

THE INDEPENDENT TERENCE BLACKER

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The BBC's taste for airbrushing history

There is something undeniably creepy about the BBC's policy of tidying up its archive productions by removing what it deems to be undesirable elements. A performance by Jonathan King on an edition of Top of the Pops in 1976 has been quietly edited out of a rerun of the show on BBC4. The problem, presumably, was that 10 years ago King was convicted of having sex in the 1980s with underage teenage boys.

What is the rationale for this small-minded prissiness? Do BBC bowdlers fear that the moral health of the nation will be put at risk if King appears, singing "It Only Takes a Minute" under the stage name 100 Ton and a Feather? Or is there a vague fear that some feeble-minded moralist (or tabloid newspaper) might accuse it of somehow condoning the crime? It seems that the corporation is now so self-important that it sees itself as an extension of the law. King has been punished but the state broadcaster must add its own penalty.

Certainly, if the BBC's new policy is to give musicians a retrospective morality test before allowing them on the screen, its censorship department is going to be busy. There will be no room for Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Pete Townshend, Ike Turner and many others – and that's before one has even reached jazz.