



# LIVE AND LET DIAL

The late-night phone in is radio's traditional graveyard shift, a twilight zone populated by boring bastards with no lives, the perfect insomnia cure. Until now. Nick Abbot's ruthless Perform Or Piss Off policy and supporting cast of cretins, fanatics and weirdo's is fast becoming essential listening, VIRGIN 1215 AM's only saving grace.

**MAT SMITH** meets the man no-one's calling "Jack Killian with attitude"

If you think the phone-in is a magnet for every inarticulate cretin of pensionable age, a piece of tortoise-paced programming for the terminally retarded, designed only to save on the sleeping pill bill and basically about as riveting as a triple-CD compilation of Chris Rea outtakes, you definitely haven't heard The Nick Abbot Show.

Sacked from GLR's Breakfast Show for being a grumpy sod, the 32-year old Abbot learnt his trade first as the Virgin Megastore DJ in Oxford Street then on Radio Luxembourg hosting a more abusive but more childish version of the show he now runs on Virgin.

*"Basically, the whole idea was that it went out without a seven-second delay and, as soon as kids found out they could say 'fuck' on the air, they did. I used to have my hand hovering over the kill switch. It was almost a test of speed. I'd be cutting them off at the 'f' before the 'ck'. They got wise to it and would ring up and say, 'Oh great show Nick, and fuck off!' I haven't had much of that on Virgin, which is good."*

On Virgin, Abbot encourages - if not exactly a more esoteric approach - then certainly a higher degree of innovation from his callers. One show boasted a call from a guy who claimed there was a dolphin in his bath while another swore blind that musicians from the Sixties were time travellers who had been sent to give their fans a message that only a few would understand. Another guy, who said that he could see how a jury made up of people like that could allow a teenage murderer to go free, was quickly dumped for being too serious.

*"There was one call last night that was supposed to have come from a family listening in Greece," Abbot smirks, "They had a Greek TV station going on in the background, she could barely understand a word of English and she was talking Greek to people in the room. It sounded real. So, after the show, we checked with Mercury and found out that you can't call the programme from a foreign country."*

*"I'm always pleased when someone makes an effort because so few do. Over here, your typical phone-in is, 'Hello, Mrs Scroggins, so you've lost your parrot, have you? Well, let's talk about that for 10 minutes' People aren't allowed to rabbit on about nothing for ever."*

Abbot won't stand for that. His is a gong show in which the caller is expected to either perform or piss off. At times proceedings sail perilously close to the wind, liberally flouting libel laws along the way.

*"Before we went on the air, they invited me to talk to a lawyer about libel. After half an hour, I was none the wiser. I know very little about the law, frighteningly enough."*

*"If somebody says that John Major is an arsehole and shouldn't be running the country, people are amazed that it's on the radio. Nobody's doing that. All you get is a barrage of niceness from the radio. All everyone seems to want is another grinning plastic arsehole, and I'm sick of it."*

Abbot blames the BBC for this state of affairs. After all, most people in British radio have been trained by a corporation that seems determined

to live down to its nickname, "Auntie".

*"In this country, the most important thing about radio is not to offend anyone. Because the first complaint of any kind anywhere that I've worked - except here - is a major fucking scandal. Some 90-year-old fart writes in and says, 'Nick Abbot shouldn't be saying small yappy dogs need shooting in the head,' and it's a case of, 'Well, it's been nice, but here's the door'."*

When he started the programme, Abbot reckons he was managing about one good show a week. Now, even by his own tough standards, he reckons he's hitting two. One couple were so impressed they even called their twins, presumably conceived while the radio was on, Nicola and Nicholas!

*"Talking to them is one thing, but obviously you wouldn't want to meet any of these people," he explains, horrified by the very idea. "What a scary thought. Most of them you think, fucking hell! They shouldn't even be allowed out!"*

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