

Friday on my mind

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***Friday on Our Minds: Popular Culture in Australia since 1945,*
by Michelle Arrow**

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As many refugees from the Sixties will recognise, the title of Michelle Arrow's new book on popular culture is inspired by the *Easybeats'* hit 'Friday on My Mind'. The Vanda and Young composition went to number one on the Australian music charts in 1967. Arrow has much to say about popular music, so the title is a fitting introduction to her study. The longevity of the TV show *Countdown* (1974–87) is in itself a comment on the central role of music in Australian popular culture. For many of us, music provides a shorthand guide to personal histories. Arrow notes, for example, that numerous women recall Helen Reddy's 'I am Woman' (1970) as a turning point in their feminist consciousness.

Friday on Our Minds is a quickly-paced survey of much broader terrain and in some ways a general history of post-World War II Australia as well. The politicising of sports, to take one obvious example, is placed in the context of protest during the 1960s. As Arrow asserts, 'an understanding of the ways Australians have interacted with popular culture is essential to understanding Australian history generally'.

While the organisation of the book is chronological, there are three main themes explored. The first is the growth of a mass consumer society. The years immediately after the war saw the family and home promoted as the centre of consumption. The suburban family became idealised as the 'Australian way of life'. The advent of Beatlemania in 1964 underscored the commercial potential of the youth market. Sport increasingly became commercialised over the entire period.

Second is the impact of technological change on popular culture. The advent of television in the 1950s began a cascade of other changes to popular culture, such as declining cinema attendance and mainstreaming teenage cultural practices. With the introduction of the video cassette recorder (VCR) from 1979 there were further revolutionary changes in

home entertainment, later cemented by DVDs and home computers. Ironically, video piracy would become a major challenge to Australia's film industry.

Thirdly is the relationship between popular culture and identity (both personal and national). The growth of a distinctive youth subculture after World War II began with the boddies and wiggies. In terms of fashion and style, teenage consumerism challenged traditional gender roles. The growth of local television programming (beginning with *Homicide* in 1964) marked an emerging cultural nationalism. From the 1970s cinema was viewed as a key way of conveying the Australian identity. During the 1970s Australia produced 153 films, nine times as many as during the previous decade. The hoopla surrounding the America's Cup win in 1983 and the Sydney Olympics in 2000 further exemplifies the close relationship between nationalism and popular culture in an era of globalisation.

Friday on Our Minds is full of fascinating facts, poll results and statistics that tell their own story. A survey of drive-in audiences in 1964 disclosed that 70 per cent were aged between 15 and 24. South Australia was the last state to give up early closing of pubs (1967), but in 1975 was the first state to have a nude beach. LP record sales doubled between 1969 and 1979. In 2003 four of the top twenty highest rating TV programs in Australia were home renovation shows. A 2005 survey of over 1000 adults found that of the 78 per cent who had used the internet, 13 per cent used it to form relationships. By 2008 20 per cent of Australians owned properties other than their dwelling. A survey the same year indicated that 88 per cent of households had a least one device for playing computer games, and that 46 per cent of gamers were women.

Like the title of Arrow's book, many readers will find the content nostalgic. So it is appropriate that *Friday on Our Minds* concludes with an essay on the ways popular culture has become increasingly associated with imagining, consuming and purchasing nostalgia. Nostalgia offers ways of framing and engaging with the past. In a similar way, Michelle Arrow accomplishes a re-understanding of the post-war era through the lens of popular culture.