

Tim Baker

XXXXXXXXXXXX@XXXXXXXXXX.mn

11th January 2011

Dear Mr Baker

Freedom of Information request – RFI20101633

Thank you for your request to the 15th December requesting the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000:

“could you tell me if the BBC still refused to play the song “God Save the Queen” by the Sex Pistols after it was banned by the corporation in 1977”

In addition you also wanted to know:

“is the conspiracy theory true that the Sex Pistols song “God Save the Queen”, did reach number 1 in the singles chart, but the chart was fixed and it only reach number 2 in 1977”

The unique reference for your request is RFI20101633.

Firstly I should explain that information held by the BBC is only covered by the Act where it is held for purposes “other than those of journalism, art or literature” (see Schedule I, Part VI of the Act). We are not therefore obliged to supply information held for the purposes of creating the BBC’s output or information that supports and is closely associated with these creative activities. Information which is not subject to disclosure under the Act because of Schedule I might otherwise be exempt from disclosure because of the application of other provisions of the Act.

However in this case I am happy to volunteer the information



If you look at our current BBC Guidelines you will see that a key component when production teams are making any editorial decision is “context”. For programme makers today that would include the following:

- the surrounding editorial material
- the service on which the content is available
- the time at which it is available
- other programmes or content that are available around the programme or content concerned
- the likely size and composition of the potential audience and likely expectation of the audience
- the harm or offence likely to be caused by the inclusion of the particular content in output generally, or in output of a particular nature or description
- the extent to which the nature of the content can be brought to the attention of the potential audience, for example, by signposting and content information
- the effect of the content on audiences who may come across it unawares.

Not all of these factors would have carried the same weight, but programme makers are asked to take into account each of these points.

In 1977 the guidance would have been slightly different, but the editorial decision would have been based on “context”. At that time the decision was taken to ban the record, but programmes makers today may well have taken a very different decision

On your second point, while the BBC broadcasts the chart, it doesn't actually compile it. In 1977 it was done by the British Market Research Bureau (BRMB). However you may be interested in the following website: <http://www.everyhit.com/number1quirks.html> , which contains the attached webpage

The 'Urban Myth' Number One **The Sex Pistols - "God Save The Queen"**

1977 marked The Queen's Silver Jubilee - 25 years on the throne. The occasion was marked with celebrations at every level throughout the UK. During the summer months The Queen embarked on a large scale tour, the climax of the national celebrations being on the evening of Monday 6th June when she lit a bonfire beacon at Windsor which started a chain of beacons across the country.

1977 also marked the year when Punk Rock took a real grip on the chart. Leading the way were The Sex Pistols. They made no secret of their contempt for royalty, releasing a highly irreverent punk version of "God Save The Queen" during the Summer. As the chart for w/e 11th June was about to be made public (on Tue 7th June - the day after the climax of the jubilee celebrations), the newspapers were rife with speculation that The Sex Pistols were going to be number one for the historic week. In the event, Rod Stewart's rather more placid double-A side "I Don't Want To Talk About It" / "First Cut Is The Deepest" retained its number one position for a fourth week. Rumours then circulated wildly that the chart-compilers had caved in to pressure and 'fixed' the

chart to avoid controversy. So convincing were some of the stories that the NME actually listed The Sex Pistols as number one!

Anecdotes which have come to light since support the theory that many people held at the time; that the whole media frenzy was whipped up by The Pistols expert manager/publicist Malcolm McLaren! "God Save The Queen" was never a number one.

Appeal Rights

The BBC does not offer an internal review when the information requested is not covered by the Act. If you disagree with our decision you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. Contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF telephone 01625 545 700. <http://www.ico.gov.uk>

Yours sincerely,

Chris Burns
Group Manager Audio & Music