



REINVENTING RADIO TIMES

Editor Tom Loxley talks to [Rebecca Norris](#) about tuning into the streaming revolution and why his mag is not just for grannies

Tom Loxley is taken aback when asked about his first memory of *Radio Times*. I'm after something nostalgic, to neatly capture its history as a household staple. Perhaps a tale about being sent to the newsagents every week to buy a copy, coins jangling in his pocket, or the image of a yellowing stack of back issues in his parents' living room.

"Crikey," he says, scratching his beard. He thinks for a moment. "It wasn't in my house when I grew up. If you want the honest answer, I went to do a subbing shift."

Fresh out of City in the early 90s, he was sitting on a job offer from the *East Anglian Daily Times*. "They were going to pay me the princely sum of £6,000 a year," he recalls. "Then someone told me, 'you should go to the *Radio Times*, they're paying 90 quid a day.' And my second memory of the *Radio*

Times is that £90 a day proved too good a gig to turn down."

Evidently, Loxley is more practical than sentimental – a necessity for the editor of a magazine with an initial concept that has long been outmoded. Created as the world's

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first broadcast listings magazine in 1923, *Radio Times* is gearing up to celebrate its centenary next year. Times have changed since the magazine was filled with adverts for cigarettes and wireless sets. Today, an interview can be conducted over Zoom – Loxley backgrounded by fanning palm

leaves – and a television show can be watched on demand.

"If I were in the office and not in my jungle, I could show you the physical archives that we keep there," he says. It is a record that spans the infancy of the BBC, both world wars (where it had to contend with paper rationing) and the advent and deregulation of television. Weekly circulation peaked in 1955 at 8.8 million. The 1988 Christmas issue sold 11,220,666 copies, earning it a place in the *Guinness World Records* as the biggest-selling edition of any publication in British history.

Years later, having been sold on from the BBC to Immediate Media in 2011, *Radio Times* is their most successful title. It remains the biggest-selling quality magazine in the UK, despite broadcast listings being freely available, and a sizable

cover price of £3.80. So how does it manage to stay so popular?

Loxley became co-editor in March 2020, alongside Shem Law. But he hasn't been at *Radio Times* since those lucrative subbing shifts – he has served on the editorial board since 2010, having formerly been editor of *Maxim*. He is also the founding editor of garden magazine *Rakesprogress* ("it's my 'side hustle', as my teenage kids call it").

Upon assuming the top job at *Radio Times*, he inherited a struggle quite apart from the looming pandemic. "We took over the magazine two weeks before lockdown with this long-term structural problem. How do you get *Radio Times* ready for a world in which television is not watched in a linear way?"

To tackle such a heavy task, the magazine was captained by a duo for the very first time. No longer is the role just about getting an issue to print. There's a website, a festival, and a brand new podcast. "Two pairs of eyes, two sets of hands, two brains, make it all a bit more manageable," says Loxley.

An immediate order of business was expanding their streaming coverage. "If the magazine is going to reflect broadcasting today, it's got to reflect it in all its forms," he says. "A growing number of people do not watch TV according to a timetable. So we got straight out of the blocks with a vastly improved offering for streaming guidance."

Of course, all other challenges "paled" in comparison to the work-from-home order ("We had our work cut out getting a magazine out from 60 different kitchen tables.") But there were silver linings. The pandemic meant their expanded streaming coverage coincided with unprecedented membership rates to services such as Netflix. "The digital era had looked like it was spelling the end," Loxley admits. "But lockdown changed the way people consume television. More than 60 per cent of our readers subscribe to a streaming service now, which is amazing when you consider that percentage was about 15 per cent before I took over."

"The digital world, which up until very recently was seen as a threat, is now seen as an opportunity. Since we've started embracing the streaming programmes, we've seen our average reader drop quite considerably. The average age of the print reader of *Radio Times* – not the website – is 57."

Lockdown allowed the print magazine to consolidate its subscriber base. "Our circulation is still nearly half a million every week, which is huge, but more than 60 per cent of those buyers are subscribers. Before lockdown, our subscriber numbers were way, way smaller."

This means the magazine is able to take more risks. "You can start to put things on the cover that maybe talk to an audience beyond your heartland readers," Loxley explains. "It allowed us to start to experiment with putting streaming hits on the cover." By featuring Netflix's *Bridgerton* on the front, they got their biggest sale of 2021 aside from the Christmas issue.

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"It's helped us to explain to a whole new generation that *Radio Times* isn't just something they encounter at their grandparents' house at Christmas. If you want a Jodie Comer interview, or a Louis Theroux interview, or a Ricky Gervais interview, they've all been on the *Radio Times* podcast in the last few weeks."

"There's no stopping where you can go with it, if you stop thinking of it as just a

magazine," he says. "If you think of it as just a magazine, you're condemning yourself to be dismissed – and I would never use this phrase other than by way of example – as legacy media. You've got to develop it, you've got to take it to new platforms."

Across all these developments is one unifying ambition: to provide "the very best guidance when it comes to consuming any form of modern entertainment media". Where *Radio Times* was initially a catalogue, it has steadily grown into a map. Loxley is confident that this renewed purpose will not become obsolete any time soon. "In a world of myriad choice, to know what's worth your precious time is quite a commodity to deal in," he says. "You need someone who's going to do that sifting. As

we go into the future those choices are only going to get more complex and are going to require more navigation. That's what we hope we can provide in spades."

Gone are the days where a crumpled copy of the *Radio Times* could be dug out of millions of sofas across the country. But under Loxley's supervision, the magazine is far from floundering. That practicality has served him well. [X](#)



The first copy of *Radio Times*, published in 1923. Image credit: Radio Times