



Life on Air: A History of Radio Four

David Hendy

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Radio Four has been described as "the greatest broadcasting channel in the world", the "heartbeat of the BBC", a cultural icon of Britishness, and the voice of Middle England. Defined by its rich mix, encompassing everything from journalism and drama to comedy, quizzes, and short-stories, its programs--such as *Today*, *The Archers*, *Woman's Hour*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To the Galaxy*, *Gardeners' Question Time*, and *The Shipping Forecast*--have been part of British life for decades. Others, less successful, have caused offence and prompted derision. Born as it was in the Swinging Sixties, Radio Four's central challenge has been to change with the times, while trying not to lose faith with those who see it as a standard-bearer for quality, authoritativeness, or simply 'old-fashioned' BBC values.

In this first major behind-the-scenes account of the station's history, David Hendy--a former producer for Radio Four--draws on privileged access to the BBC's own archives and new interviews with key personnel to illuminate the arguments and controversies behind the creation of some of its most popular programmes. He reveals the station's struggle to justify itself in a television age, favouring clear branding and tightly-targeted audiences, with bitter disputes between the BBC and its fiercely loyal listeners. The story of these struggles is about more than the survival of one radio network: Radio Four has been a lightning rod for all sorts of wider social anxieties over the past forty years. A kaleidoscopic view of the changing nature of the BBC, the book provides a gripping insight into the very nature of British life and culture in the last decades of the twentieth century.

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