

## TV & Media

By [Sarah Foster](#)

Sunday 3 February 2008

### Sunday 3rd February – God save the

**BBC's the anarchy of kids' TV** Most likely because now, for the first time ever, we're probably legitimately old enough to look wistfully back to days long gone, and remember how much we used to love our jelly shoes and pokemon cards. We are allowed to admit to the entire dance floor that yes, we do know all the dance moves to every Steps songs ever released, because kitsch is cool, and the nineties were obviously the best decade ever, so shut up if you think anything different.

Although I'm not really sure that nineties were that great at all. Yes, I remember enjoying those ten years ago great deal, but I'm probably not the best person to wax lyrically on the topic of the last decade of the century, because I was child for a most of it. My cultural reference points aren't the war in Kosovo or the reunification of Germany. I can't really remember Labour's landslide victory in 1997. I remember John Major had glasses and that's about it. Of course, I could probably name all the Blue Peter presenters. (I always liked Katy Hill the best.) That was the nineties for me; television programmes and bubblegum pop. I read Smash Hits magazine. I had a great time, yes, but that's because I was very easy to entertain when I was nine years old. And I don't think that this was because I was a particularly stupid child. I think it was simply because I was child. Moving images were enough to keep me occupied for a couple of hours. I'll always remember one super exciting babysitting job I took when I was sixteen. It was a Saturday evening, and the two pre-pubescent boys I was supposed to be looking after were slumped in front of the television. They stayed like this for most of the evening, not even bothering to change the channel. They sat there watching Casualty. And then the Lottery. And finally a television show dedicated to the comedy of Victoria Wood. Now, I, aged sixteen, quite liked Victoria Wood, but I found it very hard to believe that a six year old thinks "I enjoy Victoria Wood's powers of finding humour in the everyday and her skills at satirising the British class system."

You'd think then, making television shows specifically designed for children would be easy. They'll watch any old crap, especially if it makes reference to bodily fluids at some point. But I remember enjoying my diet of CBBC. It was very good indeed. The fact that any conversation about the nineties eventually ends up being a conversation about television surely proves this. Yes, it might have been because again, we were children, and all children seem to do anymore is watch television. But in part it must have been because these shows were just a bit amazing. Who wouldn't want to watch an animated show about a group of animals led by a polar bear who lived on a floating island? Or a show in which a mild-mannered school girl turned into a giant hulking monster? Or even a show about a tone deaf choir? (Noah's Island, Julia Jekyll and Harriet Hyde and Out of Tune respectively.) These were works of pure genius. I'm still waiting for the day they release Microsoap on DVD.

Compared to these gems, children's television today seems rather less exciting. There's no more Live and Kicking, no SMTV. In fact, ITV doesn't even have after-school children's scheduling anymore. In these days of multi-channel television, they don't feel it is necessary for children's television to be shown on their main channel. Which might be a good thing, as I'm still certain that all children's television at the

moment is a bit crap. I'm not pretending to be an expert on the topic, but I will announce (somewhat shamefacedly) that I've seen my fair share of the recent crop of children's television. Some of it is very good indeed (Charlie and Lola is a favourite of mine, even though it is aimed at pre-school children.) It seems that once they get a bit older television flounders. Or at least I was under the impression. That was until, on one fateful day, I turned to the CBBC channel. (In my defence, I had an essay to write, and anything is better than an essay; even poorly written children's television.) I was greeted by a strange manchild and a cactus puppet. Poor CBBC; how the mighty have fallen. But wait ... the manchild was explaining a new segment to his show, using a giant picture of the head of his own mother. He begins to ask the giant disembodied head questions, which he then replies to himself, in a high-pitched tone which I assume was his attempt to mimic his mother's voice. We learnt her name, what her job was and her likes and dislikes. "Anything else you'd like to tell us?" the manchild asked. (The cactus stayed quiet during this piece, but I imagine he always gets a little uncomfortable when people bring up the issue of parentage.) "Yes," he replied to himself, again using his odd 'I'm pretending to be my own mother' voice... "POO!!!"

What I had stumbled across was 'Parents Say Poo', a unique idea which requires the audience of the CBBC channel to send in a picture of their parent and some interesting facts about them. The manchild will then blow up this picture and proceed to embarrass said parent by making their head scream 'POO' on national television. This is obviously amazing. This is what children's television should be about. Nobody wants to watch semi-educational programmes about living like evacuees. And if CBBC aren't going to play repeats of Maid Marian and Her Merry Men then the least they can do is allow brilliant things like this sneak onto television. Long live anarchic children's television! Now excuse me, I'm off to play the bogey game in the library.



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### 3 comments

James MacDougald

3 Feb '08 at 7:41 pm

Kids' programming may be mindless and scatological - but children are idiots. Much more depressing are some of the things Channel 4 has to offer after the watershed: the creators of 'Supersize v. Superskinny' are evidently marketing prodigies, and must have an appreciable understanding of the poverty of the nation's cultural appetite. Though there are possibly worse ways to pass the time, watching this programme is, in essence, equivalent to watching caged animals being prodded with sticks.

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Jenny O'Mahony

4 Feb '08 at 4:49 pm

James,

Some of us enjoy watching caged animals being prodded with sticks. Just because it doesn't fit into your fascistic interpretation of "entertainment" doesn't mean it's not worthwhile. I love that I can moderate this comment into existence.

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James MacDougald

6 Feb '08 at 10:57 am

So unprofessional.

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