

# A Passion for Communication:

Investigations into Different Cultures and Media



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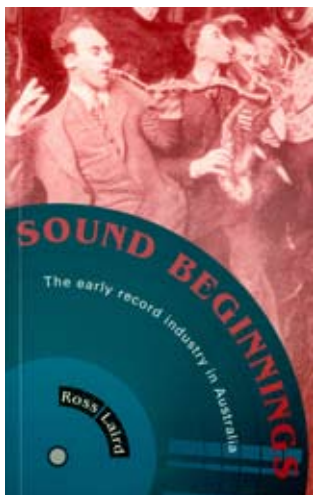
As a child I loved reading, so it was fortunate that my home in suburban Melbourne was just a few minutes walk to a branch library and I could go there almost every day.

As I grew older my interests expanded to include music, and as my teenage years were in the 1960s, it was opportune that my musical tastes developed at a time of great musical innovation in pop and jazz, two genres which I enjoy.

Given my lifelong passion for books, it is hardly surprising that after university, I decided on a career as a librarian. I had worked in a number of public and academic libraries in Australia over the years. At various times, I also worked as a journalist, radio producer and in television.

Although not consciously planned, in retrospect, my career has always revolved around communication and the media through which the written or spoken word is combined with music and visual elements. It reflects my deep interest in how people communicate.

About 20 years ago, I had the opportunity to combine my library skills with my interest in music when I was offered a position with the Australian National Film & Sound Archive in Canberra. I worked there as a sound archivist until I retired in 2006. During that time, I wrote a history of the early Australian record industry titled *Sound Beginnings*.



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My interest in the history of the record industry developed further during my five years in Hong Kong when I went to help set up the first cable television network there in the early 1990s. Although faced with a learning curve was steep, this being my first time working in the television industry, I found the challenges immensely stimulating.

Unlike most expatriates in Hong Kong, I worked for a Chinese-owned company rather than a multinational

corporation. My interactions were mostly with local Hong Kongers and other overseas Chinese. Working conditions were more demanding compared to what I had been used to. As manager of the video library at the television network, I was on call 24 hours a day and was expected to fix any problem immediately, even if it was in the middle of the night.

My first 18 months in Hong Kong were spent preparing for the opening broadcasts, which were scheduled to go live on a specific time when Chris Patten (then the last British Governor of Hong Kong) would press a button on-air and all 8 channels would commence broadcasting immediately. We were told that money was no object but that the live broadcast must go on air at the time advertised. There was tremendous pressure to ensure that all the complex systems involved is ready on time.

The preparations for the big event included a real-time rehearsal and broadcast of the events so that timings and camera angles could be finalised. As one of the few Westerners in the company, I was asked to “role play” the Governor during the rehearsal, including reading out the speech he was to make. I sat on the stage next to the CEO of the company and was given a tour of the studios and a running commentary on the facilities — so I had the privilege of being Governor of Hong Kong for a day!

Living and working in a totally different culture was a wonderful experience for me. Spending an extended period in Hong Kong meant that I gradually developed an interest in doing similar research into the history of the Asian record industry as I had done in Australia. I returned to the National Film & Sound Archive in 1997 and continued this work in my spare time.

In the last ten years I have expanded my research to include the history and development of the Singapore record industry. I am very appreciative of receiving the Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship as this will enable me to develop my research in this field even further.

Mr Ross Laird was awarded the Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship by NLB on 16 July 2010. ■