

The Pocket Oxford History of 4ZZZ-FM

Where did it all start? On the station's fourth anniversary, long time staff member John Stanwell outlines the history of Triple-Z from the beginning.

July 14 1971 — The Queensland Government declared a State of Emergency to protect the Apartheid-based Springbok Rugby Union Team. The excessive police action and blatant media bias at this time was the straw that broke the camel's back, and informal planning began for an independent media outlet in Brisbane.

March 1973 — Following the election of a Federal Labor Government, the reaction against the cultural and political bias of existing media outlets consolidated in the (University of Queensland) Union Media Committee, a group formed to lobby for an experimental radio licence. The Committee met regularly, discussing programming, community involvement, technical requirements, finance, F.M. or A.M.?, and staffing, while making constant submissions to all relevant government departments.

Early 1974 — Prime Minister Whitlam established an Independent Inquiry into F.M. Broadcasting.

February 17-21 1975 — The Media Committee, using the call sign 4ZZ-FM, was granted an experimental licence to broadcast to the University of Queensland campus during Orientation Week. The station was on air from 10am to 5pm daily, broadcasting contemporary and specialist music, news, and current and student affairs.

June 1975 — Dr. Moss Cass was appointed as Media Minister, and indicated that he may soon issue experimental radio licences.

July 1975 — Cass commissioned a Working Party on Public Broadcasting. Jim Beatson of 4ZZ-FM was one of only two representatives of the Public Broadcasters appointed to this committee. It was later decided that the term Public Broadcasting would be reserved for the ABC, while the new sector was referred to as Community Broadcasting.

August 1975 — 4ZZ-FM conducted a second test transmission from the Park Royal Motel, to coincide with the Brisbane Hi-Fi Show. Hours were Fri. 5pm to 10pm, Sat. 10am to 10pm, and Sun. 10am to 8pm. The transmitter was located in the bathroom of the station's motel room, and the door to the room had to be closed each time the microphone was used in the makeshift studio. As with the earlier test transmission, many of the station's future staff, both volunteer and full-time, were recruited at this time. Important alliances were also built with the music and Hi-Fi sectors.

September 1975 — Dr Moss Cass announced that fourteen experimental licences would be issued under the Wireless and Telegraph Act (virtually a legal loop-hole used to speed up the process). One of these licences was offered to 4ZZ-FM.

October 1975 — Construction of the Double-Z studio and office complex began with an army of volunteers ably led by Kevin Hayes, while Ross Dannecker and his team built a 1 Kw FM transmitter. The University of Queensland Union provided space for the studios, and made a substantial cash grant for the purchase of equipment and building materials. Helen Hambling, John Stanwell, and Beatson (fresh back from Sydney) joined Dannecker on the payroll, working towards the projected opening on December 1. Full-time staff were hired, including our only radio pro, John Woods, who had been interviewed by a station committee via the phone. He arrived from Adelaide resplendent in Cuban heels and a bad hangover, and was pressed straight into bricklaying. Fellow announcer Stuart Matchett returned home from London to join the team. The Double-Z subscription scheme also started at this time.

November 11 1975 — The Whitlam Labor Government was removed from office by the Governor-General. Jim Beatson began immediate lobbying on behalf of Double-Z and the other "soon to be" Public Broadcasters. The projected opening was postponed to December 8 (a welcome respite for the builders) but the station was still unsure if it would go to air. Eventually the licence was signed by Caretaker Minister Peter Nixon.

December 8 1975 — 4ZZ-FM went to air at 12 noon with a statement on Public Broadcasting and The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again". The station had 11 full-time positions, and from the very beginning relied heavily on volunteers in all areas. After some initial technical hitches, the station settled down to broadcasting from 6am to 1am, seven days a week. Issue No. 1 of Radio Times, our monthly Subscriber's Magazine, was published on December 8.

February 1 1976 — The station's callsign was changed to 4ZZZ-FM following the decision by the Broadcasting Control Board that all F.M. stations would have three-letter callsign.

February 20 1976 — Triple-Z Joint Effort Number 1 was held at the University of Queensland Union Complex, featuring The Carol Lloyd Band, Bob Hudson, Quasar, Moonlite and The Booze Blues and Boogie Band. Admission was \$2.00.

February 21 1976 — Joint Effort No. 2 with Crossfire, Quasar, Moonlite, and Marga. Also \$2.00.

February 1976 — The Brisbane Line first appears on air, on Sundays at 2pm. Also, the station's banana logo popped up about then.

April 1976 — The station's new transmitter arrived from the U.S. Foolishly, Triple-Z thought it would be on-high power straight away.

September 1976 — The "new" Triple-Z transmission tower was dismantled at the old 4BH site at Nudgee.

December 1976 — The Triple-Z 1st Birthday Party was held at the Colossus Hall, West End, and featured the International Banana Awards. As well, a commemorative drop known as "Triple-Z Red" was bottled.

April 1977 — The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal held Brisbane hearings into regulation of radio and T.V. broadcasters. A big showing was made by anti "funny-business" campaigners Rona Joyner and George Cook.

June 1977 — With John Woods and Stuart Matchett nearly invalids from the rigors of being breakfast announcers (arising around 4am) while still trying to live the Triple-Z late-night lifestyle, young and healthy Michael Finucan jogs into the spot (and jogs a few listeners). Also in April, the Triple-Z tower was transported from Nudgee to Mt. Coot-tha, with the help of a stack of volunteers.

July 1977 — Volunteers construct the new transmission hut on Mt. Coot-tha, cleverly disguised as a nuclear fallout shelter.

August 29 1977 — A horde of police and assorted Goths and Vandals attacked an alternative community at Cedar Bay, North Queensland. Triple-Z's Steve Gray was on the spot (holidaying in Cairns, actually) and the station was the first media outlet to seriously investigate the story, and talk to the victims.

September 1977 — Stuart Matchett trucks off to 2JJ in Sydney.

October 20 1977 — The Triple-Z tower is erected on Mt. Coot-tha.

December 8 1977 — 2nd Birthday Party at the A.H.E.P.A. Hall, West End.

December 30 1977 — January 9 1978 - Test transmissions are conducted from the Mt. Coot-tha site. Though still on only 1 Kw power, the switchboard is jammed with calls from Mooloolabah to Tweed Heads, and Stradbroke to Toowoomba, all hearing us in stereo.

January 6-9 1978 — Triple-Z holds its first Radiothon appeal, and listeners donate over \$6,000.

May 24 1978 — Triple-Z opens the Queens Hotel with Skyhooks, and the place is immediately Brisbane's top rock venue. It is later joined by the Exchange Hotel for smaller scale shows.

August 9-10 1978 — Under the guidance of Haydn Thompson, the Triple-Z troubleshooters appear before the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal to apply for a Special Purposes (S Class) Radio licence under the Broadcast and Television Act. The station is successful in this application. As well, licences are granted shortly after to 4MBS-FM (Classical) and 4EB (Ethnic).

December 8 1978 — 3rd Birthday Party, at A.H.E.P.A. Hall, visited by our "friends" in blue.

December 15 1978 — After three years of waiting, 4ZZZ-FM finally transmits from Mt. Coot-tha, and changes frequency to 102.1 MHz.

December 1978 — RAM magazine awards Michael Finucan the dubious honour of "Best Poor Taste Announcer of This and Any Other Year".

February 23 1978 — Triple-Z tries out the Gold Coast using The Patch at Cooloongatta as a rock venue. The Mooloolaba Hotel is also tried, but the Surfair Hotel at Coolumb becomes the effective out of town venue.

February 1979 — The second Triple-Z Radiothon raises almost \$12,000 from its listeners and supporters.

March 15 1979 — The Queens Hotel is killed off by the Queensland Licencing Commission because of noise complaints from across the Brisbane River. Attempts to open other venues are also hampered. Eventually the Brisbane Hotel gets going as a small venue, and the station's Promotions Department concentrates on Joint Efforts, which successfully move to Cloudland Ballroom.

September 1979 — The station weathers its most serious financial crisis (and there have been plenty of those).

November 17 1979 — Graham Parker and the Rumour break all attendance records at Cloudland while appearing at 1979's 18th Joint Effort.

December 8 1979 — 4ZZZ-FM has managed to remain on the Brisbane airwaves for four years.

Radio Times, December 1979