

## **KENNY EVERETT AT 80 : BBC RADIO 4 EXTRA**

**By Paul Rowley**

**Paul Rowley began his career as a teenage journalist on the *Southport Visiter* (correct spelling) in 1974, moving to its sister newspaper the *Bootle Times* where he became its News Editor. He joined Radio City (Liverpool) in 1977, becoming its Local Government Editor in 1982. He moved to Independent Radio News (IRN) as Political Correspondent at Westminster in 1987, crossing the floor to do the same job for the BBC from 1994 to 2021. He's now a freelance, working mostly for the BBC. "*Kenny Everett : The BBC Local Radio Years*" was shortlisted for a Sony Radio Award in 2002 in the Music Special category. "*Happy Birthday Maurice Cole*" won silver in the Frank Gillard Awards in 2010 in the Original Journalism category**

BBC Radio 4 Extra is to host a week of programmes on Kenny Everett to mark what would have been his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The series begins on Monday December 23 with Paul's documentary "*Kenny Everett : The BBC Local Radio Years*" from 2001. On Christmas Eve you can hear Cuddly Ken's first programme on Radio Bristol from June 1971. On Christmas Day is another of Rowley's documentaries "*Happy Birthday Maurice Cole*" from 2009. It's followed on December 26 by Ev's Boxing Day special from 1971, finishing on December 27 with another of Kenny's Radio Bristol shows which features a revealing chat with the former Beatle.

Each programme will be on Radio 4 Extra three times across the day at 1000, 1600 and midnight. They will then be available on BBC Sounds for a month.

Rowley says Everett inspired him to become a broadcaster since first hearing him as a schoolboy : "In my view Kenny was the best in the business. He was the most creative, most innovative, technically brilliant radio practitioner this country has produced. He was more than just a disc-jockey. He worked harder than anyone else in stitching together a kaleidoscope of sound that no-one could match. His bespoke jingles with their multi-track harmonies were usually better produced than many of the records he played. He was loved by millions and lauded by his radio colleagues who regarded him as a 'genius'.

"But he pushed the boundaries and was always being fired, first by the pirate ship Radio London, then by Radio Luxembourg, and most notably by Radio 1 in 1970 after insulting the wife of a Government Minister on air. At the time the corporation had a radio monopoly in the UK, and apart from a brief stint on a couple of continental stations there was nowhere else to go. A year later Radio Bristol unexpectedly offered him a way back, bringing him on board as holiday relief, despite strong reservations from the top brass at Broadcasting House".

The "wireless wizard" was paid just £12.50 per show for four Saturday morning programmes on condition that he recorded them at his home studio at Cowfold

in Sussex, allowing producers to check them before going to air, just in case they needed to remove any of Kenny's "naughty bits". At the time radio stations wouldn't routinely save copies of their programmes as reel-to-reel tape was expensive. Invariably they'd be reclaimed for future use, or simply taped over.

"Thankfully" says Paul, "an experienced broadcaster was astute enough to have hung onto the original tapes. For decades he'd kept them at home in a cupboard under the stairs. But he feared that their condition may have deteriorated over the years, and they would no longer play. So, we went into a BBC radio studio where we still had a Studer reel-to-reel recorder. We laced the tape of Kenny's first programme onto the machine, held our breath, and pressed 'play'. The joy on our faces must have been a sight to behold. Not only was the sound quality perfect, but the content was breathtaking. This was Kenny's first broadcast in the UK in almost a year, and it was clear he hadn't lost his magic. You can judge for yourself on Christmas Eve when it'll be broadcast in full for the first time in 53 years.

"Similarly, the interview with John Lennon is a fascinating piece of rock music history a year after the Beatles had split. It took place at John's mansion at Sunningdale in Berkshire at a time when he, George and Ringo were immersed in a damaging legal dispute with Paul McCartney over the Fab Four's assets. Kenny asks some naïve questions about whether the group will get back together. John responds with his usual deadpan wit, deliberately lowering his voice when he mentions "the court case", and then strums away on the guitar and plays the piano".

The programmes coincide with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kenny's first broadcast as a pirate radio DJ. He made his debut on Radio London on Christmas Eve 1964, on his last day as a teenager. The station had only come on air the previous day. It will also be the first time in 56 years that Kenny has been on the BBC every day of the week since ending his short-lived Radio 1 evening series "*Foreverett*" in December 1968.

Kenny Everett died from an AIDS-related illness in April 1995, aged 50. Had he lived, where would he be broadcasting now? Despite spending much of his later life in commercial radio, Kenny often said he thought he'd end up on Radio 3, "playing classical music and drinking tea". But, as he pointedly remarked in an interview you can hear on "*Happy Birthday Maurice Cole*": "I'd only join when I'm 80". Which, of course, he would have been on Christmas Day.