Walters – Walter's Trip
4. U2 – Bullet the Blue Sky
5. Queen – Somebody to Love
6. Radiohead – Everything in its Right Place
7. The Beatles – We Can Work It Out
8. Lisa O'Neill – If I Was a Painter

Book: Samuel Beckett – The Complete Dramatic Works
Luxury item: acoustic guitar and strings
Favourite disc: If I Was a Painter



AUDIENCE RESPONSE

- The core audience are an **older demographic** who have listened to **DID** for many years – **Radio 4** cater mostly for **55+ ABC1 upper-middle audiences**, often in the South of England.
- The show has been known to lack **diversity**, with most music artist choices being **White-centric**.
- The concept has been seen as **universally appealing** (the cast away premise) and the increasingly **inclusive and diverse** representation on the show highlights its evolution over different eras.
- Lauren Laverne as presenter arguably brings in a **younger demographic** – former singer in an alt-rock band, veteran radio DJ, 46 years old – **Radio 4's** strategy to attract **younger demographics** aims to build a **sustainable audience** for the future.

AUDIENCE PLEASURES

- **DID** fulfils many **needs and desires** for audiences – some enjoy hearing guests' music choices, whilst others appreciate their integrated life stories.
- Guests are known to disclose quite personal/private information about themselves and their backgrounds – audiences have **privileged access** and a level of **intimacy** which can create a parasocial relationship between listeners and guests.
- Jamie Dornan disclosed the impact of his mother's death, which was relatable for listeners, provoking **empathy** for the star.
- Some experience a level of **catharsis** with the transparent nature of what guests disclose.
- Radio can be seen as a **medium** that soothes listeners.
- Often, radio can be a background to peoples' everyday lives, which means **passive listening** is more common than a more active spectatorship for audiovisual **mediums** such as TV/Film.
- Many older listeners have an affinity where their sense of identity is deeply connected with the programme.
- **DID's** warm and friendly tone is inviting and familiar.

USES & GRATIFICATIONS

- **Entertainment Needs** – **DID** may appeal to the listener's **entertainment needs** in helping them escape and be diverted from reality, imagining what their 'desert island discs' would be, getting immersed in guests' personal stories and book/music/luxury item selections and vicariously living through the guests' experiences.
- **Knowledge/Education Needs** – **DID** may appeal to the listener's **knowledge needs** through namedropping music and literary references, as well as contextual information provided by the show host and guest for the episode.
- **Social Interaction Needs** – **DID** may appeal to the listener's **social interaction needs** through discussions with family and friends over guest selections, and the conversation may also develop on forums and social media online.
- **Personal Identity Needs** – **DID** may appeal to the listener's **personal identity needs** through comparing their life experiences with the 'castaways' (guests) and vicariously live through their character.