corruption was rampant because state structures in Somalia were underdeveloped and extremely weak. There were no democratic institutions, and there was no accountability on the part of political leaders. Somalia's economic problems were aggravated by Barre's misguided macroeconomic policies, by a lack of technical expertise, and by poor project selection and implementation. The foreign aid Somalia received was not invested in profitable ventures, and by the late 1980s the Somali economy had almost ground to a halt.

To make a bad situation worse, by the late 1980s Somalia had been deserted by all its friends and neglected by all but one of the Western powers. Washington terminated aid to Somalia in the wake of human rights violations in 1989. By 1990 Italy was the only Western power working with Somalia, putting the economy on a sound footing. It failed, largely because of Somalia's complex political problems, rampant corruption, and of course the feuding clans.

Barre's defeat in January 1991 accelerated the disintegration of Somalia. First, the anti-Barre opposition had only their interest in the defeat of Barre in common; other than that they hated each other almost as much as they did Barre. Second, when Barre was overthrown power was immediately assumed by the Hawiye, a clan that played virtually no role in the anti-Barre struggle until a few months before his fall. Third, President Mahdi was appointed by the USC without consulting the other groups.

Since the overthrow of Barre there have been several clan-based civil wars in Somalia, and given the fragmentation of society it has been hard to gauge the direction of the fighting. Among the warring guerrilla groups now are Barre's own forces, which regrouped in southern Somalia and have been trying to topple the Mahdi regime. This is implausible, yet they are still capable of making life hard for the new government.

Around Mogadishu the USC has been fighting on several fronts—including against its own breakaway groups. On another front, the USC has had to deal with disaffection from the SPM and other political groups which have been dissatisfied with the post-Barre power-sharing arrangement.

After taking power Mahdi had proposed a 'conference of national reconciliation', but other groups refused to attend. The conference was finally convened in June and July 1991, but the various political groups were still so divided that it was hard to see how they would coordinate their programs.

Mediation efforts in Somalia have failed for several reasons: the various clans and sub-clans still hate each other vehemently; the clan leaders or warlords have virtually no legitimacy and can be abandoned by their supporters at any time; and the number of clan militias keeps rising. Somalia's inter- and intra-clan rivalry can be resolved only when clan leaders or warlords agree to unite and persuade their supporters to do the same. But without tangible political and economic rewards to show for years of fighting, the warlords have been unable to persuade their fighters to put down arms. In his heyday Barre succeeded in bribing clan leaders with political office and economic rewards, but the country is now so poor and disorganised that such rewards are no longer tenable. In the long term only strong state structures, efficient and accountable government and appropriate macroeconomic policies will save Somalia.

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Jaywalking

It was a momentous event in radio journalism. Brett Whiteley had been dead for less than a day and the JJJ reporter was hot on the case. Interviewing a gallery owner she got to the point: "Just how influential was he?"

That's rather typical of JJJ: in pursuit of shoehorning a perceived point of cultural interest into terms acceptable to their idea of a youthful point of view, JJJ boil Whiteley down to how much you should care he's dead. It's the sort of thing you're likely to find every day on the station: perhaps well-meaning, but often just crass. As Australia's one and only 'Youth Network' (though Sydney and Melbourne both have male youth-oriented, commercially successful MMMs) the station inhabits a curious place in radio. Mildly 'intellectual', it's designed for the 15-24 age group, the inheritors of a strange white liberal middle-class suburban landscape which can only be populated by the sort of 'typical' families of ABC dramas and sitcoms.

This is a far cry from the assumed JJJ audience of the 70s and early 80s: coffee/beer/coffee-skulling, trendy-haircutted, casually-university-attending, t-shirt-wearing, already-been-overseas-once-and-hope-to-go-again-next-year music fans.

One might argue that it's better to cater for the odd suburban teen reject here and there as a Youth Network than to wallow in the Golden Oldies of the New Wave for the sake of an ageing band of 'Jays' lovers. Yet JJJ doesn't have many listeners these days anyway, probably because it doesn't play the music that the majority of kids really enjoy—it brings too much of its aged knowledge of what's gone before. Aussie MOR rocker Rick Price, for instance, is hardly likely to get a look in on JJJ because he's not a 30 year-old's idea of what a 15 year-old should like.
Yet his willowy ballads (and equally willowy long brown hair and meaningful gaze) probably make him the current favourite of the teen audience. It would not be too unfair to suggest that JJJ often takes a particularly patronising attitude to mainstays of teen life (TV soaps for instance) which serves as a policy compromise: while JJJ cannot condone mainstream teen culture, it can still mention it knowingly (if somewhat dismissively). Part of the problem is of course the difficulty of appealing both to 15 year-olds and their 24 year-old elder siblings—quite a stretch, when you think about it.

However, this ‘sophisticated’ attitude leads to curious (and irritating) consequences. One JJJ DJ recently announced that he would have a new track from Morrissey coming up in the next hour, adding sarcastically that he was “looking forward to that”. One wondered, if playing Morrissey is so stupid, why do it? And if JJJ plays Morrissey because some people in their audience like him, does that mean they’re saying parts of their audience are stupid? The DJ’s comment rather neatly encapsulated JJJ’s dilemma: despite its best (or worst) instincts, it cannot comfortably endorse any particular musical artist at any particular moment. Morrissey is cool to some people in the 15-24 age group; to others he is a wimp and a whinger. Mainstream radio—like the MMMs in Sydney and Melbourne—cannot easily make value judgements on music because they only play current hits and items from the ‘Heritage Rock’ canon (see John Potts on ‘Heritage Rock’ in Philip Hayward’s From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism, Allen and Unwin, 1992).

Which is not to say that JJJ does not have its own canon. Though many of the announcers who created the original Sydney 2JJJ are no longer there, JJJ still seems to adhere to a very inner-city Sydney-based view of music. There are certainly no garage bands on the station: the closest you’ll get are people with an ‘underground’ heritage, and even they are treated with some trepidation.

Again probably because of its Sydney base, JJJ has always had leanings towards the mainstream end of ‘alternative’, and its recent rejection of an ‘alternative’ audience has probably not made a huge difference to its music programming. DJs have little say in what they play and either apologise for or criticise sarcastically anything that’s unfamiliar. (Though it might not make a lot of difference if they did; when the BBC’s Radio One allowed their DJs to make a choice in the music they played a few years ago, they found the announcers played less new material than they had previously. Everyone has their ‘golden age’.) One listener reports calling up JJJ to congratulate a DJ for playing a particularly ‘different’ track, only to be told by the crestfallen announcer that “it was supposed to be a joke!”

On the whole, however, the new JJJ is not the unmitigated disaster that fear of the unknown might have led fans to expect. A breath of fresh air might have been just what the station needed—though the sackings in late 1990 which accompanied the ‘new look’ could have been handled better in almost any other way. And while the youth of Australia might have an inbuilt resistance to anything not including Coke ads and announcers who sound like they’re shouting through a megaphone, one can only assume that every few days, somewhere around Australia, some spotty adolescent accidentally flips their dial a few degrees to the left and hears a program or a song that changes their mind.

That, after all, was the cry of the new wave groups: “if we can change just one person’s attitude!” And that’s probably the most we can hope for from our Youth Network. Whether it’s worth using so much taxpayer’s money on such a tiny cause is debatable. But if it’s a toss-up for the ABC between JJJ or another drama in the Brides of Christ mould, I for one will be rooting for the Jays.

Just as long as I don’t have to listen to it more than once every three months.

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