

In Praise of Early Music Radio, UK

By Nick Fritsch

Every now and then, someone still does something completely on their own with internet technology, with only a rough idea of how to go about it, and with virtually no thought of how it will turn a monetary profit, that turns out to be something absolutely extraordinary. Such a venture is **Early Music Radio UK**, the web based, 24/7 independent streaming ‘radio’ station whose playlists are exclusively made up of music from recordings of Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods, (and later music performed on period instruments) seasoned with a zesty pinch of Shakespearean and other spoken recitation thrown in for good measure. The venturer in this case is a gentleman named Steve Foulds. Foulds is a father of five (soon to be a grandfather) who lives with his wife Jenny about thirty miles north of London in Hertfordshire. He is a professional building surveyor for a Hertfordshire affordable-housing provider, and also a musician with an eclectic range of musical influences. His first exposure to early music came when he studied classical guitar in his teens, and had to learn a few early pieces for that instrument. He traces the genus of his lifelong love for early music to this experience, though he goes on to explain that he then “*spent the next twenty or so years playing semi-pro in rock and country bands!*”

Over the next decades, Foulds amassed a sizable collection of early music recordings on vinyl LPs. One of Steve’s heroes was the late David Munrow, and his LP collection featured many

recordings by that groundbreaking early music pioneer. Then, as happens to most of us, life intervened and in time his LP collection gradually took a back seat to later acquired compact discs that mostly reflected other musical passions. Then, only two years ago, while cleaning out his garage, he rediscovered the early music vinyl collection he had amassed over so many years, at earlier stages in his life. Where others might simply have argued with themselves whether or not to donate or sell the LPs, or if he should drag them into the living room for a fresh round of rediscovery, Steve first did the latter, but later, after thinning the collection to the recordings he really valued and wanted to hear repeatedly, (primarily those of early music), he somehow jumped to the radical idea of starting his own web-based radio station. Rather than talking himself out of this fleeting, possibly half insane brainstorm, he set about to actually do just that.

With only a rudimental foundation in the technical, legal, or myriad of other challenges this was certain to involve, Foulds then took every step in this complex process one ladder-rung at a time, making sure to never look down along the way. In March 2009, he secured his domain name, and only then learned from Britain’s PPL and PRS (the organizations that govern the mechanical and performance rights for music in the UK), that he was not allowed to just play his record collection in any manner he might want, and that he was required to purchase costly and complex licenses from those organizations and faithfully

follow stringent sets of governing rules for publicly performing copyrighted music. Then, he encountered numerous disappointments and setbacks regarding the convoluted and often frustrating process of securing reliable hosting for streaming high quality audio in a manner that functions as well and as consistently as the best and most listened-to, high-end services on the internet.

Foulds attributes much of his initial success with meeting the daunting technical challenges he has faced getting his station up and running, to the expertise of his daughter Vicki's fiancé, Stu, who fortunately happens to be an IT professional...

"I have a great deal of affection for Stu – and he, a great deal of patience with his future father-in-law. With a brain the size of a planet, he uncomplainingly explained to me, in what it seemed were words of single syllables, the mysteries of the binary universe and how it all related to my insignificant position in the grand scheme of things. He also knocked up – in a matter of seconds, my very first web page."

Early Music Radio, UK commenced web-casting in Easter Week 2010, and has been engaged in a non-stop process of growth and improvement ever since. The international audience has begun to grow dramatically as well. Says Foulds, *"...already, I have made many new friends around the world, who just like me, enjoy listening to the same sort of beautiful music."* The website offers several different streaming options, including *Real Player*, *Winamp* and *iTunes*, and all seem to function flawlessly. One notably impressive aspect is the service he obtains from

Wavestreaming.com in particular, that allows **Early Music Radio UK** to play seamlessly in high fidelity through *iTunes*. I have yet to encounter even one momentary "hiccup" or glitch in the streaming process. The audio quality is excellent and the streaming is as, (or possibly more) consistently reliable than even some of NPR stations I routinely listen to via Internet. The onscreen index system conveniently lists every track as it is played (or at least as much fits in a single line of text – which is generally enough). In fact, once one starts listening to **Early Music Radio UK**, its ease of use, high quality and reliability quickly make it a permanent fixture in one's music-listening life.

EMR UK's playlist is top notch, including a broad and wonderful wealth of performances by such Early Music titans as *Emma Kirkby*, *Anonymous Four*, *René Jacobs*, *The Kings College Choir*, *Thomas Binkley*, *Paul Odette* and others, but also contains recordings by many somewhat less well known collegiums, camaratas and cathedral choirs, performing all manner of renaissance polyphony, monody, madrigal singing and more. Spending an evening or an entire day with the wide range of Early music played **Early Music Radio UK** offers an incredibly rich, commercial free, musical experience that is a godsend for those who love the genre.

In addition to the enjoyment of being able to partake of a wide selection of history's greatest music whenever the mood strikes, some of the excitement and inspiration I also personally get listening to **Early Music Radio, UK**, comes from knowing that this was all accomplished by the sheer will of one

dedicated, tenacious individual, whose driving focus was simply to find a way to share and explore his love of this great music with others. No business plan, no particular expertise, no multiple reworkings of proposals or meetings with hired consultants - just an unshakable desire to accomplish what he set out to do – no matter what!

Precisely what the future will hold for Steve Foulds's adventure in web radio, it is still not altogether clear. However Foulds, ever the pragmatic optimist, is not concerned:

“As for the outlook going forward, I don't really know. I'm not doing this for profit – I doubt I'll break even in the foreseeable future. However, it's great fun and whilst it remains so, I'll be here, growing the playlist and adding new features to the station – just as long as I can get to grips with the technology.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” For me, and I suspect for many others as well, **Early Music Radio UK** is a most agreeable and welcome stroll down such a brand new trail.

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