

Dave Berry

Presenter, Absolute Radio

Media Masters – July 25, 2019

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today, I'm joined by Dave Berry, presenter of the Breakfast Show on Absolute Radio. After making his radio presenting debut on the Capital afternoon show in 2007, he moved on to XFM, where he pulled in some of the channel's highest RAJAR figures. Dave later returned to Capital, where he won the Radio Academy Gold Award and two TRIC awards, before moving to Absolute in 2017. He also has a number of television credits to his name, from his early career on Nickelodeon and MTV, to guest slots on panel shows, including Through The Keyhole and Celebrity Juice.

Dave, thank you for joining me.

All right, Paul! How are you? Hello, subscribers. Nice to be here.

That was very good. I can tell you're an accomplished broadcaster already. You should be doing this podcast, not me.

No, you go ahead. You're the man!

Some people have often mooted a switching of the tables, so perhaps in the future, when I'm the guest, you can be the 'me'.

Yes, I'm much happier in your chair, to be honest, Paul. I like to ask the questions. It's something I've been doing for many years. There is an element of a craft to it. Whereas, having to answer the questions, I always have this fear. I had this fear coming over here this morning, that I hope I'm not my idea of a terrible guest.

What would that be?

Well, that would be kind of safe. Safe, middle ground.

Just throw in a few swear words, and everything, just to keep it street.

Am I allowed to swear on this pod? I'm not going to swear, don't worry! I'm not going to swear. But there's people that we encounter in our industry who are so well media

trained that there's no fun in it really. That was also, I suppose, a little bit of the puzzle that needs solving, and part of what I really enjoy about having guests on the show is that if they are going to be that way, if they are going to have the Hollywood polish, it's nice to remove some of the veneer and peek beneath.

How do you do that then? This could be my learning, this could be my personal development podcast.

Well, the big way in which I do it at the moment is a regular feature called Showbiz Scenarios, which is three hypothetical scenarios, and three people from that person's working life or actual life. They have to tell me who they think will be best suited to help in the scenario. Scenario number one is...

I was going to say, I couldn't do this anyway, because I've got no friends.

I did do some research, I wanted to do it with you but unfortunately there's just your wife and that was it. I can't have her for nine options through the three scenarios.

Yes, exactly.

The first scenario is always, "There's a body in the boot of the car. Who do you call for help and why?"

My dad.

Well, there you go. Why would you call your dad?

Because my dad's totally on my side. He'd do anything. basically. To be honest I'd tell him there was a body in the car and he'd come and help and then I'd just say, "Actually, Netflix isn't working, have you got your password?"

"Get here quick!" There we go. We've scratched your Hollywood veneer there by finding out that you and your father would dispose of a body together. That's how it works, Paul.

But you can't kill anyone anyway.

Here the lesson endeth!

I watch so many episodes when I'm on planes flying around of like forensic files, and the police have got you before you even start. Your cell phone tower data, blood splatter analysis. They know what's happened before you've even walked through the door.

Don't you dare take one of the most beloved features in radio and cover it in science!

Sorry.

How dare you!

What are the other questions though?

We have a mixture of them. Most recently I quite liked, “You’ve angered a Voodoo high priestess, and as punishment she’s transported you into the body of one of the following people for 24 hours. Who would you choose and why?”

One of them isn’t Keith Richards, I hope. I don’t want to die in that body.

The people vary from guest to guest. It’s a nice way of getting a little bit of a story from them and getting to hear a truism about Hugh Jackman or one of those guys. It’s a nice little mechanic for that, we enjoy doing it. I think the guests enjoy it as well.

You obviously enjoy your job though, I can tell. You’ve got what I would call the show-off gene, that extroversion, you love it.

I don’t know if there’s the show-off gene, I do love doing this particular show. The presenting of the show is immensely enjoyable, and I have a lovely team, and it is my job. But the real enjoyment of it comes from creating the ideas and coming up with what we’re going to do and the creative freedom.

How do you do that then? Do you think of your ideas in the shower, you’re on the bog, are walking around the field?

They come all the time. I have the notes section in my phone, which you just could scroll for hours and never get to the bottom. Some of them make it, some of them don’t. I’m in a position where I work with such a wonderful team that they’re all willing to give it a go. The show is relatively unwritten until we all get together and we try to have as much interaction with the listeners as we can. I’ve got such a wonderful set of on-air voices in Matt Dyson, Emma Jones and Glenn Moore that I don’t want to hear what they’re going to say in advance. I think it ruins the fun for me, and I think it does take something away from the spontaneity. There’s a whole pile of heavily scripted shows out there, and I think that after a while... the listeners are a smart bunch of people and I think that they kind of catch onto that.

Well, I mean I’ve been listening to Steve Wright for 30 years but I still enjoy it even though I know that basically the whole thing’s pre-recorded 11 weeks earlier, and he’s a legend. I agree with you because we had a bit of an enjoyable chat before this podcast started recording and I actually...

What, you mean you’re not going to include any of that stuff? Veganism, vintage cars, that’s the gold. Come on Paul!

Absolutely. I try to limit the conversation because, like you said, you might end up saying the same anecdote and it's less impactful even to me if I've just heard it five minutes earlier. So you're right to have that discipline.

Yes, no, absolutely. I think that applies with the team and with the listeners in the morning, it also applies with guests. There's nothing worse than if you have a guest in live and you've got two songs and an ad break; you're effectively sat with someone you don't really know for 11 minutes before you get to hit them again and you get to go at it, and hopefully it's entertaining and it's funny and it's spontaneous. So yes, I totally agree. That's the bit of the show instead of the show-off gene, which I suppose is the presenting part of it, which I do enjoy, but it's more the creativity behind it all that I really thrive on. It's good for my mental wellbeing, I enjoy it immensely.

We're going to talk about that, because doing some research on you for this podcast I was blown away by the depth and some of the things that you've done, so there's plenty to talk about. What's the best bit of the job then? Is it when the red light goes on or is it the planning of the show? What is a typical day? How do you actually do it? What time do you get up on a morning?

I get up at five, which isn't too bad. I know that if you host a breakfast radio show, it's the first question you get asked by everybody. "What time do you get up?" Five's not too bad. I've always been so fully aware that there are so many people who get up earlier than that and work a lot longer and a lot harder than I do.

I get up at four, but I'm a twat. Do you know what I mean? It's twats like me that get up at four o'clock, you don't want to be one of me.

Just to have some kind of fresh fruit juice shaken, just stare out at the mountains. I know what you're doing Paul, don't worry about that. You've got to get your Zen in order. But I get up at five and the show goes live at six and we finish, we come off air at 10am, and then sometimes there's other things to do like hop along here and talk with you lovely people. Other times I'm home with my baby daughter by 11:30.

On air for four hours is a tall order. Is that five days a week?

Yes. Monday to Friday, 6am-10am. The last hour is slightly more music heavy.

Is that because you've just run out of energy? You just say, "Press play. Press play, Bob."

That's exactly what it is. Exactly what it is. No, no, we do a feature called The Daily Smash there, which is a little bit of wordplay. It's just, I think traditionally people are getting into their places of work, so it's nice to get some kind of three or four songs back to back as people ease into their day. Whereas, we try and entertain and talk more during the earlier hours, so between six and nine.

But there is a performance element to it, isn't it? If you've had a bad day, or something might've happened in your family, or your dog might be unwell or

whatever it might be, there could be things bothering you but you can't be downbeat on air. So you've still got to try and be an authentic version of yourself that's also not feeling a bit miserable. It must be tough.

Yes, you're right. Everybody's built differently, as we know, Paul, that goes without saying. I've always found work to be a great escape from things like that, and I've always found that whatever's going on in actual life, having those four hours of fun in the morning can almost serve as some kind of respite, and that's really important. I think that you're also in a position where you can talk about and share those things if you feel they're fitting and they're suitable, you have the ability to do that. It's also nice to be even off air, to be locked in a soundproof room with my dear friend Matt Dyson and talk to him about things and it works the same with all of the team. Fortunately, we're in a good place at the moment, so that's good.

You've got the number one commercial show in the UK, that must feel pretty good. As you've just alluded to you also use it to talk about serious issues like depression.

Yes, we have. Yes, we are number one, which is great, because the show's quite new, we're only just over a year old.

Christian's gone to Australia, hasn't he?

He has, yes. Christian, who did the show for 12 years, has moved himself and his entire family to Australia. I haven't spoken to him, but judging by his Instagram he looks like he's got a fine standard of living there, so good for him. It meant the breakfast show was available, and I was doing the home time show so they asked me to move over. I again, to go back to the getting up early, I'm built for breakfast radio. I don't like too much time to overthink things. When I was doing the home time show, which starts at 4pm, I was second guessing myself a lot throughout the day. Also it's odd to start your working day when people are going home. Just psychologically speaking, it's odd.

Taking the whole daytime knowing that you've got the big thing to do.

I've got it coming. Yes, it's like a dark shadow.

It becomes a thing, doesn't it? In the distance.

No one should think of their radio show as a dark shadow, in the distance.

Exactly.

"What's that coming over the hill?" "It's a radio show." I'm much more suited to the early mornings. That's why it's great that we are number one and we've seen people are listening for longer as well to the show that's at a record high. After a year that's really pleasing for us and we're glad that the audience are getting what we're doing. They've been in touch and they engage with the show a lot and that means the world to us. Yes, no, we're really happy with that. Then your second point about talking

about things such as mental health is really a tribute to the listeners and to my employers really. I think that, I'm happy to be the mouthpiece in the middle of this, more than happy. We had some really powerful emails to the show from people who were in dark places and were saying that the show helped them out of that, and they just wanted to say thank you. I would always contact those people and wish them well and, "Stay strong," and, "If there's anything I can do, let me know." Then one guy called David, very kindly, I asked him if we could share his email on air and he said, "Absolutely," he had no problem with that, so thank you to David once again. Then we decided this is what we would do, we would share his email, and we would use this as an opportunity to say not everybody feels great all of the time, it's perfectly normal.

It's perfectly normal to get ups and downs.

You're not alone and we're all in this. Then my boss was like, he said, "I really love that you're going to do this, let's do it." I hate this term but for the reasons of this anecdote, let's do it in the Power Hour. Let's not throw it away at quarter past six in the morning, let's do it at ten past eight, prime time, where normally we'd be doing some big feature or big competition. Instead we tackled David's email, and the response from the listeners was great. As I say, it's thanks to David for getting in touch, and all the other people that do, and then being brave enough to reach out.

And you've been brave enough as well, frankly.

Well, thanks Paul. And then to my boss for saying, "If we're going to do this, let's do it big."

You did do it big, and it's been an incredible success. That was a genuine risk because it could have failed and then you would get the blame. There's that, "What's he talking about miserable stuff for on the Power Hour?" It could have backfired. I think genuine courage has to have the ability to backfire, so all credit to you.

Well, thank you Paul, that's very sweet of you to say. Thank you.

What do you do immediately when you come off the show then? Do you have like lots of adrenaline going round? Do you need half an hour to...

Normally fire a couple of people straight away, then the rehiring process begins. That's true of some people in this industry I can tell you.

Is it like The Running Man? Do you remember that bit that Arnold Schwarzenegger film where the cleaner at the beginning accidentally knocks the presenter. He says, "Oh, don't worry. Don't worry." Then as he walks away, "If that guy isn't fired within five minutes I'm out of here."

The game show host.

Yes, that's it.

He's making his way across the office.

He is. What a git.

That's such a fabulous film.

What a great way of setting up the fact that he was a total numpty. I love that. I thought, "He needs to die, that guy."

Yes, he does need to die. Plot spoiler – can we plot spoil an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie from 1995? – he does. The aftermath is thinking about what we just did, what just happened? That's the other thing about breakfast radio is you almost come up for air. I get in at quarter to six, we're live at six then at 10 it's like right the mics are down, Leona, or whoever's on after me at that time comes into the studio and it's like, "Right, that was good let's revisit that. There's more that can definitely be done with that. Let's park that until next week. That was a nice idea but that's a rainy day idea. That's non-time specific." We have that kind of conversation, then we have the real basic bones of the show. At the time of record, we're doing a thing called 10 Weeks of Tickets. It's a chance to see various different bands, and so we'll have a competition mechanic for that. At the moment we're doing, it turns out that Glenn Moore, who's on the show with me, can do a fabulous Alan Bennett impression. We're doing quotes from either Alan Bennett or Liam Gallagher, and the listeners have to identify whether they think that the quote has come from Liam or from Alan, which has proved to be such fun, and his impression is brilliant. We know that's coming so all those bits go in. Then the rest, as I say, happens when we arrive in the morning. We'll put the mics up, and usually it's me, I like to get the ball rolling, I feel that's only fair. Or we'll have an email that would have come in on the day from a listener, which will be fascinating and there's a real talk topic there. Or Matt Dyson might just say, "Well, you never guess what happened to me on the way home." Then the agenda for that hour is set. And that's just wonderful. That's what I'm talking about with the mental wellbeing. That's the fun part.

Because you never quite know where it's going to go, in a glorious way.

We haven't done it yet. I'll probably talk about this tomorrow, I know that. And you, you wonderful human being!

I am wonderful, I admit that.

I know that there'll be something about doing this podcast. There'll be something about, laughingly, one minute you're going to your first audition and the next thing you're on something called Media Masters. You're like, "How the hell did that happen?" So I'm really looking forward to tomorrow already because we don't know what it's going to be.

How do you know what works and what doesn't? Sometimes you might be too hard on yourself. My wife's a writer, and sometimes she'll write something and

she'll say, "Well, I've written it and I thought it was great. I've re-read and thought it was terrible." I've read it and thought, "Actually it's very good." Sometimes you can be your own worst, fiercest critic.

Yes. You see, one of the great things about radio is that if you really know it's not working – because no one's getting in touch, no one's bitten when you've chucked the bait out there –you can just scrap it and move on. Also, it's interesting, because I think one of the events of live television, and I've done a lot of live television, people watch it because they want to see something go wrong. Live TV can actually be too polished to the point where, unless it's like a sporting event or whatever, it's not really worth even being live. All the presenters are so polished and the autocue works, but people want to see that. And I've always been aware of that, and I know that myself. If something bombs on the show, we all just have to be honest about that and go, "That hasn't worked, so we've thought of something else, we're going to do this now instead." But fortunately, Paul, I'm touching wood here, we have a relatively high success rate.

What does go wrong? Is it the technical snafus, or is it, something's just isn't as funny as you thought it would be. Do you say, "Well, we read the email out, it sounded good an hour ago but I admit, listeners, it doesn't work." How does it work when it doesn't work?

We have technical issues. We are dogged! People listening to this may not know, but what the Breakfast Show has at Absolute Radio is quite incredible because my show goes out across seven different stations simultaneously. If you like music from the 60s you can listen. It's exactly the same talky stuff and it's live, we don't package it up and send it out. If I press the green button that plays a song, and on Absolute Radio it's playing Kasabian, then Aretha Franklin will play, and they will be exactly the same duration.

It's clever.

It's so clever.

When Christian pioneered that you could actually hear Def Leppard in his earphones sometimes. He'd catch himself at the beginning, he'd say, "Def Leppard, great tune." I thought, "No, I've just been listening to, I Want To Know What Love Is by Foreigner."

Precisely. There are songs where, like my god, particularly some bands like Aerosmith that this is just so radio DJ geek town here, but the backend of some songs by a band like Aerosmith, it's like 30 seconds of fading. My instinct is to put the mics up and lower it down a little bit, and use it to talk over and set up what's going to be coming next. But over on 60s I'm sacrilegiously talking all over the end of A Day In The Life by The Beatles. So I just have to sit and wait for it to play out. We have technical issues from time to time, but that's because it's such a ground-breaking, cutting-edge piece of technology.

It's clever isn't it? Because the listeners want you, but then they also differ on the music. I listen to a few Radio 2 shows, and you never like every song that's been put on. It's such an incredibly intimate medium, radio, isn't it? Much more so than TV.

Yes, absolutely.

You're either in my ears as I'm running, or you're on the radio as I'm in the kitchen chopping vegetables, or I'm driving, but you've got my exclusive attention.

Well, a line that my boss uses, "Nobody has a favourite TV channel, where everyone has a favourite radio station." That says it all really.

I like that.

Yes. It's nice, isn't it? Across our seven playlists, we've talked about, we had an idea of maybe on a Friday in the final hour, we would bring all of the playlists together in one kind of big special Friday weekend decades montage.

Play all six simultaneously.

Yes. Which that machine has done! When you ask about technical difficulties, it has done that! And then the emergency CD kicks in, which is always Chumbawamba, which I think...

Yes. I get knocked down.

Because it's... yes, yes.

It's a tune!

Pissing the night away. But, yes... but the thing is, is that it's played there at, like, five past six on a Monday morning, and that's just the least five past six on a Monday morning song, possibly ever written.

Or the most five past six, depending on how you look at it. That would get me leaping out of bed. Saying, "Let's do this!"

It depends how big your Sunday night was, I suppose, Paul. So we've mooted these ideas before and, just, even listing it off there, it seems to tick a lot of boxes, but the fact is, is that people who listen to Absolute 80s do not want to hear Kasabian; they want to hear songs from the 80s. So we respect that, we respect their boundaries, and we're going to keep it as it is, because it's working. And you've chosen Absolute Radio 90s for the reason that you like music from the 90s.

So, how do you choose the music then, across all the strands? Because we've had Jeff Smith sitting in that chair; he's the head of music at BBC Radio 2,

well, BBC Sounds, as it now is, and I used to tease him because it's him and a couple of other people. I would say, "Surely the BBC has got a vast committee of 70 people that decide the playlists and everything." But I imagine, on commercial, it's probably you and a couple of producers. But you must have to decide on the songs. Who does that and how do you do it?

No, it's the same as the Beeb. There's a team of people, wildly lovable people, and they sit around and schedule all the music, particularly for the Breakfast Show, because all of the songs have to be the same length. Or if you're playing... Because a lot of pop songs from the 60s were really short, that's the other thing. Single lengths...

That's brilliant.

In the 70s songs were quite long, in the 60s they were quite short, so for whatever's playing on Absolute Radio 70s, you've got to have two songs scheduled on 60s...

You've got to be quite clever as well as creative.

And slightly cross-eyed, Paul.

Is it like the Minority Report? When they had those pre-cogs in the pool, where there's just a brain with wires coming out. Are they just like that?

You've met Tim and James?! Yes, of course, you know them so well. So I just kind of... myself and the team, we focus on the bits between the songs, and the guys know what they're doing and everyone seems happy with the selection of music. And we play... Vic Reeves said to me once, "We play all the good stuff." That's what he called it. So we play the Beatles and Oasis and Kasabian, and all the good stuff.

I'll never ever forget what Vic Reeves said to me.

What did he say to you?

He said, "Who are you and why are you in my bedroom?"

(Laughs)

It's an old one, but... is there a formula for a really good show? On a pie chart, is there a bit of chat, a bit of music, a celebrity feature? Do you have the rough approximation as you're going into 6am about what the formula is, what the levers will be?

Yes. I think that what... it's called a clock as opposed to a pie chart, but no, it is, it's called a clock.

It's *literally* the same thing, isn't it?

Yes. So, we have a rough idea. Obviously we've established we're happy to throw that away if something particularly incredible happens, but we definitely have little beats that we like to hit. And I've always been of a belief that I think it's important that you play music at breakfast if you work at a music station. Obviously there's talk radio that people tune in for...

Yes. And it's called the Today programme, is it?

No, and it's not LBC, and it's not that. People have chosen Absolute because they want to hear music and they want to be entertained, hopefully, so I'm always thinking about the balance there. And where I do have a small input into the music is if we've talked too much and we're going to be dropping a song, I will decide which song has to go, which is normally Blink 182. Sorry, Blink 182 fans. It's nothing personal to them, it's me. It's all me.

Are you naturally a competitive person? Who do you regard as your competitors? Is it not just like other DJs, other stations? Is it that Netflix is your competitor now? Because I've got the Absolute Radio app, but it's just one app amongst a hundred others that I can click on.

I'm not really a competitive person, Paul. How can I put this? It's very important to me that what I'm doing is good, and that what we're working on collectively, I think, is the best it can be. And, without sounding like a total idiot, that mentality has led to success. So, I don't really listen to the radio, I haven't heard other people's shows. Sometimes I come in after the weekend and pitch an idea into the team, and they're like, "Well, that's famously something that Chris Moyles did on Radio One." "Alright, I'm sorry, I haven't heard it." So I'm glad that they're there to say, "No, don't do that because it belongs to someone else."

Although I'd still love Carpark Catchphrase to be brought back.

I've never heard it. So I've found that I'm not watching, listening or worrying about what other people are doing, and focusing on making the best radio we can for our listeners has, as I say, over the years led to relatively successful ratings, and the occasional award and stuff.

The occasional award.

I've brought them all with me. Is that all right? I like to arrange them around me.

It's difficult because even I do this when I watch shows like Alan Partridge, or David Brent in The Office, where I end up using managerial words. I've got a few friends that are broadcasters and even they sometimes descend into Partridge-isms.

What I was trying not to say was, as long as you've got your own house in order.

Yes.

And I just didn't want to say that. But, yes, people do, yes.

I think the best bit of Alan Partridge is always the bit when he announces the songs. He's like, don't, "Don't club his young; it's Seal," and things like this. Do you remember those?

And there was another one: "In a parka, throwing snowballs. It's Cold Play." There's a game in that.

"The greatest stadium band in the world: R... E... O Speedwagon?"

"The band the Beatles could have been: Wings." Yes, there's a game in that. There's a game in clipping those, and saying which band is he talking about, but, no, I mean... I really enjoyed the new series of Partridge as well. It wasn't particularly well received, I think, as much as in how legendary he is as a character, but I've been recently re-watching them and I think it's amongst the best.

Tell me. Many people, in their wallet, got rid of that Blockbuster Video card 20 years ago. Now, I imagine that you have one in your wallet. Why?

Well, what you're referring to is occasionally the radio gods smile upon me, right? And what happened was...

What a caper.

What a caper. What basically happened was, as we would... Matt Dyson, who's on the show, and Glenn Moore, who's on the show, they both have these really thick dense brick-esque wallets because they never throw anything out.

Like it's the 80s or something.

Yes. Because Matt even puts it in his front jean pocket so it just, it kind of bulks.

To distract the ladies.

Yes! But it just brings me out in hives. I'm kind of... I quite like...

They know it's his wallet, don't get me wrong! They just assume it's cash.

How wealthy he is. No, I know what you meant, Paul. But it's not, it's just full of old receipts and, like, Nero cards that have remained unstamped since 2014. So we did this thing called Wallet Wars, where Matt and Glenn would take out the most obscure thing they still had in their wallet, and who would be the winner? To give you an example, Matt Dyson had a business card given to him by Dion Dublin, who, back in 2010, launched a new musical instrument called the Dube, Dion Dublin's Dube. And Matt Dyson still had the business card in his wallet, like, this was a month ago.

Jesus.

And Glenn had half a credit card, a credit card that expired in 2016, and only the bottom half.

I've got a credit card that's half up to its limit, but that's slightly different.

No, physically half. So, anyway, so we were doing this and it was a bit of fun, and someone got in touch saying they've got a Blockbuster Video card still in their wallet, and I thought, "I want a Blockbuster Video card."

Well, why not?

Yes, because there's so many happy memories associated with that. And we ended up getting so many lovely, warming, nostalgic anecdotes from the listeners about Blockbuster Video and the times they were in there, and celebrities that they'd seen in there.

You could meet girls in the Blockbuster Video shop.

You could meet girls in there. And the people who had worked in there, and all this kind of stuff. We were fascinated to know whether they'd put a cushion in that drop letterbox you'd put your videos in so they didn't break, and apparently they did. Anyway, so we ended up flying the assistant manager of Blockbuster Video in Bend, Oregon over to England, clutching a DVD that the listeners had decided they wanted to rent for Blockbuster Video, which was Keanu Reeves' classic, Point Break.

Top film.

Yes. Keanu Reeves is an awful actor, by the way. John Wicks, perfect for him. A very lovely man, I'm sure.

John Wick is awesome as well, actually.

John Wick's great, you know, Balearic fighting scenes and just wonderful, but very monosyllabic and I think that kind of suits what's going on. So we flew him over, and whilst he was in the studio, the only other Blockbuster Video in the world shut down.

Is that the one in Alaska?

No, the one in Alaska had already gone. There was one in Perth.

Because I went to that one.

You did?

I was in Alaska last year. Yes.

That was the one I... because John Oliver had spoken about it on This Week Tonight, so that was kind of where the idea of wanting to go to Alaska came from. But, anyway, we ended up talking about Blockbuster Video cards. And so, Ryan, the assistant manager, was on the show as it became the last Blockbuster Video on planet Earth.

That's incredible.

He was in Parliament Square trying to put a Blockbuster Video sticker onto a little bollard and take a picture of it for his Instagram, and two police officers came over to him and said, "I'm afraid you can't do that, sir." He said, "I'm really sorry, it's just that I've just found out that my place of work, it's a family business, is the last Blockbuster Video on Earth." And the two police officers went, "Oh, from the Absolute Radio Breakfast Show? You're Ryan!" And they did a selfie with him.

Brilliant. Did they then let him get away with the crime as well?

So, that's it.

That's the Met.

So, if you work for the last of anything, you can commit any crime and the police are fine with it in the UK.

And rightly so.

Yes, exactly! But it was just a lovely moment, and Ryan was such a sweet kid and he'd never ventured out of Oregon before, and so to come on this amazing journey. And we had his mum, who was the manager, she was like, "Make sure you look after my boy," and it just had so many different ingredients in it and it was lovely. And there was a lot of press that came from it, and apparently we're in a documentary that they're making about it as well. And, as I say, the radio gods were smiling.

That's incredible. How often do you get involved with capers like that?

Oh, well, you know, we try to come up with them when we feel they're fitting. The first "caper", to use your words, was Bring Back Quantum Leap. Do you remember Quantum Leap?

I do remember Quantum Leap. Yes, I loved Quantum Leap. Scott Bakula...

Scott Bakula.

And Dean Stockwell.

And Wilson... Bakula, you're right. Bakula, some people call him.

They're wrong. Those people need to be killed.

Incorrectly. Yes. Scott Bakula and... so we brought back Quantum Leap. We did it with the help of Simon Pegg, who was a guest, and I started by leaping into the body of Simon Pegg.

Wow.

Plot spoiler, I end up in a dog.

Did you say, "Oh, boy"?

I did say, "Oh boy," and then, "Who's a good boy?" was where I was going with the dog thing at the end. We've raced... do you remember the Sinclair C5?

I do.

The ill-fated vehicle.

I know Clive Sinclair, actually.

Do you?

Yes, I do, for my sins.

This is... well, it was, like, the 35th anniversary of the Sinclair C5 last year.

Death traps.

Yes. Oh yes, because I've now driven one, because I raced. We raced them along the seafront.

Wow, I bet that was quite a slow race?

They're actually quite nippy. I think it's because you're so low to the ground.

Yes, it's something like eight miles an hour but I imagine it feels about 30.

It was funny because a load of listeners, it was so sweet of them, they all came down to Margate to watch us race, and there was someone who posted footage of me going by. And they'd very kindly put their phone on slow-mo, and he was like, "You didn't really need to do that, did you, Dave?" But that was fun. So we get up to the occasional caper, yes.

And isn't a lot of it visual? Because, like you were saying, people are Instagramming these things now. How important is it that it's a multimedia experience now, or do people just want it to be audio?

I'm a big fan. I know that some people in radio, particularly the more senior broadcasters, aren't particularly fans of how everything's become multimedia but I've always embraced it. But I caveat that by saying there are some things that I think should only be on the radio. Some things are between me and our listeners, and other things are for the YouTube channel, like the guests and stuff. And people want to see Benedict Cumberbatch and Denzel Washington, and that, I totally understand that. So, you can listen to it and you can watch it as well, and I think that's happy bedfellows and that's how it should be, and it should be, you know, and across social media. But every now and again there's a story that I might tell, or someone might come on and tell their tale, and that's just between myself and the listeners.

Do you get recognised, or is it that you might just ring a call centre and someone says, "Is that Dave Berry off of the radio?"

I get recognised just enough, Paul, and... not that this was ever going to happen, but it genuinely is my idea of hell to be as famous as, I don't know, a Beckham or something. I would hate that. And walking around is very therapeutic for me; it's how I kind of get rid of what's been before, and start to think again, and the other factions of life that one has to think about in their day-to-day life. And feel quite fortuitous that I always try, if possible, of course, to manage to get a little hour in the middle of the day, where I can walk from that thing to that other thing.

Me time.

Me time, and it's done walking, that's how I enjoy it the most. And if I was being stopped every two metres because someone wanted a selfie or something, I just don't know how happy I would be. Even for that £175 million fortune, I don't know how happy I would be. You'd be in a gilded cage. You've got your big house, but you can't just go out and walk around. Look, I don't know why I have to have a go at David Beckham. He's a lovely man, he's a very talented football player, but when he went to America, it was like, that's the one part of the world where they didn't know who you are. You're so famous in Europe and Asia, but you can go to Manhattan, one of the greatest parts of the world, and walk around New York with probably not getting bothered that much. There'd be an element of getting bothered, but you went over there and conquered the States, and now you can't go anywhere.

But there's a slight change now, isn't there? Building on the famous thing, that in the old days, you've built your audience up on Capital and all of those things you've done, but now radio stations are hiring people with big followings. People like Amanda Holden, that haven't had a big following, because they're hoping they can bring in new audience. How does that work? I mean, it's quite a gamble for them, isn't it? But, also, Amanda hasn't had any training, she hasn't come up through radio, so I'm sure she'll bring some new audience, but she might... it's a gamble, is it not?

I don't know if it's a gamble. I suppose it will be a calculated decision. She doesn't have any radio experience, but she might be fantastic, and sometimes raw and fresh and untrained people, which we all were once, can bring something fresh, you know? But I haven't heard her on the radio so I don't know. She might be hilariously

funny, she might be very informative, she might be very warm, friendly. I have no idea. And for a variety of different reasons and circumstances, I've never seen Britain's Got Talent.

Me neither.

But I would imagine that, as well as aside from probably being a great broadcaster – but as I said, I can't say because it's an ill-informed opinion to say that because I haven't heard her or seen her – but, also, Britain's Got Talent is a hugely popular show and people will see her on the posters and perhaps they will tune in because they believe they're going to get some kind of behind-the-scenes anecdote about Simon Cowell's latest procedure or something. And if that's what you're after in your breakfast radio, then it would make sense. So I think, I don't know if it's a gamble, but I think that they would have... you know, they certainly would have weighed up all of those things. And she's a big name, isn't she, in the UK?

She is. Well, so are you now, but you've been an established broadcaster for many years. But, when I was researching your career, you came into broadcasting from modelling. You were a model before... [sound of Dave spitting out water in shock] oh, you genuinely have spat that water out!

Sorry, guys. I'll clean that up, sorry.

You won't. Neither of us will. Just bill us! So, you were a model, were you?

Well, yes, I was but it was... the two career paths are very different. I was...

Do you not get much modelling work now?

No, I don't get much modelling work now, and I didn't then either.

You're still a reasonable looker.

Well, that's the biggest compliment I've had in ages!

Six and a half, seven out of 10. You're not minging.

I'll take that. I'll take that, Paul, thank you. You're most kind. You're a generous soul. No, but it was... I was with a modelling agency for a spell and I did a few bits, and I did what a lot of models do, which is traipse around London, going to castings. And it was fun and I enjoyed it, and I didn't... it wasn't, you know... I'm no David Gandy.

He's almost too perfect. I've seen him modelling that Wellman stuff in the airports and I just think, "Well, I'm not going to take it just to spite you, because how dare you be that attractive?"

I was saying the other day that he also has taken, recently, to being photographed holding cute little dogs because he's interested in animal welfare, which is a

wonderful thing. But it's like, "Gandy, you're already good enough as it is, man. Put the pooch down, this is unfair."

"Kick the pooch. We want some flaws."

This is unfair. Yes. Don't kick the pooch. That's Paul's words, by the way, not mine, for all you people who are going to start rating on this.

No one listens to this podcast anyway, so you're alright. We're safe.

But, yes that was soon parked. I went to my first TV show audition and I got it, and that was... then that became something I used to do, and that was now 20 years ago.

Tell us about the TV thing. What was it? Nickelodeon and... what else did you do?

Nickelodeon. Yes, so I went along... I got kind of asked to go along and audition because they were looking for a new presenter for Nickelodeon, and it was myself, and writer and comedian Simon Amstell.

He's a ledge, actually.

He's a lovely man. So he was my first ever co-host, and we did Nickelodeon together, and then Simon left and went on to do Pop World, and then I left and went to MTV.

What did you do at MTV?

I started off doing continuity. It was myself and Emma Willis doing stuff throughout the day, and then I hosted a show called TRL, which stood for Total Requests Live, which was their big live guests, chat show, games, extravaganza, live audience. It was great fun. It was a landmark part of my career, and it was a television show that, you know, I was immensely proud to be involved in. It opened lots of doors, and I got to meet lots of wonderful people and work with some great people, who are still my friends to this day. And so, yes, that was the early path, but then all of that modelling stuff is long, long gone in history.

We need to dig up some old pictures. It's not really radio...

You called me a six out of ten! I'm not surprised. If only my agent had said that at the time, I could have managed my expectations.

Six out of ten now. You might have aged badly! Father Time could've savaged your facial features, and it is tough in radio maybe. Because I don't know, but anyway... but did you know at that point early in your career that music and

presenting was going to be your career, and that that's what you wanted to do, that's where you were happiest?

No. No, I think music comes from, as it does for so many people, from growing up in a house where your parents play a lot of music, and my first proper jobs in clothes shops, both... one was called The Observatory, which is a vintage clothes shop in Greenwich, and owned by my dear friends Ian and Ian, and partners in love and in business. And they had a real passion for music. And the people who buy vintage clothes, who want to get that exact look from the 1960s or the 1970s that they're really passionate about, they're also passionate about their music, so spending time talking with those people and hearing what they had to say, and the authenticity of a three-button blazer from 1962, and... I found it all fascinating. When I moved to another store called Bullfrogs, they realized that the sonic identity of a clothes shop has to be spot on, and so... and then the auditioning for the TV thing just came out nowhere really, and miraculously, these two parts of my life came together, and next thing you know, you're a six out of ten doing a podcast.

That's good! That's good. I like that. So what do you think will come next? Because you're still a young guy. You're already presenting the number one commercial show. What's next, outer space?

No, not outer space. Well, I'm currently working on a podcast, as so many people are. But this one's been floating around for a little while now. I became a father for the first time, to my wonderful daughter.

Congratulations.

Thank you very much indeed. Evangeline, and we're so happy that she's in our lives. And as part of that, part of the process of the pregnancy and what to expect...

Your partner's pregnancy, we should say.

Yes, yes. We were pregnant together. She did all the hard work though, let's make that perfectly clear, that I am aware of that. But as part of this process, I started talking about it on the show, and...

You used Instagram to announce the birth of your daughter, didn't you?

Yes, don't... I'm hardly, as the youth would say, "lit" on the Gram, but I do post from time to time on Instagram. I find it a much happier place than Twitter. I mean, Twitter is just a void of middle-aged people whingeing about stuff.

Yes, but I'm a middle-aged person that likes to whinge about things, so it's ideal for me.

Well then, that's perfect for you. You're the only person I follow on there. It's all I need. You tick all the boxes for me, Paul. But at Jaded.com as well, is Paul's website! But yes, Instagram is a much nicer place. It was just a little picture to announce that she'd been born. I was talking about this and asking people's advice,

and from this little section on the show, because I didn't want to bang on about it, you know, everyone's got other stuff going on. You need to have variety in your breakfast show. But the Dad Pod has been spawned, which we've already made two of. It's going to be coming soon, and it's basically a place for people to come and celebrate all things dad. So Cold Feet star John Thomson has done one. He was adopted. He talks about his parents, and he's such a funny, warm man. He's also a father of two daughters.

Do you remember him as Bernard Righton?

Yes.

That's his best character. I loved that.

It was so great spending some time. We did a thing together for Radio 4, and I asked him if he would come and do the podcast for me, and he said yes. And he took the time out to do it, which I really appreciated. It's a really interesting and warm conversation. And then the second episode of the Dad Pod is Emma Willis, who comes on and talks about being one of three daughters, and what her dad was like when she left Birmingham to go to New York to be a model. And we talk about how Matt Willis is as a dad, and how he compares to her dad. So at the moment, as well as the breakfast show, I'm getting my teeth into doing that, and I want to make it as the best it possibly can be.

I, for one, am in favour of podcasting. I think it's like flared trousers; they're coming back in a big way.

Well, we were saying this when we arrived. It was all the rage, Paul.

Back in the day.

And then it went away and it became very unfashionable. And now, as I say, what's so wonderful about... if I was starting out now, if I was starting out again, it's just so lovely that people, for not a great deal of money, can sit and talk about something that they're really passionate about, or knowledgeable about.

Not a great deal of money? You've charged me ten grand to come and do 50 minutes' work.

You're getting the best.

I am, in fairness. The UK's number one commercial presenter.

Yes, that's what... no, just for the record: I am doing this for free, I think! No, no, and happy to be here. It's just so wonderful that so many people... Because there's a podcast for everything.

Yes, there is.

And it's great that people are able to do that, and I think that's from an every-person perspective, and I think from a broadcaster's perspective, I think that some people can be pigeonholed, or they can have the certain project that pays the bills, or that show that they're known for doing. And this resurgence of podcasts has meant that we're getting to see different angles and different passions from people that we know and love for being something else. So I'm really enjoying it. And as I say, I hadn't really had an idea for one, and I wasn't particularly gunning to do one, because I've got the radio show. But the Dad Pod kind of came about just because of the response that I got through the show. So it's come from an organic place, which is always nice.

So you're better at this lark than I am. You build up an incredible rapport with your celebrity guests. How do you do that, and who's been the best guest, and who's been the worst, if you dare tell me? I bet you won't, but I thought I'd ask.

No, I don't mind telling you how the worst... rapport-wise, as we touched on before, I think it's about getting them on, having fun with them, asking them what you want to ask them, trying to get the best possible listen, or the best possible view as you can, without having to sit in the same room for 11 minutes while songs play, and you make idle chit chat, and the whole thing just starts to deflate, I think. Also, because I've been doing it for so long, there's people who know what to expect, and they know they're going to have some fun, and they know the mindset to be in when they come on the show. Best guests? I've been blessed with so many. I think most recently, and if I was... I wouldn't be so bold as to do this normally, but if I was to, say, search something out of mine, a piece of my work, it would be when Denzel Washington was my guest recently.

Love Denzel Washington.

He was plugging The Equalizer 2.

Love that as well. That bit on the train at the beginning.

Yes, it's great.

As he walked in, I thought, "Those guys are going to get absolutely mullered."

He's going to muller them all.

Yes, and he did.

And he does. Yes, you know what I mean. You know Denzel's going to win, isn't he? But he came on, and we had *crippling* sound issues, and so effectively instead of doing an interview with Denzel, we set about firing the sound guy together, his name's Phil, I've been working with Phil since the MTV days. I've known him for many years, and he's a massive Denzel fan, so he was just loving it. And it's just six

minutes of Denzel Washington and I firing Phil. And it's one of the most joyous things I've ever taken...

Did Phil find it amusing? I bet he did.

Phil absolutely *loved* it.

Because there's Denzel Washington talking about him for six minutes.

And he's going, "Oh, I can't believe it." He's got his head in his hands at one moment. He can't believe that Denzel's going, like, "Phil, Phil. You're out of here, man." And it's really funny.

Tell you what? If I am ever going to get fired, I'd want it to be by Denzel Washington.

But Denzel, he went into kind of character in one part. And then we were laughing, and it was... but Phil, as I say, it wasn't any kind of workplace bullying. Phil was very much in on it, and just *overjoyed* to have so much time with his idol. And it's one of those things that's quite rare. Like, Denzel doesn't know me from Adam, but if I saw Denzel in a restaurant, I would feel comfortable going over and going, "Denzel, sorry to interrupt your dinner, but I'm Dave. We fired Phil together." I know he'd go, "Dave!"

Yes. I have a few celebrities where I would remind them who I was in the intro, and then they'd remember.

Right, okay. As I say, it's quite... Instead of just going, "Oh, I do a radio in the UK. You were on a promo tour and you came on," it's like, I'd just rather not hear those words leave my mouth, and I'd just leave Denzel to his dinner. But it was such an amazing moment, that I would go, "We fired Phil."

Do you get star-struck? Because I work in Hollywood quite a lot, and I was in a restaurant a couple of weeks ago. There was Christoph Waltz on one table, and Gary Barlow on the other table.

What a combo!

Yes, exactly. It was really... and we were queuing...

What a Come Dine With Me that is.

It was really odd, because this restaurant tries to treat everyone equally, isn't star-struck. So we're all queued up at the beginning before they started their service. I'm stood in a queue with Christoph Waltz and Gary Barlow, randomly.

Amazing.

I thought should I mention to them that they're Christoph Waltz off of Bond, and out of Take That?

Oh yes. And the amazing Inglourious Basterds. He's fantastic in that Tarantino movie.

Brilliant. Do you get star-struck though? Are there people that walk through the studio and you think, "Wow, you are Denzel Washington." Or do you think, "I've got a job to do"?

Yes, I'm kind of more... I don't really get star-struck. I think that's quite handy in this line of work. I suppose I would get more star-struck if I saw someone out and about, but I can normalize the studio/interview situation. I've done it so many times. It's like, "You're here to talk about a movie or to talk about your new album, and I'm going to interview you. It doesn't matter who you are," that's absolutely fine with me. But if I saw someone walking down the street, I think I would behave just like any other member of the public. "Have you seen who that is?"

And you've also done a bit of writing, haven't you? You've blogged for The Huffington Post and written for broadsheet papers. Is that something you want to do more of, journalistic writing?

It's something I enjoy immensely, and going back to what we touched on at the very beginning, for my mental wellbeing, I do need to be doing something creative. I need to be conjuring something. It doesn't necessarily mean it's any good. I have a caveat with that. But yes, I've written a few pieces for the Guardian, and I've blogged and stuff before. I find that I write the most when I feel I'm fulfilled in whatever else is going on. And I haven't written anything since joining Absolute, because I feel that my energies are going into that, and I feel immensely rewarded by the show that I do. So I haven't written in a while. I would be an awful journalist. I couldn't... I have so much respect for nearly all of our journalistic friends and writers, because – and I know your wife is a writer – but having to keep to deadlines and stuff... whilst I'll always be there... Early in the morning, as it is, I'll be there on time, and I'm ready to go. It's like, "Dave, we need 800 words on this by next week." I'm just going to write it and then I'm going to agonise over it and I'll delete bits of it and I'm going to put it back in. But it's quite nice to explode out onto the page. A friend of mine was telling me recently about flash fiction, which is basically stories under 2,000 words, around the 2,000-word mark. So I've been working on a little short story, which is about dealing with grief through gaming. It's rubbish. It's really rubbish, and it needs an overhaul, but I'm not writing it for anybody. I'm not writing it for acclaim or financial gain, I'm just writing it because it's a nice thing to do. I find I do most of my writing on holiday. I think there's a correlation between not being on air, and me writing stuff. That's instead of... I know a lot of people read or listen to a book on holiday, but I'll normally write. You know, like, a little daytime glass of white wine on the terrace.

Yes, but you clearly need a creative outlet, even when you're in your downtime.

Yes, and as I say, it doesn't necessarily mean any of it's any good. I've always had a real sense of pride whenever I've had something that I've written has been

published, or taken on by a newspaper, or used. The last outing really, which I'm still dining off, was a piece about loneliness in the older community. My wife worked for Age UK Camden, so she would just tell me some stories and some of the stats, and it was quite upsetting, in a way. For example, they'll have their Christmas party well in advance of Christmas Day, just because of when they can afford to get the space and all of that stuff. Through people giving, they'll give each of the older people a present. And in the vast majority of cases, the present will remain unopened until Christmas Day because it's the only present they're going to get because they don't have anybody.

Jesus. That's terrible.

And there was a pub called The Alexandra who were doing a thing where they were opening their doors for free on Christmas Day, and said that everyone's welcome. "If you're feeling lonely, you can come and have Christmas dinner and a drink with us." So I contacted them and wrote an article about that, that whole thing, and urging people to get involved with befriending, which is something that my wife and I do... well, mainly Sarah Jane does the befriending, to be honest. But it just...

You could befriend me.

I don't want to.

That's good. That's good.

I've known you for 45 minutes, and honestly, you make me want to just take down the article I wrote. If I had a physical copy of it right now, of the Guardian, I would tear it in half.

I have to admit, that was good.

But no, so when that got published, and it garnered some nice comments. I mean, never read the comments. A top tip for anyone thinking of getting into this.

Never go below the line.

Never go below the line. But it garnered a nice response, and as I say, I've kind of been dining off that one for a while. And I feel so fulfilled at work at the moment, that I haven't really wanted to pick up the laptop.

I might feign loneliness on Christmas Day, because I'm a Yorkshireman. We're like Scotsmen, just not as generous. We're quite tight, so I might just pretend I'm lonely, just to get a free Christmas dinner. It might save £30 at Waitrose.

You've just inspired the follow-up article. "Who are these cheats taking advantage of people's generosity?"

Yes. "The loneliness cheats, the faux-lonelines: an article by Dave."

He's got a wife and seven children at home, and yet we can see him in the pub on his own.

Exactly, nursing a pint in the corner. What is next for you, then? Because it must give you some existential worry from time to time. You're already at the top of your game, you're presenting the number one commercial show. What is next? Or are you going to be like Jimmy Young, and just go on and on?

Well, I think the key thing for me to remember, and to be aware of in those dark moments where I think, "What am I going to do next?" is I'm really excited about the podcast, I am really excited about doing more writing, whether it just be for myself. But the breakfast show is only a year old. We're just starting out, and it's becoming really nice, and the audience are really getting it, and it's so nice to be with them every morning. So my main focus is to try and continue to think of ways of entertaining and making people's commutes into work, or wherever they go in the mornings, as happy as they can be.

What's the kind of relationship you have with almost individual listeners? Because I've been on LBC quite a few times, where they'll block vociferous callers. Do you have fans waiting by the equivalent of the stage door? I imagine it's just the front door, isn't it, in the studio.

It's a front door, yes.

But do you have persistent fans?

No. Well, we have return tweeters and texters and stuff. We try not to get the same voices on if we can avoid that, but we'll certainly read messages that people are getting involved in. And I just feel grateful that they've taken the time to play our silly games, and get involved with their own opinions. So I've got no issue with that. But yes, there's always... I think with any radio show, there's always a few names that float around on a regular occasion.

Last couple of questions then: what advice would you give someone listening to this that's starting out in their career that's really inspired by your success, and wants to be the next Dave Berry, maybe 10, 15 years from now, that wants your slot when you eventually retire?

Back off!

That's good. I like that. There can be only one. It's like Highlander.

I'm on the ladder, and I'm kicking downwards.

I like it.

No, no, not at all. I think my advice would be to get going, get creating. As we touched on before, there's a multitude of ways in which people can get themselves out there now. It wasn't that way when I started out, but there's YouTube channels, and there's podcasts, and there's avenues for you to post things that you've written, your musings... There's little videos you can put on socials of your sketches. There's a multitude of ways of getting out there, so there's not really any excuse not to get your stuff seen. And I think that commissioners, and programme controllers, and all of those people in positions of power are looking at those things. If you've got the talent, and you've got the desire, and you're going to commit to it, then there's nothing holding you back. So go for it, and good luck.

What's the thing you've done in your whole career of which you're most proud, other than this podcast?

Other than this podcast... I think overall, I can't really... there's been some really nice moments, and I think... I had no desire to be a TV presenter. I got into it, and I feel really fortunate to have done that, and it was... within a year, I got a BAFTA nomination for best kids' TV presenter, which I think I lost out to Ant and Dec. They've been winning everything since 2001.

I've heard of them.

Yes, they've... they just always win everything. They weren't even entered in that category.

They just won it anyway.

I think they won best international female solo artist at the Brit Awards one year as well, if I'm not mistaken. But that was a nice moment, where I thought... And it's not about awards and stuff, but TV isn't as intimate as radio, so it's difficult to gauge just how well you're doing and coming across. So it was nice to get that recognition. So early on, I mean. But I think that overall, it's been the choices that I've been able to make. There have been certain things that I've been able to turn down and say no to, and certain things that I've passionately wanted and I've gone after, and certain things that I've wanted to do that I've achieved. I think that looking back, I suppose it would be that, that I haven't just been kind of swept along on the crest of a wave. I've made decisions. Some of them have been wrong, but I think the majority of them have been right, and looking back now at time of record, I'm really happy. I've got a good work/life balance. I love my colleagues. I love the freedom and the creativity. I love my audience in the mornings. I've got a fabulous little daughter, a great wife, and I think I've managed to navigate through the choppy media/television/radio/print waters. And so I think if I am ever going to be reflective, which I'm not often, it would be that overall decision-making. Does that make any sense?

It does. I must say, Dave, you're a legend. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you, Paul. Thank you very much indeed.