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# In times of crisis we still reach for the radio

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**CHARLOTTE RUNCIE**



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Focused: radio continues to be a trusted source of information in times of uncertainty



**T**heatres close (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/does-coronavirus-really-mean-curtains-british-theatre/>), pubs are no-go zones and all sport is off, but radio carries on. If anything, there's more of it than ever, and in times of national crisis we instinctively reach for the radio to find out what's happening. Ever since families gathered around the wireless to hear Neville Chamberlain announce on the Home Service that this country was at war with Germany, radio has been the trusted authority to bring us the latest when all is chaos.

Maybe it's because audio, done well, brings more clarity and less anxiety. There are no lingering images of people stockpiling goods, or the terrified faces of medical staff working in intensive care, and so we can cut straight to the chase: the announcements, the facts, the personal stories, the questions and the answers.

What we need in times of public health uncertainty are frank updates from people in power, and medical experts answering good questions posed by sensible journalists. So how has radio been doing on that score so far? **PM** (Radio 4, Monday to Friday) is well-placed to cover the latest on the coronavirus crisis as it's on mid-afternoon, which is currently when the newest health figures are released and politicians are giving statements. It was extended from an hour to 90 minutes on Monday for coverage of the first of the Prime Minister's new daily press briefings.

Presenter Evan Davis is usually very good when he's called upon to cover sombre, fast-developing stories; he is humane, responsive, and able to give a sense of the scale and gravity of an issue. But the tone on Monday was slightly misjudged when, during the Prime Minister's dramatic live briefing, Davis kept interrupting to remind us what we were listening to and just how dramatic it all is. Surely it would be better just to keep quiet and let the news speak for itself, and then follow up with comment and analysis?

If this sort of wall-to-wall news coverage is sending you to the brink, podcasts are a good way of limiting your intake to concise, easily digestible chunks, and to that end The Telegraph has launched an excellent podcast, **Coronavirus: The Latest** (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/introducing-daily-coronavirus-podcast/>), presented by Theodora Louloudis. Each daily 10-minute episode focuses on four of the biggest new coronavirus stories and covers health, business and travel, with a relevant journalist or expert answering a listener's question at the end of each edition.

Shaftesbury Avenue at what would normally be approaching rush-hour CREDIT: LEON NEAL

Focus on the detail is turning out to be the most helpful way forward in a sea of news and confusion. **Woman's Hour** (Radio 4), presented by Jane Garvey, was back to its practical and no-nonsense best on Tuesday, having gone slightly astray with a frenetic phone-in episode the day before, during which listeners shared their concerns and theories.

With the government announcing that pregnant women are to be considered a particularly vulnerable group during the outbreak, Garvey led yesterday's edition of the programme on the theme of "what it's like to be pregnant right now". She repeated the new advice for pregnant women and was joined by Dr Mary Ross-Davie, Director for Scotland of the Royal College of Midwives, answering questions on the subject as fully as she could, and going a long way towards filling a gap in the lack of NHS information so far. Garvey was meticulous in keeping the discussion on track and as factual as possible, without allowing it to be taken over by platitudes, panic or speculation.

When coronavirus coverage of all kinds gets too much, refuge can still be found in art, and so last week's **Living National Treasures** (Radio 4, Monday to Friday), still available on BBC Sounds, has been blissful respite. It's about craftspeople who specialise in rare skills, such as calligraphy in stone carving, or making traditional oak baskets. Listening to

silversmith Rauni Higson, working happily alone in her converted chapel in a valley in Snowdonia to make a seven-foot-tall processional cross for Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, made self-isolation seem not so bad after all.

And, similarly, PM rallied in the end by closing Monday's episode with a moment of something precious to escape from the news, as it sometimes does. Cerys Matthews read the beginning of [Dylan Thomas's Under Milk Wood](#)

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/10724326/Why-Under-Milk-Wood-is-the-greatest-radio-play-ever.html>), hauntingly appropriate for deserted streets and the strangeness of social distance. Her delivery wasn't a match for Richard Burton's unforgettable performance, with his perfect rhythm, but was beautiful in its own new way for these new times, painting that "spring, moonless night", when "all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are sleeping now... you can hear the dew falling, and the hushed town breathing."

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