

EXHIBITION REVIEW

On Air: 40 Years of 3RRR, exhibition curated by Angela Bailey, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 2016–17

The exhibition ran from 18 November 2016 to 26 February 2017

A summer afternoon in Melbourne on a shoestring budget has always had a lot of potential. On one such lazy Sunday afternoon I found myself at the State Library enjoying the free Triple R exhibition, which was celebrating the radio station's impressive and at times turbulent 40 years on air.

Triple R has embedded itself as the beating heart of Melbourne's community broadcasting. Since its early punk-infused beginnings in the 1970s (when the station was based at RMIT's city campus) to the infamous Fitzroy rooftop gigs in the 1990s, Triple R has achieved a staggering amount of success and support along the way and has played host to an impressive line-up: Nick Cave, Ray Charles, Martha Wainwright, PJ Harvey, Jeff Buckley, Billy Bragg, Ruby Hunter, Archie Roach and Paul Kelly just to name a handful.

Ever since its inception, the station began to build up a loyal and passionate base of listeners, subscribers and volunteers. As a not-for-profit, it's these ties that have made – and continue to make – Triple R possible. Grounded in the community, Triple R represents 'an independent voice, critical investigation of culture and a passionate approach to music', as exhibition curator Angela Bailey puts it.¹

It is this sense of community that the Triple R exhibition aimed to communicate, using an eclectic array of records from the archive to show the strong network of people that have given the radio station life: 'It really is quite an incredible story of what a great community powered by goodwill can achieve', says Triple R station manager Dave Houchin.²

The exhibition was a powerful homage to the community Triple R has created, with walls of the gallery dedicated to the volunteers running the show; endless posters for community events and gigs; passionate letters written by listeners professing their devotion to the station; Community Cup and Megahertz memorabilia; and hundreds of photographs all documenting Triple R's journey.

The relaxed and friendly exhibition space within the Keith Murdoch Gallery was a perfect fit for Triple R. Couches and armchairs were side by side with old recording equipment, and screens in the gallery played a rotation of the station's recorded gigs and interviews.

The importance and value of small-scale community archives such as Triple R's cannot be understated. Such archives play an important role in reflecting and recording our culture and identity. Triple R's archive is a beautiful testament to the evolution of the Melbourne music scene and the colourful characters who helped shape it.

Following the conclusion of the exhibition, the Triple R archival collection was donated to the State Library. Kate Torney, CEO of State Library Victoria, had this to say of the Triple R archive:

Triple R has an incredible archive that is very much part of Melbourne's story, capturing the cultural heartbeat of the city. With our shared commitment to community, we are thrilled the Library will be the home for this extraordinary collection, and it's great that people will get to see some of these items for the very first time.³

This budding partnership between a community organisation and a collecting institution is an important one. Such partnerships increase access to a wider range of resources to a wider network

of people, while also serving to make community archives more sustainable, especially in times of economic uncertainty. Such partnerships make cultural resources discoverable in new and different ways and enable local groups to achieve goals they would never have the time, money or resources to complete on their own.


It's not only the community organisations that benefit from such partnerships, however. New and ongoing relationships with not-for-profit associations play an invaluable role in extending the services which institutions such as the State Library can offer to the public and also help to foster knowledge-sharing platforms that extend well beyond the confines of the library's walls. Houchin said:

We are so excited to partner with the State Library. It's a fantastic way to celebrate the work of Triple R's volunteer broadcasters over the past 40 years and the many achievements that have been made possible due to the hard work of volunteers and staff, and the amazing support of Triple R subscribers.⁴

Overall, a marvellous way to spend a spare hour.

Endnotes

1. Lynnette Foo, 'Summer Exhibition Celebrating 40 Years of Triple R Now on Show at State Library Victoria', State Library of Victoria Blog, 17 November 2016, available at <<http://blogs.slv.vic.gov.au/news/summer-exhibition-celebrating-40-years-of-triple-r-now-on-show-at-state-library-victoria/>>, accessed 15 February 2017.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*

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