The broadcast career of John Peel died suddenly last week at the age of 65. Clive Villas Bennett looks back at this extraordinary man and the effect he had on millions of people around the world.

Most of us remember hearing the news of the death of icons such as Jimmy Page, Michael Jackson, or Princess Diana. We react to the irreplaceable loss of these renowned personalities, the heroes who illuminated our lives from afar. John Peel’s death was a different story. Peel was a friend to many of us, right here, right now. He was more than just a broadcaster; he was a cultural commentator, a chronicler of the music world’s inner workings.

John Peel was born in London in 1940 and began his career as a disc jockey in the late 1950s. He quickly established himself as a taste-maker, introducing young listeners to the latest sounds from around the world. Peel was a true pioneer, always ahead of the curve, playing music that others were too afraid to touch.

His shows were not just a place to hear music; they were a window into the world. Peel’s talent was his ability to connect with his listeners, to understand what they were thinking and feeling. He had a way of making even the most obscure music sound relevant, to bring light to the dark corners of the musical landscape.

Peel was a true original, with a unique sense of humor and a love for the underdog. He was fearless, always willing to take a chance on new talent, to give a platform to the unknown and the overlooked. His shows were a reflection of his personality, a celebration of his love for music and his passion for life.

Despite his fame, Peel remained grounded, always connected to his fans. He was a true icon, a cultural figure who left an indelible mark on the world of music and beyond.

Peel’s passing is a great loss, not just for the music world, but for all of us who have been touched by his music and his spirit. He will be missed, but his legacy will live on, a testament to the power of music and the importance of fostering fresh talent and new ideas.

John Peel died on 21 August 2004, but his spirit lives on through the memories of those who were lucky enough to know him. The music world lost a true original, and we all lost a precious friend. His music will continue to inspire and uplift us for generations to come.

Thanks for the music, John Peel. You will be missed.