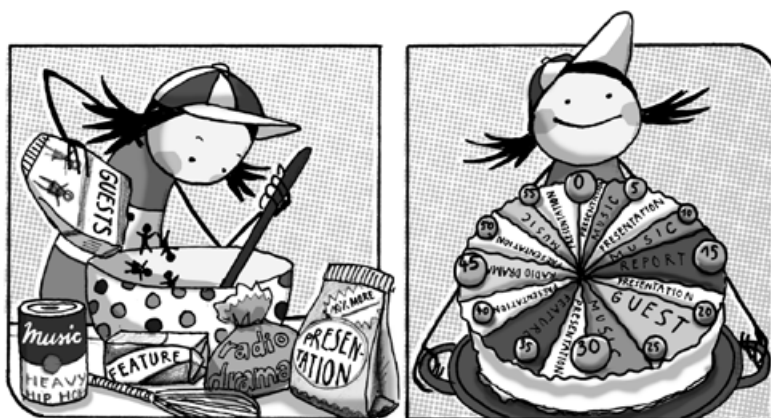


## Planning and Designing a Variety Show

Handout by Antje Schwarzmeier / translated by Maria Rogahn



### What is a variety show?

In a variety show there is space for many things. It is characterised by a high portion of talk and a lot of room is given to contents. Presentations, specific radio formats to pass information and music alternate. From news, reports, comments, features, Interviews to radio-drama and sound-collage - all radio-journalistic and artistic modes can be found in a variety show. The structure of the show is carefully planned and arranged according to contents and dramatics. This way the variety show gets a specific profile which results from the following elements:

- the mix of topics that the editorial staff selects
- the “rhythm” of the show, that is the relation of talking and music, the tempo and length of the individual articles
- the presenter’s style, who presents the contents to the listeners and characterises the variety show through his/her personality

### Topics of a variety show

What the profile of the contents in a variety show is to be, is left up to the editorial staff; there are many possibilities! There is scope for a current affairs or political show, “colourful” variety shows with assorted, lighter topics and also cultural shows or special programmes in which expert knowledge is consolidated and a specific group is addressed.

### Topic examples

*“Marketplace– the intercultural programme in the morning”, “Mission Refuge – the programme on flight and migration”; “The social show – created by and for the unemployed”; “Bollywood hits – the Indian cinema’s music”*

The variety show is suitable for everyone who has something to say and is also a popular frame for social, political and ethnic groups who are broadcasting for their communities. For example in a Russian language programme which is intended for the Russian-speaking community of a city you can integrate the most diverse elements: news that concern the target group, helpful information for dealing with, new music imports from the home countries, event calendar, etc.

### Arrangement options in a variety show

News, interviews, montages, radio-dramas, stories, event calendar, presentation – in a variety show you can employ a whole range of familiar radio frames.

Moreover, especially in community-radios there are opportunities to experiment with familiar frames to develop an individual radio expression. Accordingly, the subjective perspective of the people “affected” appears much more often in community media than in commercial media or media under public law. Presentations, montages and interviews can be very personal. It is also worthwhile to reflect upon experiences with radio in different countries of the world, because you might get good ideas for your own show.

### Structure of a variety show



Usually a variety show begins with a welcome and an introduction to the programme. This can be a specially produced jingle or piece of music with the right atmosphere. Moreover, the presenter often gives an overview of the topics which are planned in the beginning. The timing in a variety show must be carefully prearranged, so that the programme can be full of events and put into action within the set time frame. (An example of a broadcast schedule is included at the end of this chapter).

### Checklist for structure and dramatics of the show

- Which “ingredient” of the show is representative of the purpose of the programme?
- Which one is made best and therefore exciting to listen to?
- When are serious and more casual themes placed?
- Which ones are interesting and timely pieces? – they should receive a place of honour in the programme and should be played at first or at last
- Are there set categories and according broadcast times for news, tips or comments?
- Which rhythm should the programme have, which proportion between talk and music?
- When do the listeners need concentration- and listening breaks?
- Between which articles and topics can you lead over well?

When arranging the timing it is important to plan for enough time buffers to allow for unexpected delays. If you present in more than one language you need more time. Also, you should plan for at least 3 minutes of music at the beginning and at the end of a programme to allow for the change of earlier and the later broadcast teams in the studio.

### Presenting a variety show

The presentation's task is to lead through a programme, to create connections between the different parts of the programme and to make the audience curious (see the chapter on presentation). Presenters of variety shows must therefore familiarise themselves with topics and questions of the programme to present them accordingly. The preparation time for the presentation of a variety show is relatively long: you should listen to all pre-produced montages of broadcasts and read all prepared texts. Only on this basis you can write down your own sensible headwords for a presentation. For introductory presentations it is best when they lead up to the first sentence of an article like a ramp.

**Tip:** You can take notes of the first and the last sentence of an article in the broadcast schedule.

In-between-presentations are well-done if they build bridges from one topic to the next seemingly without effort. A good presentation creates a "thread" through the programme, holds it together and makes a greater whole from motley topics. For the listeners it is the link to the programme. Therefore, it is important that it is heard regularly and so has a strong presence for the listeners. Although the presenter shapes the character of a show through his personality, he should restrain from a self presentation and instead make the contents of a show come to the fore.

### Music in a variety show

Often listeners switch on a programme because of its music at first and then stay "hooked" on the articles. Therefore, think carefully about your selection of music in a variety show and regard it as an equally important part of the programme. It is understood that you name the title and band/ musician of a piece. The music should match the character of the variety show and address the same target group that you also want to reach with the content of the whole programme. If you select music that is too specific or one-sided you might limit your possible audience. An example: If you exclusively play Reggae in a political programme you will eventually only reach the overlap of politically interested reggae listeners. This means that music should be so varied that many people want to listen. But this does not mean arbitrariness!



Especially community radios give an opportunity to play music that is selected subjectively and is not played anywhere else, because it does not conform to the main-stream style and does not meet the guidelines of standard radio. There only titles are played which comply with specific requirements in length, tempo, rhythm and timeliness. ↑

Variety shows offer the opportunity to select and play music deliberately and thereby making the programme well-rounded and complete. With music you can create a positive atmosphere and rhythm of the show, for example by giving the listener time to reflect upon what has been heard by developing own thoughts on the topic. Sometimes it is good to also take up the topic in the music. For example, in a show about the youth in Mexico it suggests itself to play music which the youngsters there listen to.

However, you should be careful not to overload the contents of the show with music which in itself has a strong “message”. These are most of all eloquent pieces with political consciousness. Music is an individual part of the programme, therefore demanding lyrics directly followed by similar articles can seem “exhausting”.

This effect can be avoided by seriously considering music as part of the programme in terms of content.

### **Music as a topic of a variety show**

Music can become a topic in itself: with a presentation that tells you something about where it is from, its development, the instruments and the contents of the piece of music you can build wonderful bridges in a programme. For the same reason music is perfectly suitable for intercultural or multilingual broadcasts: the information that is necessary for understanding the music can be put across in a presentation, on this basis many listeners can then understand the piece of music. And of course music can be the topic of the show itself; interviews with musicians and collectors, background information about musicians and the development of the pieces turn a music broadcast into a music show.

**Example**

<i>Medium</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>Who/Res- ponsible</i>	<i>Ending/last sentence</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>Overall time</i>
PC - note	Jingle		...flourish	0:26	0:26
microphone	Welcome- Women between cultures, programme overview	Barbara Mohini		Ca 1:30	Ca 2 min
CD Track 2	Music: Natacha  Atlas: I put a spell on you		...fade out	3:20	5:20
microphone	Introductory presenta- tion: What German wo- men say about Muslim women	Barbara Mohini		1:30	Ca 7:00
PC: Interaudio 4/Sedung21 104/Fatima.wav	Radio drama: Fatima		"...then till tomorrow!"	5:42	12:42
CD Track 20	Music Stereo Total: Ear- worm	Beate		3:02	15:44
microphone	Facts on Migration	Mohini		Ca 2 min	Ca 17:50
CD Track 15	Music, Bollywood			Ca 3 min	Ca 21 min
				Etc....	Etc....